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# JOURNAL ON EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

**Special Issue on Education and the War on Drugs**

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When Emergency Becomes Everyday Life: Revisiting a Central EiE Concept in the Context of the War on Drugs  
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The Effects of Aerial Spraying of Coca Crops on Child Labor, School Attendance, and Educational Lag in Colombia, 2008-2012  
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“Pedagogy of Conversion” in the Urban Margins: Pacification, Education, and the Struggle for Control in a Rio de Janeiro Favela  
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*Jo Kelcey*



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# EDITORIAL NOTE

BY MARIA JOSE BERMEO AND DIANA RODRÍGUEZ-GÓMEZ <sup>1</sup>

## A PERPETUAL EMERGENCY

On April 1, 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Donald J. Trump, president of the United States, held a press conference to announce a drug indictment against Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro. With strategic reference to the pandemic—“We must not let drug cartels exploit the pandemic to threaten the lives of Americans” (White House 2020)—Trump launched a renewed offensive in the war on drugs. In the name of guarding against “narcoterrorism” and cocaine sales, the US deployed “naval destroyers, battleships, coastguards, and air force surveillance aircrafts” (White House 2020) in the Caribbean Sea, stationed a unit of advisors in Colombia, and thus ratified (once again) its influence over an important portion of South America. These recent counternarcotic maneuvers show that, after 50 years, the war on drugs remains alive and well.

The war on drugs as we know it today is a global conflict fueled by diverse interests to exert control over territory, populations, and markets. It takes form in the prohibitionist policy regime that has criminalized drug markets and escalated militarization over time. Militarized responses to drugs have long served as a means to achieve strategic objectives and empower states, causing extensive collateral damage in the process (Andreas 2019). Most visibly, the US has repeatedly employed antidrug rhetoric to legitimate its domestic and foreign policy, as conducted through law enforcement, military pressure, and international aid packages. Discursively framing the production, commercialization, and consumption of psychoactive substances as a serious threat to national security, US presidential administrations since the 1970s have constructed drug use as an emergency that must be defeated through, in Richard Nixon’s words, “an all-out offensive” (“President Nixon Declares” 2016). This has served to justify the declaration of war in a manner that extends far beyond the realm of the rhetorical, as made apparent by the deployment of troops, the expansion of arms spending, the militarization of police, bilateral oversight agreements, and invasion of sovereign states. This war, with its ongoing prohibition of certain substances, shapes the illicit (and highly lucrative) nature of international drug markets, which are today marked by heavily armed competition among drug-trafficking

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Jose Bermeo and Diana Rodríguez-Gómez served as special guest editors for this issue of *Journal on Education in Emergencies* and contributed equally to its development and production.

organizations and violent confrontations between drug-trafficking organizations and state security forces, each with an accompanying range of human rights violations, including the loss of life and forced migration.

Fought with an impossible aim—to achieve a “drug-free world”—the war on drugs has no end in sight. It has evolved over time, moved across national borders, and shifted its shape to suit emerging geopolitical interests, all justified in the name of combating the ever-looming threat of drugs—a perpetual emergency.<sup>2</sup> This war will last as long as the rhetoric of the drug menace has currency. Along with it, the human and social costs of the war will continue to wreak havoc on communities across the globe.

## THE PROLIFERATION OF EDUCATION CRISES

Across continents (UNODC 2020), the most unprotected bear the brunt of this perpetual emergency. Children and youth are harmed by extreme policing tactics, armed confrontations, and illicit drug markets. This has serious implications for education, as it contributes to a series of crises that are not often recognized as connected: attacks on schools and educators, the educational exclusion of marginalized communities, absenteeism, the school-to-prison pipeline, and diminished education quality, among others. To ensure access to quality education for all, the sources of these crises need to be identified and analyzed—a task that is often sidelined by the urgency of their effects.

The tendency to focus on the symptoms of crises rather than on their roots obscures the deeper issues—structural violence, imperialism, militarism—that warrant our attention. To borrow from Shabnam Piryaee (2018b, 2), who refers to the US context,

rather than acknowledging the foundational state of emergency that underpins the state’s institutions, the state rhetorically reinvents seemingly new crises—such as the war on drugs—to sustain the notion of an enemy warranting the state’s use

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<sup>2</sup> We use the term “perpetual emergency” to refer to emergencies that are shaped and sustained over time through the recurrent discursive framing of a particular situation as an emergency. This framing rationalizes the use of emergency response measures while distracting attention from the structural issues that underlie the given situation. The term focuses our attention on how (and why) certain emergencies are sustained over time, calls for analysis of the effects of their perpetuation, and encourages reflection about how to bring an end to this perpetual cycle.

In framing this concept, we drew from studies that have examined perpetual states of emergency, understood as governments’ repeated declarations of states of emergency (see, e.g., Bishai 2020; Piryaee 2018a, 2018b; Stanford, 2017), and studies that have reflected on perpetual war, understood as ongoing, self-perpetuating states of war (see, e.g., Arvamudan 2009; Meiehenrich 2007).

of violence. This rhetorical emergency conceals the codified, fundamental state of violence that undergirds American institutions.

Similar commentary could be offered on the international sphere: rather than examining the logics and interests that drive the machinery of war, “tactical attention” (Crick 2012; Franke 2002) is continuously directed toward emergent threats such as drugs and terrorism in order to shape a state of perpetual emergency that justifies and expands warfare. The war on drugs is one such emergency, wherein states utilize the threat of drugs to justify and extend war, which serves military and geopolitical agendas and often is escalated by nonstate actors that also profit from it. The specific agendas served by this maneuver vary across time and location; in the case of the war on drugs, they are most often related to the control of markets and territory, to military or police expansion, or to the political gains of “tough-on-crime” policies and their utility in controlling certain social groups (see, e.g., Su 2020; Kenny and Holmes 2020; Mercille 2011). The rhetorical emergency becomes tangible as the war, with all its effects, drags on, unexamined. Education is both a tool utilized to perpetuate and sustain this war and a site of extensive collateral damage.

As scholars and practitioners of education, it is important that we acknowledge and examine the complex relationship such emergencies have with education; this includes examining their impact, as well as the ways education policy and practice contribute to their continuation. Education in emergencies (EiE) is a productive place from which to analyze the “multifaceted interactions” (Pherali 2019) between the war on drugs and education. The field’s ethical commitment to the right to education, its contributions to discussions on access to quality education in conflict-affected settings, and its innate disposition to examine international and transnational issues where actors interact across different levels of action opens the space to examining the forms of direct and indirect violence that the war on drugs exerts on educational communities.

While the field of EiE has engaged aspects of this transnational war by calling attention to attacks on education (O’Malley 2010), urban violence (Carapic, Phebo, and dos Ramos 2014), and armed conflict in settings affected by the illicit drug trade (Burde 2014; Novelli and Monks 2015), attention to the complex interplay between the war on drugs and education remains unexplored. The field has prioritized the analysis of armed conflict, along with other crises, and its consequences for educational processes, thereby making important contributions to understanding the interactions between violence and education (Burde et

al. 2017). Still, the critical contributions of EiE have not paid due attention to the effects the militarization of state action, organized crime, and drug-related violence have on education. This gap offers an opportunity to draw from the growing body of literature in the field to analyze the implications for education of the war on drugs. It also invites scholars to revisit foundational concepts, such as conflict, emergency, and crisis.

### **THE AIMS OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE**

In this special issue, we have gathered studies that examine the relationship between the war on drugs and education. By situating this analysis within the field of EiE, we take up the field's emphasis on understanding and addressing the effects complex emergencies have on education. We aim to shed light on the forms of violence this war generates in educational settings, and to analyze the actors, rationales, and processes that perpetuate it. This exercise entails questioning the geographic and temporal assumptions that often frame the scope of the field in order to examine the normalized violence that takes shape outside of acute crises.

The effects this war has had on education extend to each stage of the commodity chain from the fields to the cities, and to a multiplicity of actors from students to policymakers. To properly assess its reach, this breadth of effects calls for both micro- and macro-level analyses. The war also moves across borders, thus demanding consideration beyond national limits. Education policy and practice responding to the effects of this war have tended to further support the framing of drugs as a moral concern and a security issue, thus contributing to underlying rationales for the war on drugs. Furthermore, educational responses frequently concentrate on individual-level change, such as resisting peer pressure and pursuing abstinence, rather than on addressing the links between international drug policy, socioeconomic inequality, and education. By placing our focus on the war on drugs—rather than on drug use—as an object of study for the field of education, we emphasize the need for education research and practice to extend beyond analysis of individual behavior toward analyses that examine the broader social patterns and trajectories that shape how communities relate to these substances and the ways they have been employed to sustain and escalate violence.

With a critical analysis of how the drug war operates in relationship to education, EiE will be better prepared to respond to the dramatic effects of a military and police presence in and around schools, and to the ways the illicit drug trade and drug-trafficking organizations shape educational experiences. It also will



prepare readers to identify and disrupt the underlying processes that sustain this ongoing emergency.

## CONTRIBUTIONS TO EIE EVIDENCE, THEORY, AND METHODS

The articles that compose this special issue contribute to this discussion, both individually and collectively. They offer diverse entry points through which to understand the repercussions for education of the war on drugs and, in so doing, shed light on the implications of studying perpetual emergencies in our field.

In “The Educational Nexus to the War on Drugs: A Systematic Review,” we (Diana Rodríguez-Gómez and Maria Jose Bermeo) reveal how such emergencies, despite their far-reaching effects, have evaded the attention of education scholarship. Through a systematic review, we describe the state of the art of research on the relationship between education and the war on drugs. Our content analysis of 420 articles reveals that academic attention given to drugs and education has generally ignored the insecurity and violence associated with drug prohibition and the militarization of drug-control efforts and has instead reproduced the “drugs as threat” discourse (Crick 2012) by focusing primarily on student drug use. With few exceptions, the education literature does not examine how drug-related confrontations and the illicit nature of the drug trade affect education communities. This crucial gap in the literature leaves education scholars and practitioners with limited tools for understanding how the war on drugs reshapes educational priorities.

Roozbeh Shirazi’s piece, “When Emergency Becomes Everyday Life: Revisiting a Central EiE Concept in the Context of the War on Drugs,” offers reflections that help to decipher this gap. Through a critical review of the concepts of crisis and emergency, Shirazi highlights the spatial and temporal assumptions that underpin EiE and limit the scope of action visible to the field. His point of departure is concern about how prevailing definitions of emergency constrain the dimensions of crisis, automatically linking it to a state of exception or a disruption from the norm. Insofar as the war on drugs is a long-term process that encompasses a multitude of crises across regions (gang violence, armed conflict, forced displacement, and mass incarceration, among others), Shirazi poses it as a productive object of study through which to rethink how EiE scholars and practitioners employ the terms “emergency” and “crisis.” Based on Janet Roitman’s work on the stakes of crisis, Shirazi contrasts two cultural artifacts: *Traffic*, the 2000 Hollywood film directed by Steven Soderbergh, and the 2002 song “Sellin’

D.O.P.E.” from the hip-hop duo dead prez. Through this reflection, he invites us to review how we produce and mobilize knowledge about crises in the field of EiE and the implications these decisions have on what the field chooses to prioritize—or not. Shirazi positions the EiE field as a site of possibility that could advance understanding of education crises and their resolution.

Both of these articles call for introspection regarding the theoretical frameworks that orient scholarship in EiE. They underscore the relevance of integrative frameworks that trace the linkages within and across crises and emergencies. In our article, we use the concept of assemblage to define the war on drugs, which enables us to trace the drivers and effects of conflict across diverse settings and to examine the role education plays in their persistence. Such analyses draw attention to the continuities that undergird emergencies and to the interactions that sustain them. These interactions cross the educational sphere in varied ways, including, for example, through the promotion of antidrug discourses in curricula, the replication of zero-tolerance measures at the school level, and collaborations between police and school actors.

While recognizing the connected forces that drive the war on drugs and link diverse sites and actors, the contributors to this special issue also show the value of situated analyses that examine the particularities of specific settings and time periods. Their analyses reveal local mechanisms and effects of the war on drugs across the commodity chain, from coca cultivation in southern Colombia and drug markets in Rio de Janeiro to patterns of drug involvement in Ciudad Juárez and Medellín. Each site carries specificities that are key to understanding the reach of the war on drugs and the limits of education’s responses to date.

For example, Claudia Rodriguez’s article, “The Effects of Aerial Spraying of Coca Crops on Child Labor, School Attendance, and Educational Lag in Colombia, 2008-2012,” draws our attention to rural areas and the collateral effects of forced eradication measures. By combining Colombia’s Quality of Life Survey and a database constructed from daily satellite images from NASA, Rodriguez examines the connections between the spraying of chemical herbicides on coca crops, child labor, and education. Through two-stage least-squares regression, a common procedure in econometrics, Rodriguez shows that the aerial spraying of glyphosate is associated with the increased likelihood that children between ages 12 and 17 will go to work, and the increased probability that a family’s older siblings will work instead of attending school. These effects on education are not taken into account in the calls for a resumption of aerial spraying, nor are measures taken to keep the

right to education from becoming collateral damage of this war. This highlights the failure to account for the educational losses that result from drug-policy decisions.

Through an ethnographic study conducted in Vila Cruzeiro, a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, Sara Koenders draws our attention to urban settings and the effects of the dispute between state security forces and drug-trafficking organizations for control of territory. In “‘Pedagogy of Conversion’ in the Urban Margins: Pacification, Education, and the Struggle for Control in a Rio de Janeiro Favela,” Koenders describes the implementation of pacification initiatives from the vantage point of school administrators, teachers, and parents. She shows how the intensive law enforcement efforts combined with a military presence resulted not only in grave human rights violations in the community but also led to an increased presence of state security forces in schools. She describes in particular the increased participation of police in schools through the implementation of nonformal education activities, which, Koenders argues, constituted a “pedagogy of conversion” that sought to foster closer relations with the police and promote particular values and norms. In this way, schools in the favela constituted a terrain of competition for community allegiance between the state and the drug gangs. As Koenders notes, these efforts coexisted alongside violent and repressive policing, a lack of structural reform, and top-down approaches to community development, and thus made only limited gains in repairing state-society relations.

Rodriguez’s and Koenders’ studies underscore the need for serious research on the role the state plays in the war on drugs and the effects drug-control measures have on education. Their studies highlight how state-led interventions in the war on drugs—in these cases, fumigation and pacification, respectively—framed within the discourse of protecting the general populace from the insecurity that arises from illicit drug production and distribution, may propagate structural violence. In the Colombian case, the economic shocks produced by the fumigation policy pushed families to reconsider sending their children to school. In the Brazilian case, energy and resources were put into affirming the standing of the police in the community, rather than into efforts to improve education infrastructure and quality. These contributions affirm analyses carried out in other fields that highlighted the need to question the collateral damage caused by security policies (see, e.g., Collins 2014; Espenido 2018).

In their article, “‘If you don’t have an education, you are no one’: Understanding the School Experiences of Youth Involved in Drug-Related Crime in Ciudad Juárez and Medellín,” which offers a comparative analysis of the causes of youth involvement in the drug business, Cirenia Chavez Villegas and Elena Butti reflect

on education's response amid the war on drugs. They combine data from two separate studies, one that Butti conducted in Medellín, Colombia, and another that Chavez Villegas conducted in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, to analyze how youths' relationships with school administrators and teachers influence their involvement in drug trafficking. The voices of young men at the lowest ranks of the illicit drug trade convey, some even with nostalgia, the school experiences that drove them to leave formal education and opt into the drug business. The participants in these two studies emphasize that the treatment they received at school was a decisive factor in their leaving the education system; the administrators' and teachers' perceptions of these youth as unruly superseded their responsibility to ensure the students' retention. Chavez Villegas and Butti affirm that "pushout" is a more accurate term than "dropout" to describe these young men's abandonment of school, and they call attention to the school practices that limit the right to education for those on the margins of capitalism and legality. Their study underscores the need for responsiveness in education to counteract the influence the illicit drug market has on youths' life trajectories.

The work of Nancy A. Heitzeg, highlighted in the book review by Jennifer Otting, provides further evidence of how school practices intertwine with drug policy to shape youth trajectories. Heitzeg's 2016 book, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Education, Discipline, and Racialized Double Standards*, exemplifies how zero-tolerance policies have contributed to disproportionately higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and school abandonment for youth of color in the US and ultimately contribute to increased rates of youth imprisonment. Heitzeg's work shows the disparities between the treatment of affluent White drug users, who are tracked into drug treatment programs, and the treatment of youth of color, who often are tracked through law enforcement into incarceration. As Otting observes, the school-to-prison pipeline is a manifestation of zero-tolerance drug policies and it reveals how the war on drugs shapes education crises through a variety of mechanisms. It also highlights the need for intersectional analyses that examine the disproportionate effects these crises have on communities of color in the US. Otting's and Chavez Villegas and Butti's pieces call attention to the ways schools reproduce the logics of the war on drugs when they adopt zero-tolerance policies into their curricular and disciplinary practices.

Offering an alternative approach to curricula, Theo Di Castri's field note, "Catalyst: Expanding Harm-Reduction Education and Youth Participation in the Context of the War on Drugs," highlights an education initiative that engages youth on the front lines of the war on drugs in the movement to reform drug policy. Based on the first iteration of a year-long, bilingual fellowship program, Di Castri discusses the Catalyst

team's and study participants' efforts to forge a transnational solidarity network to ensure that youth have a space in the growing drug-policy reform movement. To avoid the pitfalls of current drug policies, the same policies that have been justified in the name of young people, Di Castri calls for education that equips youth with "the ability to identify, analyze, and act to reduce not only the harm associated with individual drug use but also the wider social harm caused by current drug policies" (180). In the context of this special issue, this field note draws our attention to the potential of innovative curricular design and highlights the key role youth can play in transformative action when deep and collaborative thinking are made possible.

Offering an example from outside the war on drugs but within a context of ongoing emergency, Jo Kelcey's analysis of Janette Habashi's book, *Political Socialization of Youth: A Palestinian Case Study*, also draws attention to youths' political education. She focuses on the ways young people's civic engagement occurs outside, sometimes even in tension with, the school curriculum. Kelcey pinpoints Habashi's integrative approach, which situates young people's political development within an ecological framework and recognizes the multiple local and global forces that shape their experiences. By elucidating young people's political formation in settings of emergency, Habashi's theoretical and empirical insights help bring nuance to current understandings of youth political agency, and the possibilities they create to transform their conditions. These insights contribute to discussions of how to bring about social change amid complex emergencies.

Collectively, the articles in this issue show the intricacies of the relationship between the war on drugs and education. They also reveal the complexities of studying normalized emergencies. Our systematic review sheds light on the inherent challenges in tracing elusive topics across the interdisciplinary field of education. The qualitative studies by Chavez Villegas and Butti and by Koenders, which employ a mix of ethnographic, interview, and survey techniques, offer insights into the additional considerations needed when studying the illicit and carrying out research in insecure settings. Rodriguez and Shirazi highlight the need for creative entry points to reveal the effects of this war: Shirazi draws from an analysis of two cultural artifacts to examine the effects of narrative constructions, while Rodriguez inventively combines two datasets to identify the effects of glyphosate spraying on access to education. The articles selected for this special issue, which offer multiple perspectives on the war on drugs and its effects, expand the sources of data normally used in the field of EiE and illustrate the benefits of engaging a broad repertoire of methodological strategies to account for something as complex, widespread—and sometimes elusive—as the war on drugs.

Each of these articles also underlines the need for reflexive scholarship that critically examines the potential complicity of education research and advocacy in shaping perpetual emergencies. A field such as EiE, with its commitment to addressing the negative effects emergencies have on education, can inadvertently direct public attention to emergent threats and, hence, limit the attention given to the root problems embedded in the structures and institutions of the international system. By giving collective attention to the mechanisms that sustain the war on drugs, as well as its effects, this special issue reminds us to remain vigilant about our own roles, as scholars and practitioners, in shaping particular education policies and priorities.

### **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Our hope is that this special issue will spur further debate and research on education policies and practices that address the effects of the war on drugs and counterbalance the underlying forces that keep it going. There are many avenues for further exploration: the effects armed confrontations and criminal governance have on schools and education actors; the process of recruiting youth into organized crime; the drug-related mechanisms of exclusion from education; intersectional analysis of the implications of this war for education; the design, implementation, and results of education's responses to this war; the relationship between education advocacy and drug policy; and the list goes on. Each article in this special issue also offers suggestions for the future of this research agenda. While we recognize that this issue features articles focused primarily on the Americas, the war on drugs extends to nearly all regions of the world, which provides significant ground for further research. Finally, through this work, we invite EiE scholars and practitioners to critically examine the propagation of perpetual emergencies, like the war on drugs and the war on terror, that are sustained with little regard for the education crises they engender. Further research and discussion are needed to examine the role education policy and practice play in sustaining and normalizing such emergencies.

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# THE EDUCATIONAL NEXUS TO THE WAR ON DRUGS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

DIANA RODRÍGUEZ-GÓMEZ AND MARIA JOSE BERMEO

## ABSTRACT

*The war on drugs has had a heavy impact on educational settings, yet to date the fields of education in emergencies and comparative and international education have largely overlooked it. This systematic review of relevant empirical studies published between 1988 and 2018 across 20 subfields of education examines how academic scholarship has addressed the intersection of schooling and the war on drugs. Through a content analysis of 420 articles, we quantified the occurrence of terms related to the war on drugs, identified patterns and trends, and explored their underlying meaning. We found abundant academic literature on drugs and schools, particularly with regard to student drug use, but little research that examines the educational implications of the war on drugs. We draw from the concept of assemblage to frame the scope of this global conflict and conclude with a research agenda that incorporates discussions about the war on drugs in the education in emergencies field.*

## INTRODUCTION

Drug-related violence has had a heavy impact on educational settings.<sup>1</sup> Since the 1980s, the militarization of drug policies and ongoing confrontations between states and drug-trafficking organizations, coupled with the violent competition among criminal organizations for control of the illicit drug market, have had

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1 In this article, we use the term “drugs” to refer to “psychoactive substances . . . that, for a variety of reasons since 1900, have been construed as health or societal dangers by modern states, medical authorities, and regulatory cultures and are now globally prohibited in production, use, and sale” (Gootenberg 2009, 13). This definition draws attention to the social construction of these substances as illegal and associated with criminal activity.

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large-scale human costs. This so-called war on drugs has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives (Keefer and Loayza 2010), led to sharp increases in incarceration rates (Alexander 2010; Chaparro and Pérez 2017; Drucker 2014), and forced tens of thousands to flee their homes (Atuesta Becerra 2014).<sup>2</sup> Widely recognized as a failed approach (Collins 2014; Gaviria et al. 2009; Rolles and Eastwood 2012), the war on drugs has created an environment of violence and insecurity that shapes the experiences of children and youth in countries across the world, who often are recruited by criminal networks and targeted as a market for illicit substances (Dowdney 2003; UNODC 2018). Children and youth also experience a wide range of human rights violations linked to drug-control efforts, including extrajudicial killings, denial of essential medicines and basic health services, separation from loved ones, and the collateral effects of aerial fumigation and forced eradication of illicit crops (Barrett 2011; Walsh, Sánchez-Garzoli, and Salinas-Abdala 2008). Moreover, their access to quality education is compromised by the presence of armed actors within and outside school premises, teacher turnover, and the effects of adversity on their ability to learn. Despite these harsh realities, the fields of comparative and international education and education in emergencies (EiE) have thus far largely overlooked the nexus between the war on drugs and education.

This may be due in part to the elusive nature of the war on drugs. Although its effects are abundantly clear through the body count, instability, and insecurity it generates, we seem to struggle to identify and define this war. It has been variously described as a “global social process” (Molano-Cruz 2017), a “body of legislation” (Bowen and Redmond 2016), a “war against people” (Paley 2014, 2015), and a “cartel-state conflict” (Lessing 2018), but these definitions do not explain how this war connects distant actors, institutions, and regulatory landscapes across the globe. In this article, we suggest that the concept of assemblage—understood as a shifting configuration of human and nonhuman actors that come together through productive relations to form a new whole (Latour 2005, 2013; Collier and Ong 2005)—better captures these complex associations and reveals the war on drugs to be an ongoing and widespread global conflict produced through the dynamic

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<sup>2</sup> These numbers give an idea of the human cost of the war on drugs: in Mexico, from 2006 to 2018, it is estimated that 250,000 lives were lost and some 34,000 people were disappeared due to drug war-related violence (Human Rights Watch 2019a; Romero 2018); in the Philippines, some 12,000 drug suspects have been killed since Rodrigo Duterte declared war on drugs in 2016, including children either directly targeted or inadvertently shot by police (Human Rights Watch, 2018, 2019b); in the United States, it is estimated that some 2.7 million children have a parent incarcerated due to drug offenses, and peaks in overdose deaths have reached as high as 72,000 in one year (Drug Policy Alliance 2014; National Institute on Drug Abuse 2019). In monetary terms, estimates are that the United States has spent approximately US\$3.3 billion annually to incarcerate people charged with drug-related offenses, some US\$10 billion were dedicated to Plan Colombia and US\$1.6 billion to Plan Merida, while Mexico spent approximately MXN \$1.8 billion on security between 2006 and 2016 (Camhaji and Garcia 2016). Again, these figures are given just to offer an idea of the magnitude of the phenomenon. It is difficult to give a precise estimate of the total human and monetary costs of the war on drugs, in part due to how it moves and adapts across settings.

interplay of diverse actors and signifiers. Drawing from this concept, we define the war on drugs as the violent configuration of prohibitionist and militarized drug policies that mobilize the illicit and lucrative nature of the drug trade.

For this study, we asked, how does education research describe the intersection of schooling and the war on drugs? Drawing from a corpus of 420 peer-reviewed articles from 22 journals in a range of education fields, we analyzed how this body of research represents the relation between education and drugs, and the theoretical and methodological devices used to do so. We found significant academic work on the link between school-age populations and drug use but little on the relationship between the war on drugs and schooling. The literature offers fragmented portrayals of the drug trade and education systems, thereby reducing conflict, violence, and involvement in drug trafficking to individual actions rather than complex social phenomena. This narrow perspective limits understanding of how this ongoing conflict affects inclusive access to quality education for children and youth. We argue that education research, particularly in the field of EiE, needs to broaden the scope of analysis in order to reveal the complex ways the war on drugs intersects with education systems. We argue further that research itself may reproduce the logics that sustain this war, and therefore call for reflexive research practice.

After first discussing the educational implications of contemporary forms of violent conflict, with particular attention to the war on drugs, we highlight how the concept of assemblage can help to identify the range of actors, connections, and logics that sustain such conflicts and shape their interactions with education systems. We then describe the methodological design and limitations of our study. We proceed to a discussion of our key findings and suggest new avenues for research. We hope this analysis helps to create a critical and reflexive research agenda for this important topic.

## **EDUCATION IN CONFLICT**

Born in a period of significant global transformation, the field of EiE has had to adapt to shifting forms of conflict and crisis. Taking shape in the late 20th century, EiE emerged as a field of practice and inquiry concerned with barriers to education in crisis-affected areas and the role of education in humanitarian response initiatives (Novelli 2010; Burde et al. 2017). Since then, EiE practitioners and scholars have played an active role in advocating for access to quality education for all in the midst of complex emergencies, while also generating critical research

on the diverse facets of the relationship between education and crises, particularly armed conflicts and natural disasters.

The relationship between education and violent conflict is a central concern for the field. Since the publication of Bush and Saltarelli's 2000 report, scholars and practitioners have readily acknowledged the multifaceted role of education in divided and violence-affected communities (e.g., Smith and Vaux 2003; Smith 2005; Davies 2004, 2005; Novelli and Lopes Cardozo 2008). Research has shown that, while education can play an important role in safeguarding young people in situations of crisis (e.g., Oh and Van der Stouwe 2008; Pherali 2011), it also can exacerbate drivers of conflict and be a site of manifold harms (e.g., Hromadžić 2008; Lall 2008; Poirier 2012; Novelli and Higgins 2018). Scholars recently have advocated for a systemic read of this relationship and an analysis of how education systems intersect with structural processes in conflict and postconflict settings (Lopes Cardozo and Shah 2016; Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017). This includes examining how education may connect to the underlying rationales and interests that sustain national and international conflict situations (Novelli and Cardozo 2008; Novelli 2010).

Despite its important contributions, research in this field tends to assume a nationally and politically bound concept of interstate conflict and civil war and pays limited attention to how the evolution of warfare may reshape educational priorities. In other disciplines, a variety of terms have been used to describe current forms of armed conflict, such as "new wars," "privatized wars," "hybrid wars," "fourth-generation warfare," and "criminal insurgencies."<sup>3</sup> While the extent to which these forms of violent conflict really are "new" remains a point of debate (Kalyvas 2001; Berdal 2003; Schuurman 2010), these discussions accentuate characteristics of contemporary warfare that merit our attention.

The current landscape of insecurity breaks down the temporal, spatial, and military boundaries of what we commonly understand as war. Contemporary forms of warfare often persist for extended periods. This unsettles the notion that armed conflict is an exceptional event that occurs for a limited time in a specific place, for which humanitarian intervention serves as a temporary stopgap (Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Dijkzeul and Bergtora Sandvik 2019). Violent conflicts today involve a wide array of transnational violent actors who connect across borders, such as organized crime networks, gangs, extremist religious groups, private

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, we prioritize attention to the points of commonality among these conflict types in order to identify general characteristics of contemporary violent conflict. For further discussion of these distinct terms, see Holsti (1996), Duffield (2001), Kaldor (2002, 2013), and Mitton (2018).

interest groups, multinational corporations, and security companies (Malet and Anderson 2017). This can make it difficult to distinguish between civilians and combatants, and to determine the limits of the conflict. The use of rhetorical devices to describe amorphous threats and dehumanize the enemy (e.g., “war on drugs,” “war on terror”) enables conflicts to move from one location to another and endure for long periods. Political and criminal categories of violence become blurred, as made evident in armed confrontations among criminal organizations (e.g., the intercartel battles that have ravaged Mexico in recent years) or between criminal organizations and the state, where criminal violence is often matched or even exceeded by the high-intensity violence of the countermeasures employed by police and other state security forces (Lessing 2018). Conflict scholars have called for attention to these various types of confrontations, emphasizing the need for new theoretical frameworks that are better able to describe the ambiguities and implications of evolving forms of warfare (see, e.g., Applebaum and Mawby 2018; Kalyvas 2015; Lessing 2018).

Studies of contemporary forms of violent conflict are better served by integrative analyses that pay attention to their interconnectedness. Earlier studies have proposed thinking about war and peace and the transition from humanitarian relief to development as a “continuum,” highlighting the lack of a clear distinction between phases (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Nordstrom 2004; Mendenhall 2014). Taking up the call for systemic analyses of the relationship between education and conflict, we emphasize the need for such analyses to transcend “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Schiller 2003; Novelli and Cardozo 2008) in order to trace connections across national borders, across time, and across the fine lines that divide private and public interests. We propose that the concept of assemblage (as described by Latour 2005, 2013; Collier and Ong 2005) offers a useful analytical tool for reading these types of conflicts, as we show in the case of the war on drugs.

### **THE WAR ON DRUGS AS AN ASSEMBLAGE**

International drug regulation began in the early 20th century as a series of multilateral efforts to curb the supply and abuse of certain psychoactive substances. The emergent prohibitionist framework positioned the drug trade as illegal and criminalized drug users, producers, and vendors. Under this policy framework, organized crime networks gained control of the drug trade and, over time, drug policies became increasingly militarized. The combined effects of an illicit market and militarized repression have resulted in multifaceted insecurity in distant locations across the world.

The term “war on drugs” emerged in the popular lexicon in 1969 with Nixon’s infamous declaration; today it is frequently associated with US domestic and foreign drug policy (Paley 2014). While this war does encompass the US-led offensive on the drug supply chain, it also extends to the various ways other states have declared war on the drug trade, including declarations made by President Betancur in Colombia in 1984, President Calderón in Mexico in 2006, and President Duterte in the Philippines in 2016, and the subsequent intensification of violence between state and nonstate armed actors. An ongoing asymmetric conflict with varying levels of intensity, the war on drugs emerges and subsides in different locations. At times framed as an internal conflict, it is always shaped by dynamics that cross national borders.

As such, we propose thinking about the war on drugs as an assemblage—that is, as an entanglement of global forms with situated interactions (Trige-Andersen 2015). Although the idea of an assemblage originates with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we draw from Latour (2005, 2013) and Collier and Ong (2005) to define an assemblage as a shifting configuration of human and nonhuman actors that come together through multiple determinations. This concept calls for relational analyses and attention to how particular forms of association between actors emerge. The war on drugs assemblage thus refers to the configuration of actors that constitute the global prohibitionist drug-policy framework and its opposition.

Conceptualizing the war on drugs as an assemblage draws our attention to the actors, linkages, and logics that give it form. This includes the human actors who are involved in the production, commercialization, consumption, and prohibition of illegal substances: the president who declares that drugs are a public enemy; the drug enforcement officer who coordinates a poppy eradication mission with local officials; the cartel members who celebrate the safe delivery of tons of marijuana; the single mother who swallows balloons filled with cocaine to move them through an airport; the child who helps his parents harvest coca leaves; the student who is stopped and frisked by the police outside school premises. It also includes nonhuman actors, such as policy documents, weapons, security devices, drug-related paraphernalia, and the drugs themselves. These heterogeneous actors meet in ever-shifting networks with great asymmetries of power and agency (Koyama 2015). These asymmetries and their implications become obvious when we compare the safety and reach of a high-ranking bureaucrat in Washington, DC, to that of an opium producer in southern Afghanistan.

Despite different purposes and locations within the assemblage (Collier and Ong 2005), these diverse actors are drawn together through common logics. These logics comprise the set of underlying values that coalesce the assemblage, such as the logic of prohibition, which insists on zero-tolerance policies and the eradication of drug use, thereby justifying the use of any means to combat supply. Another common logic in this assemblage is militarization, which orients decisionmaking about drug policy toward preparations for military conflict, including weapons gathering, military funding, and the use of military tactics. These logics are propagated through fear and the construction of a binary distinction between the “us” that must be protected and the “enemy” that must be controlled, if not annihilated. Other logics present in the assemblage include prevention, which pathologizes and individualizes drug consumption, thereby focusing attention on risk factors and correction measures, and harm reduction, which frames drug use as a solvable health problem, thereby erasing diverse cultural interpretations of substance use and sidelining the dynamics of an illegal economy (Fraser and Moore 2011).

By viewing the war on drugs as an assemblage, we open our field of vision to these underlying logics and their interconnected effects. This conception fractures the dichotomy between the micro and the macro, the local and the global; in Latour’s (2005) terms, it flattens the landscape and reveals the connections across locations through innumerable movements that are woven together “by the constant circulation of documents, stories, accounts, goods, and passions” (179). This conceptual lens encourages analysts to engage with how wars spread and persist, transcend boundaries, and link disparate actors.

### **THE NEXUS BETWEEN THE WAR ON DRUGS AND EDUCATION**

In this paper, we use the term “schooling” to refer to the provision of formal education by an education system. We recognize education systems as complex arrangements of interconnecting parts that interact, cooperate, and compete to shape educational processes. This framing takes into account the diverse ideas, motives, intentions, levels of influence, and material resources that shape educational practice (Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead 2009). It also draws attention to the range of roles educational actors play, including students, educators, and parents, education bureaucrats, psychologists, social workers, and counselors, as well as the police, nonformal educators, and researchers, and the children and youth who are excluded from school. It also acknowledges the nonhuman actors



that constitute the education system, such as curricula, education policies, and material resources.

Metal detectors and drug-detection dogs in schools, a drug-education curriculum, a parent involved in a drug cartel, a family migrating to escape the effects of state repression—these multiple educational actors interact with the war on drugs assemblage in profound and varied ways. We use the term “nexus” to refer to these encounters and to the ways education systems are integrated into the war on drugs assemblage. To shed light on this nexus, we reviewed the education scholarship and examined how it describes the intersection of schooling and the war on drugs.

## **METHODS: ELUSIVE WAR, ELUSIVE LITERATURE**

### **SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES**

We began our literature review by carrying out a Boolean search in several academic databases (e.g., ERIC and JSTOR) using the search terms “education” and “drugs.” This initial search produced more than 30,000 results. Impressed, we began to read through the results and found that the majority had little to do with our research interest; most of the results were articles that only peripherally mentioned the search terms and did not have schooling or illicit drugs as their explicit object of study. For example, we found articles that examined physicians’ attitudes toward health education programs and analyses of the market for prescription and nonprescription drugs. We then narrowed our search terms to words related to formal education (“school” and “schooling”) and drug conflicts (“war on drugs” or “drug wars”), which dramatically reduced the results but excluded many pertinent studies. Terms related to the drug war varied widely, making it difficult to pinpoint the relevant literature. We decided that, to examine how and when the nexus of education and the war on drugs emerges in the academic literature, we needed a research design that would keep our search broad but not unwieldy. After further tests, we decided to search for the concurrent use of the terms “education,” “school,” and “drugs,” which enabled us to capture the widest range of studies. We then narrowed our search to a sample of journals that might offer a sense of the debate on the war on drugs across education research.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> We tested a range of related terms, such as “cartels,” “narcotrafficking,” names of specific substances (e.g., “cocaine”), and found that the term “drug” was common across articles.

To generate this sample, we ran a general search of social science and education databases, which identified key education subfields that might address the war on drugs. We selected 20 subfields and approached these journals as proxies of the key debates in each field.<sup>5</sup> Using the SCIMAGO H-Index, a measure of journals' citation impact, we identified a top-ranking journal from each subfield. We also included two indexed journals that included the terms “drugs” and “education” in their titles: *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy* and the *Journal of Drug Education*. Finally, to learn more about how the general field of education discusses issues related to the war on drugs and education, we also included the *American Educational Research Journal*. Through this process of purposive sampling, we identified 22 journals that reflected the interdisciplinary nature of the field of education.

We used the following criteria to identify articles that addressed the intersection of the war on drugs and schooling, as mentioned in the title or abstract of the article:

- Direct mention of actors affiliated with formal education as the focus of the study, thus excluding nonformal education, except when it occurred within a school setting
- An explicit focus on primary or secondary education, including reference to out-of-school children, thus excluding higher education and vocational programs
- Direct mention of illicit drugs; this excluded pharmaceuticals, alcohol, cigarettes, or inhalants, except where they were studied along with illicit substances
- Empirical data, thus excluding theoretical papers and literature reviews

We also limited our search to a period of 30 years, from 1988 to 2018. This period captures the evolution of the war on drugs from the 1988 UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, which marked the international militarization of drug policy, to the recent drug-policy reform movement as manifested in the decriminalization of cannabis consumption in several countries. Finally, a parallel search across two university library databases,

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<sup>5</sup> The 20 subfields were anthropology of education, comparative education, criminology and criminal justice education, drug policy and education, economics of education, education and curriculum, international educational development, education policy, educational psychology, health education, history of education, human development, peace and human rights education, prevention science, rural education, social work and education, sociology of education, urban education, youth studies, and school violence.

one in the United States and another in Colombia, revealed that such databases have inconsistent holdings, which can produce source bias. To address this, we conducted all our searches through the official websites of the 22 journals selected.

With these criteria established, two researchers and four research assistants read through 4,485 titles and abstracts. To reduce individual bias, we developed a protocol for running searches and selecting articles. If doubts remained, the authors made a final decision. This selection process yielded 420 articles.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Our data analysis entailed several steps. First, we used Mendeley and NVivo software to capture pertinent bibliographic data, such as publication date, author, title, and journal. We then designed and ran a deductive coding tree, which included 38 codes with their respective definitions and decision rules. To reduce individual bias at this stage, we prioritized descriptive codes that summarized data and did not require strong interpretative skills (Saldaña 2012). These codes captured (1) methodology, (2) education stakeholders, including human and nonhuman actors, (3) education level, (4) educational responses, (5) segment of the drug route, (6) use of the term “drug,” and (7) country of focus. We assessed the relevance of these codes with a pilot of 10 percent of the total sample (42 articles). This phase of coding enabled us to quantify the occurrence of terms related to the war on drugs and to segment the data for further analysis. We then carried out a second round of inductive coding and used exploratory techniques, such as keyword searches and data visualizations, to identify trends. We wrote descriptive and analytical memos to sharpen our analysis and note emergent findings.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Our strategy of selecting one top journal as a proxy for the debates in each subfield limited the scope of the study. While this strategy did enable us to capture discussions across the field of education, we recognize that reviewing one journal does not ensure full coverage of the discussions in each subfield. Furthermore, given our use of the SCIMAGO H-Index to select our sample, our systematic review focused on peer-reviewed empirical papers included in top English-language journals by publishers located in the United States and the United Kingdom. It therefore prioritized English-language knowledge production over scholarship produced in other languages and in other parts of the world, including places where the war on drugs has done great damage. We also did not include the grey literature, as mapping the many think tanks, research institutes, and organizations that generate

knowledge related to the war on drugs and education would have demanded a different data-collection methodology. Although this review does not encompass the entire literature on the war on drugs and schooling, it is sufficient to provide a framework to start a conversation about these topics in the field of EiE.

## FINDINGS

### DECEPTIVE ABUNDANCE

At first there appeared to be abundant production of research on education and drugs. However, a closer look revealed a dearth of studies that examine the intersection of the war on drugs and schooling specifically.

As evidenced by the size of the final corpus, academic production on topics related to drugs and education has been abundant and consistent over time. In the journals and the 30-year timeframe (1988-2018) selected for the study, we found a total of 420 articles that refer to formal K-12 education and illicit drugs. This scholarly production was evenly distributed over time and at least seven articles were published per year, with each decade representing around one-third of the total sample.<sup>6</sup> This shows sustained scholarly attention to the relationship between formal schooling and drugs.

However, we found an uneven distribution of attention across education subfields.<sup>7</sup> While it is unsurprising that most of the articles that fit our criteria appeared in the journals explicitly devoted to drugs, the limited attention to this topic in journals from other education subfields is noteworthy (see Figure 1). A significant majority (77.2%; N=324) came from the three drug-related journals in our sample. The remaining studies (22.3%; N=96) were dispersed across 11 journals in the areas of youth studies, health education, criminology, child development, school

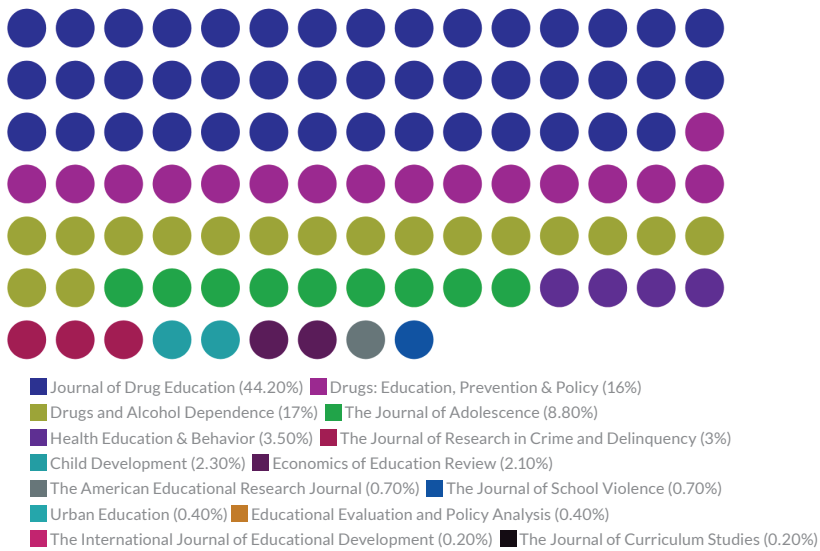
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6 The most recent decade showed increased attention to the legalization of specific substances. Of the seven studies that included the word “legalization” in the body of the article, one was published in 1997 and the remaining six were published between 2016 and 2018. This trend illustrates current concerns about how marijuana legalization might alter consumption patterns and challenge previous assumptions regarding criminalization.

7 It is important to note that, while the sample offers insights into the concerns of diverse subfields, it is not representative of the production in each subfield. Including a wider range of journals per subfield would address this limitation.

violence, urban education, and education policy studies.<sup>8</sup> The *International Journal of Educational Development* and the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* represented a bare minimum (0.2%; N=1), with only one article each. The journals *Comparative Education*, *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, *Educational Psychologist*, *History of Education*, *Journal of Peace Education*, *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *Journal of Social Work Education*, and *Sociology of Education* did not contain any articles that fit our criteria. Scholarship published in these journals neglected the intersection of the war on drugs and schooling altogether. This absence is alarming, especially when considering the frequent reference to the safety and protection of children and youth as a justification for the war on drugs.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 1: Distribution of Studies across Journals



Given that the majority of the corpus is in fields with strong quantitative research traditions, it is not surprising that 89.7 percent (N=377) of our sample relied on quantitative research methods. The remaining articles drew from qualitative (5.7%; N=24) and mixed methods (4.5%; N=19). Quantitative studies primarily drew from

<sup>8</sup> Specifically, 44.2 percent (N=186) of the articles were published in the *Journal of Drug Education*. This was followed by *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* with 17 percent (N=71), and *Drugs: Education, Prevention, and Policy* with 16 percent (N=67). The remaining studies appeared in the *Journal of Adolescence* (8.8%; N=37), *Health Education & Behavior* (3.5%; N=15), *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* (3%; N=13), *Child Development* (2.3%; N=10), and *Economics of Education Review* (2.1%; N=9). *American Educational Research Journal* and *Journal of School Violence* both had 0.7 percent (N=3), and *Urban Education* and *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* both had 0.4 percent (N=2). *International Journal of Educational Development* and the *Journal of Curriculum Studies* each contained 0.2 percent (N=1).

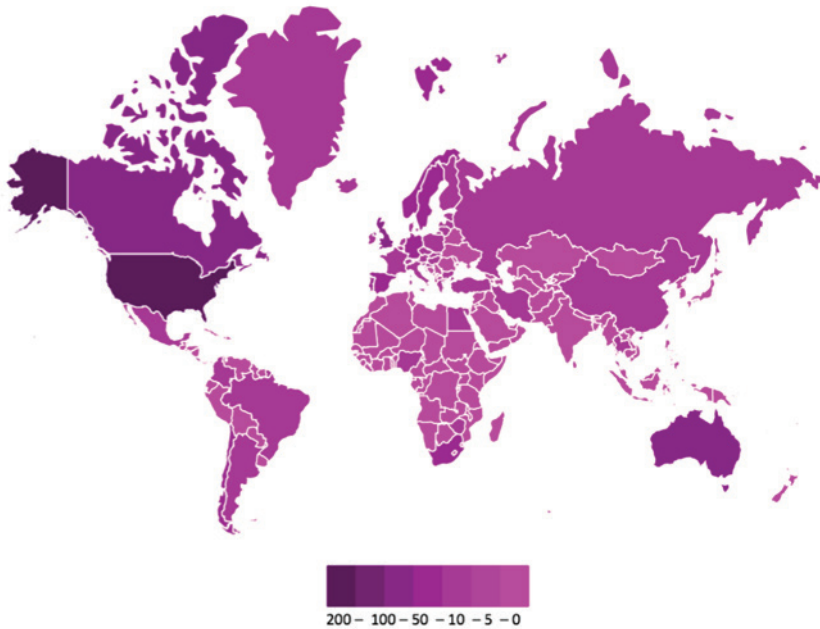
<sup>9</sup> See, for example, inaugural addresses of US presidents Nixon (1969), Ford (1974), Carter (1977), Reagan (1981), Bush (1989), and Trump (2017).

longitudinal datasets, cross-sectional studies, and surveys measuring the prevalence and risk of drug consumption among young people or the results of substance use prevention programs. Some of these sources were products of domestic drug policies, signalling the importance of examining how drug policy molds knowledge production.<sup>10</sup> Of the 24 studies that used qualitative research methods, fewer than half (N=10) sought the perceptions and experiences of children, youth, and educators. Those that did relied on individual and group interviews, classroom observations, and chat analyses to grasp students' voices. Only one article relied on interviews with educators. The other sources of data used in qualitative studies included policy documents, curricula, and textbooks. The limited use of qualitative methods suggests that there is much to be learned about the perceptions and experience of educational actors in this area.

Out of the 420 articles, only 1.4 percent (N=6) are cross-national comparative studies; all target countries and cities located in the Global North. The remaining 98.6 percent (N=414) focus on nation-states or provinces within that unit of analysis. Almost three-quarters of the total sample (71.4%; N=296) target countries in the Americas, with a large proportion in the United States (63.2%; N=262). The remaining are distributed among Africa (2.8%; N=12), Asia (4%; N=18), Europe (18.5%; N=77), and Oceania (2.8%; N=12). A stark finding is the absence of countries historically engaged in heroin production, such as Afghanistan, Myanmar, Laos, and Pakistan. It is also worth noting the dearth of studies on emerging drug-trafficking transit nations, such as Benin, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nigeria (UNODC 2018; see Figure 2).

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<sup>10</sup> For example, of the studies situated in the United States (63.2% of the total corpus, N=262), 15.4 percent (N=65) used or referenced the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (N=37) or the Monitoring the Future Survey (N=28). These two surveys, created in the 1970s under the Nixon administration (McCoy and Block 1992), collect information about the forms and prevalence of drug use in the United States in order to inform policymaking. The fact that 15.4 percent of our corpus relies on these two surveys illustrates the deep connection between US domestic policy related to the war on drugs and the production of academic knowledge.

*Figure 2: Geographic Distribution of Studies*

Finally, we found that the sampled studies prioritized certain themes and sidelined others. As we discuss below, the great majority of studies (97.6%; N=410) focused on students and drug use. Of these, a significant proportion (46%; N=195) addressed the relationship between education and drugs only peripherally. Only eight articles explicitly referred to the war on drugs, drug wars, or militarization.

In sum, while we found consistent attention given to the topic of schooling and drugs in the education literature, it was unevenly distributed, drew predominantly from quantitative methodologies, and rarely analyzed the educational implications of the war on drugs. Having offered this broad characterization, we now turn to the themes and gaps we found in this body of literature.

### **PREOCCUPATION WITH STUDENT DRUG USE**

As mentioned above, the topic of student drug use dominated the corpus, with 410 of the 420 articles selected addressing this issue. Within this pool of studies, we identified four general types: studies that examine how school factors impact student drug use; studies that address the effects of student drug use on education; studies that describe drug-use prevention strategies; and studies that analyze drug use and use schools as data-collection sites, but do not address the relationship

between schooling and drug use. Here, we discuss the first three trends, which are more closely related to EiE concerns.

A subset of the articles in our corpus (6.9%; N=29) explores how school factors affect student consumption of illicit substances, including absenteeism, retention, and exclusion; school engagement, educational aspirations, and academic achievement; peer effects; school climate and social context; and schooling type. The cumulative story offered by these studies is that schooling influences student drug use in diverse ways but what exacerbates or mitigates it varies from one setting to another, and that these factors interact with each other in multiple and shifting ways. For example, while scores on national tests in one setting intersected with peer effects to shape cannabis use (Gaete and Araya 2017), student drug use in another was shaped by the intersection of school disengagement and gender (Perra et al. 2012). This subset of studies depicts the nexus of schooling and the illicit drug trade by showing that students are consumers of illicit substances and that schooling plays a role in shaping their consumption patterns. Collectively, they caution against decontextualized and single-factor interpretations, underscoring that the influence of schooling on drug use is mediated by a range of individual, social, and environmental factors.

Another subset of articles (1.6%; N=7) examines the inverse relationship: how student drug use affects education. These studies look at how drug use influences academic performance, school attendance, retention, and educational aspirations. Several studies found correlations between student drug use and academic performance and highlight that these correlations are shaped by school, individual, and home factors. Other studies that found a positive correlation between student drug use and school dropout and absenteeism also show that this relationship is mediated by a range of other aspects. These studies indicate that dropout and absenteeism are multiply determined processes (Garnier, Stein, and Jacobs 1997). Although limited in number, these studies offer further insight into the reciprocal relationship between schooling and student drug consumption. They show that student drug use can have an effect on educational access and outcomes. They also underline the importance of context, emphasizing that substance use does not operate in isolation from the other variables that collectively shape educational experiences.



Finally, our study found a good deal of scholarly production on strategies aimed at reducing drug consumption (43.5%; N=183 of the studies in our corpus). A majority of these (32.6%; N=137) examine the design and effects of school-based drug-use prevention programs. Many of these programs share certain characteristics: they are designed with the explicit intention of reducing the onset and continuation of drug use; they focus on risk and protective factors; they occur in schools; and they target students. The programs used different approaches, including life-skills training, social-emotional learning, and fitness activities, among others.<sup>11</sup> While some programs were unique to specific schools, we found that more of the studies focus on universal models, including several commercially available brand-name programs, such as Drug Abuse Resistance and Education (D.A.R.E.), also known as keepin' it REAL, and All Stars Prevention. A limited subset of studies (2.6%; N=11) examines other types of educational responses, such as disciplinary practices, drug searches, harm-reduction strategies, drug education within core curricula, and drug-use treatment programs in school settings. These studies shed light on forms of educational response to student drug use that often are sidelined by the focus on universal prevention models.

These trends in the research offer important insights into the potential role education can play in safeguarding student health and wellbeing, and also call attention to the ways drug use can hamper educational access. Yet, they present a narrow framing of the educational nexus with the illicit drug trade, thereby limiting the ways we understand both young people and the role of education in relation to the war on drugs. This literature evidences a dominant paradigm of risk prevention (France and Utting 2005; Armstrong 2004) in discussions of schooling and student drug use. This analytical framework, which began to gain influence in the 1990s, focuses attention on the risk and protective factors that influence the onset, progression, and persistence of child and adolescent drug use. As critical scholars have noted elsewhere, this paradigm serves a normative function by structuring acceptable ways of thinking about drug use, its causes, and its possible solutions (Armstrong 2004; France and Utting 2005; Haines and Case 2008; Roumeliotis 2014). It assumes that the (potential) drug user is a rational actor who lacks self-control (Roumeliotis 2014) and thus requires training to enhance this ability or needs to be kept from opportunities to consume. The often repeated and largely static concept of risk constructs the child or adolescent as vulnerable and without agency, and thus in need of protection—that is, until

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11 Detailed description of the range of programs is beyond the scope of this study. For recent systematic reviews on drug-prevention programming, see Cuijpers (2002, 2003), McBride (2003), and Faggiano and colleagues (2008).

trained to make “correct” decisions. With this universal and rational framing of the problem, this paradigm does not attend to the socially and historically situated nature of both drug use and prevention (Freeman 1999, 233), and it neglects the diverse cultural meanings and practices associated with specific substances across social settings. It also naturalizes dominant drug-policy positions by not questioning the base assumptions of how the issue is understood, spoken about, and addressed.

This approach thus acts as a form of ideological closure (Roumeliotis 2014), whereby the only thinkable solutions to the “problem of drug use” are zero-tolerance policies that favor restricting the supply and consumption of drugs, and prevention programs that prioritize the development of individual skills and the reduction of risk factors. The aim of reducing multiple forms of risk might appear to offer a pathway to systemic reforms, such as improved education quality and access, yet the approach largely favors universal and generic models, which takes resources away from locally designed initiatives and often neglects the insufficiency or failure of brand-name programs (Birkeland, Murphy-Graham, and Weiss 2005).<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, the logic of risk prevention also impedes attention to structural forces, as evidenced when education policies prioritize school-based prevention programs that focus on changing individual attitudes toward drugs, rather than strategies to address the broader conditions of poverty, discrimination, and marginalization that engender particular patterns of substance distribution and abuse. Finally, this perspective sidelines an array of educational actors and the dynamics of the drug trade, thereby neglecting educational responses that prioritize the psychosocial effects of exposure to violence and access to quality education amid violent conflict.

### **FRAGMENTED SYSTEMS, ABSENT WAR**

Interested in how the research represents other aspects of the nexus of education with the war on drugs, we analyzed the actors and phases of the drug trade represented in the corpus of studies. Through this analysis, we identified a tendency to fragment both the education system and the war on drugs assemblage, which conceals how the two are interconnected and shifts attention away from the actors and actions that perpetuate this war.

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<sup>12</sup> While some preventive policy focuses on more holistic approaches (see the Iceland model, for example, which promotes youth-focused policy), these did not appear in the pool of articles.

The corpus includes studies that attend to an extensive range of human actors, but the amount of attention each received was not equal. Students were the focus of 75 percent of the articles (N=368), teachers 10 percent (N=49), parents 3.2 percent (N=16), principals 3 percent (N=15), out-of-school children 2.2 percent (N=11), counselors 2.2 percent (N=11), policymakers 0.8 percent (N=4), social workers 0.8 percent (N=4), nonformal educators 0.6 percent (N=3), and community leaders 0.4 percent (N=2).<sup>13</sup> Nonhuman actors were rarely the focus of a study; some studies addressed curricula, school policy, illicit substances, and school surveillance tools, such as metal detectors and drug tests, yet they were always addressed in relation to students. The numbers reveal that students were prioritized over any other education stakeholder (see Figure 3).

In contrast, state and nonstate armed actors were almost entirely disregarded. Only one article referenced drug-trafficking organizations (0.2%; N=1) and none focused on the military or police, which suggests little educational analysis of the criminalization and militarization inherent in the war on drugs. Contrast this with how drug policies have positioned state security forces relative to education during the period analyzed. For example, since founding of the D.A.R.E. program in the United States in 1983 (Becker, Agopian, and Yeh 1992), which is still operating in 54 countries (D.A.R.E. 2019), police and other law enforcement officers have had a presence in the classroom as educators. Increased school security efforts offer another example: since the 1990s, more school resource officers have been installed in classrooms across the United States, which has been followed by more drug-related charges being brought on school grounds (Na and Gottfredson 2013).<sup>14</sup> The increased police presence in and around schools also has happened in other countries (see, e.g., Excelsior 2017; *El Universo* 2018). Nevertheless, while 22.1 percent (N=93) of the articles in our corpus mentioned the police, none included them as research participants or as the focus of a study.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, during this period, several countries across the Americas militarized their response to drug production and commercialization and positioned military personnel in and around schools. As militaries have taken on greater domestic security roles in the region, we have witnessed grave human rights abuses against principals, teachers, and students (Novelli 2010; McDermott 2018). Yet, in this body of literature,

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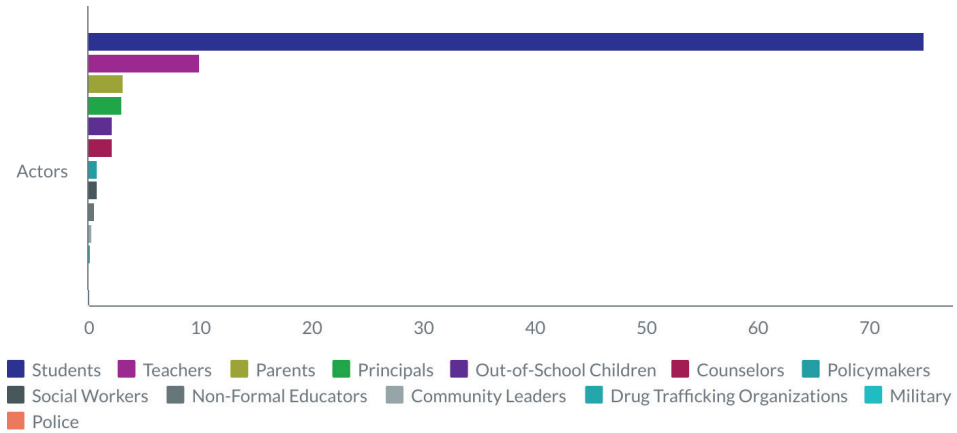
13 For this analysis, we coded the actors the studies positioned as research participants and units of analysis.

14 School resource officers are career law enforcement officers deployed by a police department to work in one or more schools.

15 The education literature beyond our corpus has addressed the role of police in schools; see, for example, Na and Gottfredson (2013), Nolan (2011), Theriot (2009), and Brown (2006). However, there is limited attention to the connection with the war on drugs.

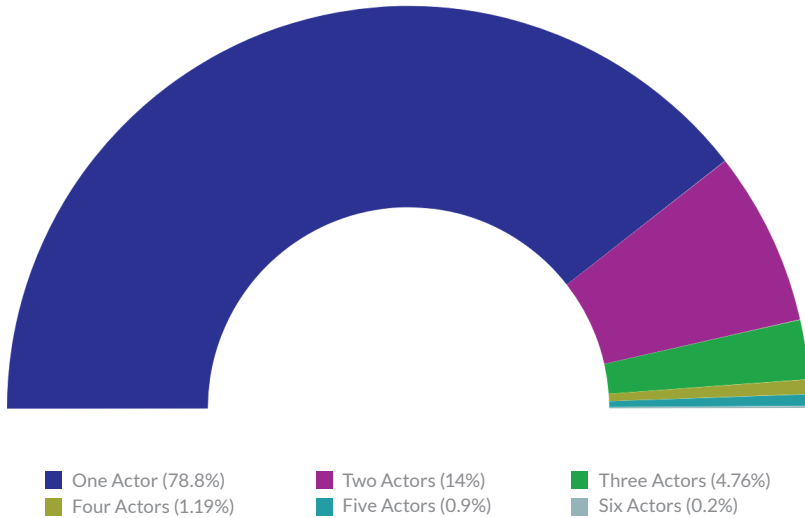
only one article (0.2%) referred to the role of the army in education during this period (Jarillo et al. 2016).

Figure 3: Actors as Areas of Focus



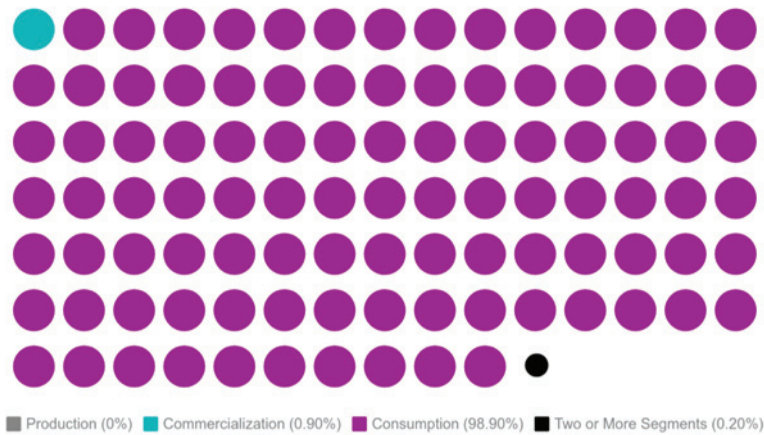
Along with identifying an overrepresentation of students and underrepresentation of other education actors, we found that studies tended to fragment the education system by treating interdependent education stakeholders as if they stood alone. Curious about how relationships between actors were represented, we counted how many stakeholders each study referenced; only 0.2 percent (N=1) discussed six education stakeholders; 0.9 percent (N=4) focused on five actors; 1.19 percent (N=5) included four actors; 4.76 percent (N=20) paid attention to three actors; 14 percent (N=59) incorporated two actors; and the vast majority of papers, 78.8 percent (N=331), focused on only one actor; of this group, 71.6 percent (N=301) targeted only students (see Figure 4). That most of the papers centered on one actor indicates a tendency to compartmentalize the education system and to separate actors that constantly encounter each other within the war on drugs assemblage.

Figure 4: Relationships between Actors



The inclination to isolate interdependent actors was also reflected in how the drug trade was conceived and studied. The drug market involves the cultivation, manufacture, distribution, promotion, sale, and consumption of illegal substances. Each of these nodes of interactions is met by varied state responses (e.g., forced crop eradication, neighborhood raids, confrontations with cartels, and incarceration) with their respective implications for conflict dynamics. For the purposes of this review, we captured three phases with codes for production, commercialization, and consumption, which we found are rarely considered in relationship to one another. Of the 420 articles in the corpus, only 0.4 percent (N=2) combined two or more segments of the supply chain (Wiesner and Capaldi 2003; Akee, Halliday, and Kwak 2014). The rest were distributed as follows: production (N=0), commercialization 0.9 percent (N=4), and consumption 98.5 percent (N=414). This distribution evidences a tendency to fragment the international drug supply chain that links distant geographical locations (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Segments of the Drug Supply Chain Studied



Methodological nationalist assumptions that prioritize the nation-state as the main reference or unit of analysis further this fragmentation (Wimmer and Schiller 2003; Novelli and Cardozo 2008). Viewed through this lens, we found that research questions and purposes tended to be constrained by the scope of a particular policy, the reach of a particular drug-prevention program, and the breadth of surveys, all framed within national boundaries. These methodological decisions limit the possibilities of a research agenda that investigates the transnational reach of the drug market or how policies and programs travel across borders.

One stark finding in our corpus was the nearly total lack of attention paid to the war on drugs as a violent conflict. To investigate this, we examined how and when the terms “war,” “violence,” and “conflict” were used in the literature. We found a tendency to associate violence with individual deviance and conflict with interpersonal dynamics, but almost no examination of how drug policy and trade relate to crises of insecurity, state instability, forced displacement, and high death tolls.

Of the 420 articles, we found only 1.9 percent (N=8) directly referenced the terms “war,” “war on drugs,” or “drug war.” In this small group, we identified two types of articles. The first type, only one article, examined the educational impact of the war on drugs: Jarillo and colleagues (2016) used school fixed-effects models to estimate the impact of “turf war exposure and persistence” on math test scores. Citing Robles et al. (Robles, Calderón, and Magaloni 2013), Jarillo et al. frame the violence in Mexico as “a result of structural changes in the drug trafficking business and government strategies to combat Drug Trafficking

Organizations” (137). The study provides evidence that this situation has negative effects on academic achievement, identifying “teacher turnover and tardiness, student and teacher absenteeism, and students frequently leaving school days early” as “channels linking the negative effects of drug-related turf war persistence on academic achievement” (136). This study, which shows the detrimental effects of drug-related violence on education quality and access, is an example of the kind of research needed to better understand the educational implications of the war on drugs.

The second type of article that used the terms “war,” “war on drugs,” or “drug war” mentioned them in a larger context. As exemplified in one quotation—“Considering the present societal context in which drug use is so widespread (the recent gains of the War on Drugs notwithstanding), it should not be surprising that academically successful student users exist” (Evans and Skager 1992, 354)—the papers in this second group tended to adopt zero-tolerance approaches without question, as such aligning themselves with the war-on-drugs policy framework.

In contrast to the limited number of references to war, the terms “conflict” and “violence” were prevalent. While the term “conflict” was referenced in 46.9 percent (N=197) of the total corpus, “violence” appeared in 29 percent (N=122). Violence and conflict were predominantly discussed as individual behaviors and disassociated from larger political or economic interests, such as “six categories of health-risk behaviors: *behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence*; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; unhealthy dietary behaviors; and physical inactivity” (Brenner and Wilson 2001, 332; our emphasis). Presented as disconnected from its political and social dimensions, violence is seen as part of a continuum of individual risk behaviors and deviance. Similarly, 77.1 percent (N=152) of the articles that mentioned conflict presented it as an interpersonal dynamic and linked it to substance use. Our analysis of how these studies discussed war, violence, and conflict shows that this corpus of education research disregards the social and political dimensions of the war on drugs. War is largely ignored, and violence and conflict are reduced to deviant individual and interpersonal behaviors.

As these analyses show, there is a tendency in the education research to treat drug-related violence as a matter of individual deviance, which renders the war on drugs invisible and assumes the logics of prohibition and militarization without question. Despite recognizing a wide range of education stakeholders and processes, the corpus concentrates its attention on students while giving

limited consideration to other education actors and almost none to armed actors. It also focuses on drug consumption and gives limited attention to the rest of the drug trade, which disregards the insecurity and violence produced by organized crime and repressive drug-policy interventions in other segments of the supply chain. As such, the literature largely neglects the human and nonhuman costs that have been linked to the prohibitionist drug-policy framework. The lack of attention to the violence and insecurity associated with the war on drugs leaves militarization and prohibition unquestioned. Why would we question them if we do not see their effects?

### REASSEMBLING THE WAR ON DRUGS

The literature we reviewed described the nexus of education and the war on drugs in limited terms. It identified that student drug consumption can shape educational experiences and, in turn, that educational experiences can shape consumption. Accordingly, it described schools as sites where drug consumption can be prevented; namely, through targeted prevention programming. However, the literature offered little description of how education intersects with other segments of the drug supply chain (production and commercialization), with repressive and militarized drug-control measures, or with the insecurity and violence associated with these. This leaves a critical gap in the research. To understand how this conflict affects access to quality education, scholars must study how and when education systems intersect with the illicit drug trade and drug-control measures, and how these encounters shape educational experiences.

We argue that, by ignoring its adverse effects, education research functions as an intermediary of the war on drugs. Latour (2005) identifies two roles played by actors in an assemblage, intermediaries and mediators. While intermediaries “transport” meaning without changing it (such as a training program that replicates the assumption that zero-tolerance approaches achieve results), mediators “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour 2005, 39). Government agents, UN officials, teachers, students, drug distributors, and academics all can act as mediators. We concur with Latour when he acknowledges that, by naming, interpreting, categorizing, invoking rules, and mobilizing resources, scholars also engineer assemblages. Our findings suggest that researchers have positioned themselves as intermediaries in this war by repeating and promoting the logics that sustain it.



New education research is needed to enable scholars to transition to the role of mediator and contribute analyses that prioritize peacebuilding. We emphasize the need for approaches that are relational, paying attention to how diverse actors and forms of violence interconnect; comparative, analyzing processes across multiple sites with historic consciousness; multidisciplinary, enabling discussion across disciplines in order to unsettle conceptual stagnation; critical, attending to the unequal distribution of effects and consequences and actively seeking out the ways given policies, concepts, and strategies serve particular interests; and reflexive, considering how research practices can perpetuate inequities and violence.

A research agenda that aims to examine the educational implications of this violent conflict would prioritize research questions that tackle the relationships between diverse actors, both inside and at the margins of the education system. Beyond being targets of drug-use prevention programs, what roles have children and young people played in this war? How do these roles shape the interactions among diverse education actors? What are the relationships between armed actors and school communities? How do we characterize these relationships beyond physical violence (armed attacks, forced recruitment, sexual violence)? How do human actors relate to nonhuman actors, such as metal detectors and specific substances? How do all of these relationships shape opportunities for access to quality education? Finally, what forms of relationship contribute to peacebuilding and the transformation of this conflict?

Analyses should move beyond methodological nationalism to trace how these relationships move across sites and connect seemingly distant points. Comparative education offers relevant methodological tools to do this, especially when comparison is understood as processual; that is, as attentive to cultural production and the “articulation and disarticulation of networks and actors over time and space, rejecting staid notions of culture or context” (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, 19), and continuous, engaging in ongoing exercises of comparing and contrasting phenomena and processes at multiple sites. Such research can produce situated analyses while also attending to how processes unfold and connect across different locations and extended periods of time.

We found that the research production in the literature reviewed was dominated by particular methodological approaches and frameworks, resulting in a homogenized depiction of the educational implications of the war on drugs. Future research on this topic would benefit from methodological diversity and cross-disciplinary conversations. How might an educational ethnography of a coca-growing community reframe the analysis of educational responses? What might critical

discourse analysis offer to drug-education debates? How could quantitative analyses shift attention to the educational impact of drug-control measures? Furthermore, engaging with diverse theoretical frameworks can expand understanding of the relationship between education and violent conflicts. For example, our use of assemblage enables us to explore a unified view of disparate actors and sites, thus permitting a broader read of the educational implications of this conflict.

Future research would also benefit from a deeper engagement with critical epistemologies to examine how power operates through the social relations shaped by this war. This would entail paying attention to the interests and actions of those who protect the stability of the war on drugs assemblage, while also examining the direct and indirect consequences of this war and their disproportionate distribution. How is violence related to the drug war experienced by students and teachers in both privileged and marginalized communities? How do these experiences of violence constrain action? Critical research would produce knowledge that denounces the current status quo and explores alternatives.

Finally, recognizing that researchers' contributions are constitutive of the phenomenon they analyze, we embrace the principle of "do no harm," not only in relation to research participants but also to our scholarly production. We are aware that researchers interested in conducting qualitative work on these issues might face serious challenges throughout the research process (Rodríguez-Gómez 2019; see also Goldsmith 2003; Hill 2004; Felbab-Brown 2014; Rodrigues 2014; Maglio and Pherali 2019; Mendenhall 2019). Once in the field, researchers and community members confront similar threats (Goldstein 2014). Changes in armed actors' strategic positions and war tactics create unpredictable risks for all. These risks turn the practical aspects of research into ethical dilemmas—from securing physical access to distant geographic locations to deciding what topics to broach, when to ask a sensitive question, and whom to speak with; and from framing how to introduce yourself to deciding if one should interview those suspected of criminal activity. Researchers also must assess how to position themselves in relation to criminality, especially as war on drugs logics criminalize a wide range of actors, such as coca, marijuana, and poppy growers (Interpol 2019). Limited access to funding sources outside the schemes that sustain the war on drugs, added to the lack of political support for research that does not conform to the "Just Say No" rule, are also important obstacles to be considered.<sup>16</sup> Under these conditions, we are challenged to examine whether our own research reproduces the values and priorities that sustain this war. What assumptions are embedded

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16 Important exceptions to consider are the Open Society Foundations and the Drug Policy Alliance.

in the framing of our research questions? How can the knowledge we produce be used in the war machinery? A reflexive engagement with these questions can ensure that research avoids reproducing unquestioned logics.

## CONCLUSION

Concerned with the widespread harm caused by the war on drugs and its implications for education, this study sought to shed light on how education research produced in the last 30 years describes the relationship between education and this war.

We drew from analyses of contemporary forms of violent conflict and the concept of assemblage to guide our study. In defining the war on drugs as an assemblage, we do not pretend to add unnecessary theoretical pretentiousness to this conversation; on the contrary, we seek to provide tools that enable scholars and practitioners in the fields of comparative and international education and EiE to understand and explain longstanding forms of violence. Assemblage has the potential to shift our attention from merely identifying consequences—attacks, disappearances, kidnappings, targeted killings, threats—to critically examining the causes and drivers of conflict by tracing the shifting associations between human and nonhuman actors at the crossroads of violence. Assemblage gives us the capacity to avoid limiting “in advance the shape, size, heterogeneity and combination of associations” (Latour 2005, 11) and the opportunity to explain the particularities that inform context-based interventions. Seen through the lens of assemblage, the war on drugs is a persistent asymmetric conflict that emerges and subsides in different locations, with diverse levels of intensity guided by particular logics.

We discussed the range of actors involved in this war, the high level of insecurity it generates, and the educational implications it may produce. We used this conceptual framework to carry out a systematic review of the nexus of schooling and drugs, which involved reviewing academic production in a sample of 22 journals over a period of 30 years. We identified 420 articles, which we then analyzed to gain insights into the patterns and trends that emerge in the literature. We found a strong preoccupation with student drug use in the Global North and limited attention to other education actors and aspects of the drug trade. The education literature generally disregards the social and political insecurity and violence associated with the war on drugs, thereby obscuring the adverse effects of prohibition and militarization and how state and nonstate armed actors affect schooling. Put simply, in the education research reviewed, the war on drugs is a

war denied. Instead, the research repeats the logics of prevention and prohibition, thereby foreclosing debate on alternative drug-policy approaches.

Comparative and international education, and EiE in particular, are well positioned to address this gap in the literature, with certain caveats. Future research that aims to understand and describe education policy and practice in the midst of this war must remain reflexive. We, as researchers and practitioners dedicated to ensuring inclusive quality education in situations of crisis and conflict, must guard against reproducing the logics that sustain violent conflict. This entails conducting careful and critical research that does not uncritically reproduce the dominant discourses of the war on drugs. It also entails being accountable to those directly and adversely affected by this war. We hope this review takes a step in that direction.

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# WHEN EMERGENCY BECOMES EVERYDAY LIFE: REVISITING A CENTRAL EIE CONCEPT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

ROOZBEH SHIRAZI

## ABSTRACT

*Though “emergency” is a key concept in the field of education in emergencies, scholars and practitioners have long been ambivalent about this term and what conditions it can refer to. In this article, drawing from the work of anthropologist Janet Roitman, I critically revisit the concepts of emergency and crisis, and propose that understanding emergency primarily as a moment of shock or the unexpected event obscures how seemingly normal conditions may produce their own impasses. Rather than being characterized by a consensus of meaning, crises entail narrative constructions that create new temporalities and frame certain questions and responses as possible, others as not. In this article, I juxtapose two narrative constructions of crisis in popular culture to explore how narrative constructions of the war on drugs can produce jarringly different accounts of the crises they are said to represent. I suggest that explicitly attending to the underlying politics of crisis narration—though possibly complicating emergency response—is vital to naming and resolving possible ethical blind spots and impasses in the field of education in emergencies.*

## THE WAR ON DRUGS: A CONCEPTUAL PROVOCATION FOR EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

According Pearl (2018), someone in the United States is arrested for drug possession every 25 seconds. The number of people arrested for possession has tripled since 1980, with 1.3 million arrests in 2015—six times the number of

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arrests for drug sales. One-fifth of the country's incarcerated population, some 456,000 individuals, is serving time for a drug charge; another 1.15 million are on probation and parole for drug-related offenses (Pearl 2018).

It would be reasonable to conclude that the cultivation, distribution, and consumption of controlled substances is drastically reshaping individual and familial lives, as well as institutional arrangements and policies in the US. Comparable snapshots from other countries—for example, the 200,000 people killed in Mexico since 2006 in drug-related operations and the 12,000 killed since 2016 in Philippine president Duterte's notorious drug crackdown—suggest that the adverse effects of the drug trade are transnational and interstitial, thus not easily attributable to one factor or issue. Across nation-states, these interrelated effects have coalesced into broader narratives of crisis that demand a coordinated response—what many states have come to refer to as a war on drugs (WoD).

Rodríguez-Gómez and Bermeo (2020) describe this war as a long-running assemblage of global and national policies, multilateral and bilateral agreements, and military interventions to control the production, distribution, and possession of drugs. It also can be seen as producing a growing range of crises and emergencies, including forced migration, violent conflict, mass incarceration, and environmental degradation (Rincón Ruiz and Kallis 2013; Paley 2014). These effects of the WoD can be viewed as emergent terrains of humanitarian action and, by extension, possible education in emergencies (EiE) responses, in that they are productive of the very disruptions EiE is typically meant to alleviate. Surprisingly, however, the WoD is not typically discussed in EiE literature or practice.

## NARRATING THE CRISIS

In this article, I explore the implications of reading the WoD as a crisis or emergency, and of viewing it as constitutive of new theaters of humanitarian action and the provision of education. One question serves as a point of departure for this exploration: How do the complexities of the WoD suggest that the field of EiE must revisit its spatial and temporal notions of humanitarian response—and the narrative framings that legitimate such a response—in settings where emergency and crisis conditions show little sign of abating? This question is of critical importance to EiE, given that the notions of crisis and emergency are central concepts of the field. Moreover, the idea of what situations count as emergencies and how emergency should be understood remains a contested concept within EiE. Burde (2014, 40) has argued that there are durable humanitarian mindsets around how to respond to

emergencies and that, by defining a situation as an emergency, “humanitarians cue in the popular imagination certain images and ideas—a sudden, life-threatening crisis that requires an immediate response. These, in turn, influence and often determine decisions about the kinds of interventions needed.” Burde’s call for further attention to the hegemonic understanding of emergency in EiE remains generative. While she calls for this work to be done in light of conflict-sensitive education programs being centered in humanitarian emergency responses, my primary aim in this article is to draw critical theoretical attention to the interrelated concepts of crisis and emergency by examining how they are invoked and deployed in EiE discourse, and in representations of the WoD in popular culture. In examining how invocations and narrations of crisis in popular media work to open up particular questions and foreclose on others, this article serves as a conceptual provocation for the field of EiE.

I argue that the WoD is fruitful analytical terrain for rethinking notions of crisis and emergency, for considering what it means to be in a state of crisis indefinitely, and for determining how one can best educate and be educated in such a milieu. Thinking of the WoD in relation to the field of EiE entails grappling with two noteworthy points. First, which of the myriad crisis conditions, events, and circumstances born of the WoD can become intelligible EiE response opportunities or “emergencies”? That is, how are understandings of educational problems and the parameters for action constructed in crisis settings, given the constrained material and temporal conditions in which EiE works and decisionmaking typically occurs? Second, making the WoD a terrain for EiE also compels consideration of what modes of educational action are ethical and needed in the context of a multifaceted intervention that is largely deemed a failure but still ambles on. In the following sections, I engage with these considerations by providing an overview of different approaches to understanding crisis and emergency, honing in on how narrative constructions of the WoD work to engender and legitimate certain responses.

Drawing from recent literature on crisis and emergency in politics, cultural studies, and anthropology—notably Janet Roitman’s (2014) work on narrative constructions of crisis—I offer two main arguments. First, long-running, multisited interventions like the WoD highlight the importance of critically attending to narrative constructions of crisis and drawing from new temporalities in EiE responses that move beyond sudden/slow-onset frameworks. Because crisis is, as Roitman (2014) states, an experiential category and constitutive of so many facets of our daily lives, these arguments have implications for how EiE responses are framed and put into practice. Such reflection is important to EiE because it expands the terms that traditionally frame the field and justify

its realm of action. Second, by utilizing narrative and textual methods of analysis from critical media studies, I critically analyze two popular cultural representations of the WoD to illustrate how social crises—including the effects of the War on Drugs in the US—are inscribed into popular cultural production and consumption. These media representations are also highly influential in shaping humanitarian emergency landscapes (UNESCO 2011). Music, literature, and films that address various crises are valuable artifacts for understanding how the parameters and possibilities for political and humanitarian action are framed and made legible across different material, geographic, and political locations. In this article, to compare how distinctive narratives of humanitarian crisis in the US WoD are framed and presented, I analyze two cultural artifacts: “Sellin’ D.O.P.E.,” an anti-carceral hip-hop song that examines how drug enforcement disproportionately harms Black communities in the US, and *Traffic*, a Hollywood thriller that portrays the WoD through multiple plotlines. While reflective of dissimilar political commitments and visions, these artifacts function as crucibles that distill a “truth” about the drug war crisis they mobilize for our consumption. Through this analysis, I illustrate how different narrative and popular constructions of the drug crisis may reorient understandings and actions within the field of EiE, leading to a consideration of emergencies not just as unexpected events but as outgrowths of the same governance practices that make much contemporary humanitarian work possible and necessary. These analyses point to the need for EiE scholars and practitioners to consider and incorporate different vantage points and understandings of crisis into humanitarian decisionmaking processes, education responses in particular. I conclude with a discussion of how different conceptualizations of crisis can help us understand the effects of the WoD in ways that center the lives of those most affected by crisis. While aware that the work of EiE is fraught—perhaps more so in the context of the WoD—I argue that drawing from a wider set of sources to understand the effects of crisis could expand EiE as a site of ethical possibility.

### **WHAT’S IN A WORD? THE WAR ON DRUGS AS TERRAINS OF EMERGENCY AND CRISIS**

For more than two decades, scholars, practitioners, and advocates involved in humanitarian work have been adamant that education is an integral part of disaster and emergency relief (Aguilar and Retamal 1998; Nicolai 2003). However, the question of what it means to name something an emergency or crisis has long vexed practitioners who deliver education in such settings. As early as 2005, a USAID report, “Education in Crisis Situations: Mapping the Field,” noted that the difficulty of defining crisis poses a “larger conceptual problem with maintaining

a distinction between relief and development assistance” (Burde 2005, 5). This conceptual problem is compounded by the fact that different agencies employ diverse understandings of the term “crisis” and use it to refer to myriad issues, making crisis a powerful (if fuzzy) justification for certain forms of intervention. Since that report, efforts have been made to standardize definitions, benchmarks, and approaches used in the EiE field. Notably, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) developed a *Minimum Standards Handbook* to serve as a tool for humanitarian workers, educators, and government officials, as well as an EiE “term bank” to support correct and universal usage of technical terms.

Though INEE does not define “crisis” in the *Minimum Standards Handbook*, “emergency” is defined as “a situation where a community has been disrupted and has yet to return to stability” (INEE 2010, 117). And yet, in linking these concepts so closely, practitioners are confronted with a tautological impasse in which concepts of emergency and crisis are used not only to define each other but also interchangeably and broadly. Certainly the concepts are related and often work as synonyms, but unless these terms are opened up to scrutiny, their interchangeable usage does not provide a strong analytical footing for understanding what is at stake when we speak of these conditions. Moreover, the ways actors employ these terms can shape what is understood as an emergency or crisis. Rubenstein (2015, 105-107) makes a useful distinction between the concepts of emergency and crisis, wherein the former represents an unexpected state that demands immediate action and the latter represents an urgent situation in which a decision is required. Said differently, emergencies emphasize the primacy of (re)action, whereas crises entail framing appropriate action and demand decisive judgment. In the case of EiE, a field largely driven by the need to take urgent action, the definition of what is an emergency has clear implications for what can and should be done. However, as a growing literature on slow-onset emergencies suggests, critical attention is needed to determine how appropriate action is conceptualized and acted on.

Similar to the political expediency afforded by the term “crisis,” the WoD represents a potent example of how war rhetoric—seen in other US “wars,” such as those on poverty and terror—is used “to elicit public consent for all sorts of disparate ventures” (Noon 2004, 342). As Rodríguez-Gómez and Bermeo (2020) note, this broad policy regime is often characterized by militarized interventions, punitive legislation, and prohibition campaigns—interventions that work in tandem to police, secure, displace, and disproportionately criminalize populations of color. Dawn Paley’s (2014) argument that the WoD is a form of continuous war against socially excluded populations in Latin America is especially trenchant for thinking about how invoking crisis as a conceptual and political category can

work to obscure concurrent displacements and loss of rights. Plan Colombia, the US-funded counterinsurgency against drug cartels and Marxist rebels, saw the Colombian military working in tandem with right-wing militias to target suspected sympathizers in rural strongholds of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC. These operations temporarily diminished the FARC insurgency, but they also led to thousands of civilian deaths while the production of illicit coca remained largely unchanged (Miroff 2016). Moreover, the operations produced what observers have termed a balloon effect, where the inroads made in halting production in Colombia dispersed production into Central America and Mexico (Paley 2014), which in turn gave rise to the Merida Initiative or “Plan Mexico,” thereby transferring the Colombian intervention into a new WoD territory. A willingness to grapple with how crisis is invoked and deployed in governance and development techniques makes it possible to understand complex and long-running interventions, like the WoD, not as a corrective response to dangerous situations but as incubators of the larger structural shifts that produce instability, violence, and the erosion of rights.

As Bengtsson (2011) observes on the use of the term “fragility” in the field of EiE, there are inherent risks in working with vague terminology and assumptions of shared meaning. Words matter. The terms practitioners use, and how they use them, matter because they are central both to framing problems and to deploying putative solutions that privilege certain interests over others. The ability to name a situation (crisis, fragile, stable, or otherwise) is explicitly political and tantamount to setting the stage for how we may understand, approach, and resolve it. In a world marked by the growing privatization of public services and resources, precarious livelihoods, extended violent conflicts, environmental degradation, climate insecurity, racialized policing/surveillance, militarized borders, and pandemics, the core terms in the field of EiE—“emergency” and “crisis”—find increasing relevance, but they also invite a critical revisiting. It is important to query how education policymakers, development practitioners, and researchers deploy the term “emergency,” which situations can be understood as emergencies, and which actors are able to name emergencies and mobilize resources to address them. It is also important to understand how broader understandings of crisis are produced, circulated, and consumed in popular narratives of crisis. Discursively, ambiguity may work to privilege particular understandings and institutional actors and to occlude important contextual histories and local voices and struggles. For example, if the rationale for EiE is to contribute to stability, ease difficult circumstances, or to set things right, so to speak, it is vital to trace which modes of living are assumed to constitute stability and what forms of stability are desirable. It is equally important to be explicit about who gets to articulate the normative dimensions of what stability ought to be and

which power relations are privileged therein. As examined in greater detail below, media depictions play a pivotal role in shaping the contours of what we know and how we know it to be true (Tisdell 2008).

In the remainder of this article, I argue that the definitions of emergency and crisis introduced above, while supple, fail on two counts. First, they render emergencies as unexpected and urgent happenings but do not reflect the fact that an emergency may itself be a product of statecraft or be politicized, manufactured, or sustained for profit by local and nonlocal actors (Klein 2007; Paley 2014; Loewenstein 2015). Second, they construct a temporality in which crises are decisive events with measurable effects best approached with clear indicators like the INEE Minimum Standards, target populations, and standard responses. Such tidy understandings of emergency—as moments necessitating swift response rather than critical reflection (Bengtsson 2011)—can neglect messy and inchoate forms of breakdown, instability, and attrition that are ongoing if not always perceptible aspects of social life. Following Rubenstein (2015), although the WoD is often framed as a response to myriad emergencies, it cannot be understood strictly as an emergency situation in itself. Many of its known targets—displacement, armed conflict, mass incarceration—emerge as the effects of state policies and antidrug actions. In fact, the WoD presents policymakers and EiE actors with multiple, concurrent, and interrelated humanitarian crises that require delimitation and decisions on how best to respond.

## RETHINKING CRISIS AND EMERGENCY

There is a growing literature that critically theorizes the related notions of crisis and emergency as indeterminate conditions (e.g., Agamben 2005; Berlant 2011; Wagner-Pacifici 2017; Roitman 2014; Rubenstein 2015). Given my focus on frames that enable EiE responses rather than on the EiE responses themselves, I draw primarily from Roitman's (2014) work on these concepts to illustrate different temporalities of crisis that have important implications for the EiE field. Roitman is a useful interlocutor, as she has written extensively on the concept of crisis with the aim of examining how it is constituted as an object of knowledge and the different ways crisis narratives can be put to work. She provides a genealogy of the concept, beginning with the ancient Greek term *krino* (meaning to decide, to judge, to choose), which was prevalent in medicine. In this context, crisis denoted the turning point of a disease or a critical phase in which life or death was at stake, and it called for an irrevocable definition and decisive choice between alternatives.

A key point of interest to the field of EiE is Roitman's assertion that crisis narratives introduce new temporalities. Crisis is mobilized in narrative constructions to signal turning points, or transitional phases, that establish both a basis for action and a particular teleology that is implicitly directed at a norm. The political utility of a crisis narrative is that it evokes a moral demand for a difference between the past and the future, where the past is recast as wrong (or the temporal location to discover what went wrong) to make room for a different kind of future. Thus, a crisis can "become an imperative or device to understand how to act effectively in situations that belie, for actors, a sense of possibility" (2014, 2). It is important to note here that crisis narratives are fashioned to produce meaning, and to open certain possibilities and foreclose on others in terms of creating opportunities for action or coordinated response. Roitman argues that calling a situation a crisis posits that a deviation from the normal has occurred, regardless of whether such a claim can be substantiated.

Within the EiE field, crisis narratives frequently center on the provision of education in relation to natural disasters, conflict settings, and displaced and refugee communities (UNESCO 2011; Nicolai and Hine 2015). The provision of education services under these circumstances similarly marks out new temporalities in delineating what is to be done. Nicolai and Hine's (2015) review of investment in EiE responses indicates that there is typically little engagement with "long-wave" events and "complex emergencies," and none in high-income countries, which suggests that the temporal, spatial, and political dimensions of crisis in EiE responses are narrowly defined. Narrow constructions of crisis help to focus the scope of action, but they also have to be understood with respect to the material support for EiE efforts, as funding cycles for EiE, like other humanitarian responses, are much shorter than the crisis situations they are meant to alleviate (UNESCO 2011). Indeed, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR 2017) reports that protracted refugee situations across the globe now last on average an estimated 26 years, which raises fundamental questions about the viability of the short-term funding cycles that drive contemporary humanitarian responses. The mechanisms of funding for emergency education responses have to be considered here as well; appeals for long-term planning resulted in only 38 percent of education requests being funded (UNESCO 2011, 205). The scarcity of funds for education responses poses additional challenges for developing EiE programs that are informed and sustained by specific contextual factors. Roitman's (2014) arguments are similarly instructive in highlighting how invocations of humanitarian crisis establish a moral basis for EiE responses, but in ways that frame and reduce what is to be done to correspond to the constrained capacity of humanitarian actors to respond. Such narrative constructions of crisis pave the way for education responses that, while



well-meaning, are not sustainable and do not (or cannot) necessarily address longer timeframes, larger systemic arrangements, or interrelated complexities.

There is also the question of what EiE programs actually do to orient participants to their lived experiences of crisis. While EiE programs are thought to safeguard psychosocial and physical wellbeing and to contribute to possibilities for peace, little to no research has been done that tracks people's changing perceptions of EiE over time, and little is known about the views of children and youth in these settings (Nicolai and Hine 2015, 15). The empirical record suggests that students' experiences of EiE are complex. In a recent study examining civic education efforts for refugee youth in Lebanon, for example, Abu El-Haj et al. (2018) found that these lessons emphasized obedience to authority, and also taught children to be ashamed of their social positions and to distrust their own knowledge. Comparably little is understood about how emergency education responses for youth might unfold and inform their self-conceptions in the multinational, extraordinarily diverse settings marked by the WoD. We know that education in conflict settings is often understood as helping to establish clearer boundaries between civilians and combatants (UNESCO 2011). In the WoD, however, action plans that rely on greater policing and military operations in arenas of everyday life may further blur the lines between civilians and offenders. Historically, antidrug education efforts in the US, like Drug Abuse Resistance Education or D.A.R.E., have promoted abstinence and avoidance of circumstances and settings in which drugs are present. Educators and humanitarian actors have to consider how such pedagogical aims or life skills would translate in settings characterized by economic precarity and informal labor markets, where the distribution and consumption of drugs are intertwined with local economies and daily life. If students know of family or community members implicated in these activities, such educational interventions would run counter to the complexities of their lives and would not speak to their sociopolitical and relational realities.

### RETHINKING TEMPORALITIES OF CRISIS

Roitman argues that the term “crisis” is now increasingly understood “to be a condition, a state of affairs, an *experiential category* [my emphasis] . . . posited as a protracted and potentially persistent state of ailment and demise” (2014, 16). This conceptualization of crisis moves the causes of disruption beyond any specific event—the terrorist attack, the episode of conflict, the earthquake, or the hurricane—and toward the larger, seemingly banal socioeconomic and political arrangements that frame everyday life. Said differently, it is not only the spectacular event or catastrophe that introduces uncertainty, disruption,

and instability into the lives of a community. Thus, we must consider that crisis conditions are exerted and exacerbated by ongoing and mutually reinforcing processes that often go unquestioned as normal.

Such an indeterminate temporality of crisis, one without a clear origin or endpoint, challenges the logic and targets of rapid or “early” emergency response and the moral basis of humanitarian intervention. What we must contend with then, following Roitman (2014), is that we are living in far more indefinite conditions of crisis than we imagined, conditions that distribute harm differentially and are sustained by the very systems that provide humanitarian relief to alleviate them. This is especially true in the WoD, where poor, rural, Black, and indigenous populations in Latin America and poor, urban, minorized populations in the US bear the brunt of the harm caused by antidrug policies (Paley 2014).

As discussed above, the idea of emergency in the field of EiE is usually defined as an unexpected shock of intense but brief duration. Recently, however, attempts have been made to rethink the temporality of emergency and, notably, to account for what are known as slow-onset emergencies, which INEE defines as “an emergency that does not emerge from a single, distinct event but one that emerges gradually over time, often based on a confluence of different events.”<sup>1</sup> The UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2011, 3) names examples of “global challenges—such as climate change, food and energy price spikes, macroeconomic trends, irregular migration, rapid population growth, and urbanisation—[that] are contributing to increasing vulnerability and humanitarian need.” Although the introduction of a slow-onset emergencies framework can potentially broaden the theoretical scope and the theaters of emergency action, there is evidence to suggest that shock-based understanding of emergencies still predominates humanitarian relief responses. In other words, the frameworks of EiE are too narrowly conceptualized and applied in circumstances of emergency that they cannot necessarily address. There are clear limits to sudden-onset approaches that emphasize preparedness in the case of the WoD, where there is a long history of states building on what exists and where responses intensify without grappling with the material causes and effects of the responses themselves.

Undoubtedly, a deeper exploration of the explanatory possibilities and limitations of slow-onset emergencies remains important for the EiE field, especially when considering the increasingly protracted and interconnected nature of contemporary

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1 INEE adopts UN OCHA’s definition of slow-onset emergencies. See <https://inee.org/resources/ocha-and-slow-onset-emergencies>. INEE’s definition of slow-onset emergencies will be published in 2020 in an updated EiE glossary, though the draft glossary was consulted in 2019.

humanitarian challenges like the WoD. In my analysis of two popular cultural representations of the WoD that follows, I engage closely with questions of how popular representations of crisis in the WoD direct our gaze to different geographies, communities, and everyday experiences of human lives. These examples illustrate how the juxtaposition of distinct WoD narratives enable several important possibilities: first, to complicate normative assumptions about the drivers of (and solutions to) humanitarian crises emanating from the WoD; second, to draw transnational links between human communities affected by the WoD; and, finally, to draw attention to systemic issues such as militarization, racialized policing, and mass incarceration that are often made invisible in narrow humanitarian responses. In doing so, I illustrate how narrative analysis, enjoined with critical attention to power, social relations, and political and economic conditions from which narratives emerge, represents a potent approach the EiE field could embrace in order to challenge normative understandings of what may count as an emergency, its temporal and spatial dimensions, and its contributing factors and effects.

## METHODOLOGICAL/ANALYTICAL APPROACHES

Narratives present situated accounts of the world, and in this respect it is important to examine narrative constructions of crisis. Narratives draw attention to the fact that our understandings of a reality and the possibilities of shared meaning emerge from one's social location and, relatedly, that different understandings of an event, situation, or reality are not only common but to be expected. As feminist security studies scholar Annick Wibben observes, "narratives are sites of the exercise of power; through narratives, we not only investigate but invent an order for the world" (2011, 2). Thus, my focus here is on the practices and politics of narration, rather than on the relative efficacy of one narrative over another.

Narratives can also be understood as social texts that are subject to analysis, insofar as they circulate social meanings (Fürsich 2009). Narrative analysis reveals the relationship of utterances, talk, and media to the social construction of norms and institutional discourses (see Souto-Manning 2014 for an innovative critical application within education research, and for a substantive review of the approach itself). My analysis here is informed by the work of Wibben (2011), and by cultural theorist Stuart Hall's (1984) assertion that narrative has to be understood as inherently political, in that it stakes out claims to reality and constructs reality while providing a situated account of it. Hall's critical treatment of the role of British media in constructing hegemonic claims of reality and imbuing them with cultural legitimacy during the Falklands War is instructive

for analyzing how popular cultural forms may perform a similar function with respect to narrative constructions of crisis in the WoD. Indeed, we would be remiss to ignore the enormous effect popular media depictions of crisis as entertainment have, both consciously and unconsciously, on what and how we think—about ourselves and others, and about personal and social issues (Tisdell 2008, 48). In the following sections, I critically analyze two treatments of the drug war in the US, one in film and one in hip-hop music, as illustrative examples of how narrative constructions work to direct and curate distinct popular understandings of crisis. As Adorno (1976) has argued, popular culture works as a site of politics, in that it is frequently implicated in securing popular consent to dominant social relations and the status quo. However, narrative constructions within popular culture can also be subversive, particularly when not beholden to commercial interests and profit motives (Ciccariello-Maher 2005).

### SELECTION OF MEDIA

In this section, I draw from narrative constructions in the 2000 film *Traffic* and the 2002 song “Sellin’ D.O.P.E.” by hip-hop duo dead prez as they relate to the WoD. I have chosen these social texts because they are roughly contemporaneous accounts that offer contrasting points of entry into understanding the WoD as a crisis and in assigning and ordering its effects, thus highlighting knowledge production as a site of politics. While there are more recent media treatments of the WoD, notably the Netflix series *Narcos* and the 2017 feature film *Loving Pablo*, these depictions focus largely on enforcement measures against the Medellín cartel in the 1980s and 1990s, and on the pursuit of Pablo Escobar in particular. Though not as recent, *Traffic* is noteworthy for moving past dramatic portraits of “drug lord” personalities to attempt a contemporary, multinarrative, and systematic engagement with the US drug war. Similarly, while there are numerous songs that explore the pernicious effects on individuals caught up in the drug trade (e.g., “Love’s Gonna Get’cha” by Boogie Down Productions, “The Ten Crack Commandments” by the Notorious B.I.G., “Peruvian Cocaine” by Immortal Technique), “Sellin’ D.O.P.E.” offers a more comprehensive and multilevel counternarrative to *Traffic*’s depiction of the drug war. These examples together are useful for analysis, in that they attempt far-reaching explorations of the social, economic, and politics factors that shape the WoD.

### ANALYSIS OF MEDIA

In analyzing these narratives, I hew to a repertoire of diverse but interrelated forms of textual analysis that have precedent in critical media studies, including literary-critical interpretive strategies (Fürsich 2009, 241). Fürsich (2009) discusses

how critical analysis of media need not attend only to the manifest content (i.e., the visible or audible) but to the production and signification of broader cultural meanings. I come to these media with critical constructivist and poststructuralist epistemic commitments. These commitments draw my analytical focus not only to the production of situated accounts and knowledges but also to broader relationships of power and the possibilities of legibility within discursive and normative frameworks that confer authority to particular narratives over others. Analytically, this entails attending to (mis)representations of institutional and political norms, power dynamics, and the visibility of marginalized communities.

My analysis proceeded as follows. I viewed *Traffic* several times to move beyond a passive consumption of its manifest content and to develop critical insights into its narrative framing—that is, how and why the story was being told as it was. I thus was able to identify relevant scenes and transcribe portions of the dialogue that I deemed thematically significant for consolidating a larger crisis narrative about the WoD. Similarly, I listened to “Sellin’ D.O.P.E.” several times in order to transcribe its lyrics and identify its key themes. After I transcribed them, I selected an excerpt of the lyrics that explicitly exemplified a counternarrative of crisis, one that queried the benevolent framing of enforcement of the WoD by highlighting its disproportionate effects within Black communities. It is important to note that the process was dialogical and inductive, insofar as my multiple viewings and listening to one text yielded insights that drew me back to the opposing text, and eventually toward broader comparative insights. For example, listening to “Sellin’ D.O.P.E.” helped me give specific attention when viewing *Traffic* to how questions of race and racial disparities in arrests, prosecution, and incarceration were addressed (or not). Finally, the process of expanding these observations through memo writing helped me consolidate my analysis.

## **THE WAR ON DRUGS IN NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF CRISIS**

### **STAYING THE COURSE, NARROWING THE SCOPE: DEPICTIONS OF THE DRUG WAR IN SODERBERGH’S *TRAFFIC***

The film *Traffic*, directed by Steven Soderbergh, was released in 2000 to widespread critical acclaim, including Oscar awards for directing, acting, and screenplay. A cinematic adaptation of a British television series of the same name (*Traffik*), *Traffic* sets forth several simultaneous (though not always overlapping) narratives about the drug trade and enforcement efforts in the US and Mexico. The narratives are

meant to convey the different perspectives and lived experiences that intersect with the WoD, with storylines featuring rich white suburban kids from Ohio, US law enforcement officers and politicians, high-level dealers living publicly respectable lives in Southern California, and Mexican military officials and law enforcement officers in Tijuana.<sup>2</sup>

My task here is not to recount *Traffic*'s plot in its entirety but to look at the representations of the drug war as a crisis, one that Roitman (2014) explains carries a moral demand to act. A significant plotline involves the character Robert Wakefield (played by Michael Douglas), a federal judge who is nominated to serve as the new federal drug czar and to outline the government's strategy to win the drug war. Wakefield approaches the task earnestly, proclaiming to reporters that the drug crisis "affects all families" and promising to continue to improve on existing measures. Wakefield tours the US-built infrastructure of the WoD, notably intelligence and border-security operations. In these scenes, he is told by the solemn customs officers that they are outmatched and cannot compete with the resources of the cartels, which leads him to push his staff for "outside-the-box" ideas that culminate in a demand for very "in-the-box" joint enforcement and information-sharing efforts with their Mexican counterparts to deal with cartel activity.

On the Mexican side of the border, the film follows two Tijuana municipal cops in their efforts to stem the flow of drugs. The film opens with a shot of them discovering and stopping a large shipment of drugs in the Baja California desert. Their success is short lived, as the contraband is seized by a Mexican army convoy led by a general who is later revealed to be collaborating with another cartel while enforcing raids against its Tijuana-based rival. Thus, high-level corruption is marked out as the first source of crisis in the WoD as a threat that demands active intervention, but one that is intractable in the context of governance in Mexico. Significantly, political corruption in the US is not depicted as a crisis of the same magnitude, if at all.

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2 Language is unquestionably a site for the exercise of power, and I seek to write in ways that open political possibilities and confront unjust structures. In this article, I intentionally capitalize "Black" as an antiracist and anticolonial practice, one meant to orthographically reflect how the enslavement of African peoples in the US was premised on explicit negation of their personhood and erasure of national/ethnic ties. Such a move is consistent with the arguments I am making here about the importance of language and of centering the lives and dignity of those most affected by crisis. Conversely, I do not want to capitalize "white" for two reasons: first, because capitalizing the word is a stylistic practice (though not exclusively) of white supremacist discourse; and second, the use of "white" does not imperil the ability for people to trace and claim their ethnic origins.

Less visible are narratives of crisis that illustrate the implications the WoD have for everyday life. In the scenes in Mexico, the transport drivers working for the cartels—the ordinary citizens whose lives are permeated by the drug trade—have few if any speaking parts. They are literally the human scenery for the “real” action, which *Traffic* depicts as law enforcement’s cat-and-mouse pursuit of and clashes with traffickers. Thus, *Traffic* stakes out two related arguments: first, that the “war” in the WoD is primarily between law enforcement and dealers, with everyday citizens affected peripherally; and second, that efforts to enforce the law against traffickers is a Sisyphean task and unlikely to decisively end the flow of drugs into the US.

In making this argument, the film leaves its viewers with the impression that there are few options to fighting the WoD outside of continued policing and militarization, one being the decriminalization of drugs. Notably, there is little to no discussion of why militarized enforcement is the only way to address the drug trade, and there is no mention of the vested interests of those in the US who benefit from extending the WoD, such as US Customs and Border Protection (Vera 2013), prison contractors (Alexander 2012), or private arms manufacturers, who find willing markets for their products as enforcement and prohibition become increasingly militarized. Nor is there mention of the significant role a protracted violent conflict plays in fueling migration to the US (Vera 2013). As a result, the understanding of crisis that is foregrounded in *Traffic* does not necessarily carry what Roitman (2014) terms ethical demands for a different kind of future. Rather, the film’s critique seems to build up to an ambivalent call for more efficient governance and border-security coordination, and it does not address the ways US policies and militarized efforts to stop the cultivation and distribution of drugs are implicated in other humanitarian crises.

*Traffic* moves repeatedly across the US-Mexico border and other sites, including Washington, DC, and wealthy and low-income neighborhoods in Cincinnati. It is in Cincinnati, of all places, that the movie attempts to humanize the effects of the drug war and provides a closer investigation of its effects. The result is strange portrait of white upper-class youth ennui, in which the Wakefields’ daughter Caroline, an overachieving student at an elite private high school, regularly gets high with her privileged friends to escape what they refer to as “fake social conventions.”

*Traffic*’s treatment of the demand side of the war is heavy-handed and at times descends into crude racist stereotyping. It shows young Caroline spiraling down a path of drug use and addiction, and depicts the nadir of her descent as being high and obliviously exchanging her body for money and drugs in a motel in a

predominantly Black neighborhood. The scene implies that the height of anxiety for the concerned parents of a “good” young white girl is her having sex with a Black man in exchange for drugs—an embodiment of how far she has fallen. It is curious that Caroline’s descent into addiction is depicted as the human face of suffering in the drug crisis, and that securing her wellbeing (or that of youth like her) is the second moral demand set forth in the film. For all of its narrative juxtapositioning, tracing of intersecting storylines, and vague commitment to “listening” that takes place in an all-white rehabilitation space at the end of the movie, *Traffic* has surprisingly little to say about how Black and other communities of color are explicitly targeted in the WoD. There is nothing about the sentencing disparities between Black and white drug offenders or the disproportionate imprisonment of Black men in the US prison system that fuels what Angela Davis (1998) refers to as the “prison industrial complex.” Instead, shots of Black Cincinnati are limited to passing glances at crowded street corners from Wakefield’s car as he looks for his strung-out daughter. Mirroring the scenes of Mexicans in Tijuana, Black residents of Cincinnati have no speaking parts; they just appear as human scenery, as if Black neighborhoods exist primarily as locations for white people to secure and use drugs. The film inadvertently addresses racial disparities in the enforcement and prosecution of the WoD through scenes in which Wakefield is assured by his colleagues that his daughter’s criminal record can be expunged and that the press will not report his daughter’s misfortunes.

As a multinarrative exploration of the WoD, particularly its treatments of the limitations and challenges confronting enforcement policies and efforts, *Traffic* does succeed in highlighting that the WoD cannot and should not be understood from a single perspective or space. *Traffic* also highlights how wealth often facilitates impunity and immunity from the reach of the law, and that those lower in the hierarchy of social relations bear the brunt of the consequences. These highlights are perhaps why the film leaves something to be desired, particularly in its relative neglect of a robust and critical economic and political analysis. When directed at the treatments of lives and communities that are disproportionately harmed by the WoD, the narrative constructions of crisis in *Traffic* are often underdeveloped and crude. In turn, these representations work to suggest an order of the disposability of lives and bodies and to secure support for the status quo. As a result, the film’s narrative account of crisis offers a much narrower response to the question of what is and what went wrong than it intends, and it does not convincingly convey a demand for a different moral order or future (Roitman 2014). *Traffic*’s narrative framing thus leaves the viewer with little sense of the possibility for a different future outside of better coordination, better mobilization of resources, and better law enforcement in the WoD. Intentionally or not, this framing legitimates the very governance and criminal justice structures that are fueling the crisis conditions noted at the



start of this article. Here again, we can observe how narrow constructions of crisis help to focus the scope of action and to constrain the notion of what else may be possible. In this sense, there is a parallel here in how invocations of humanitarian crisis justify EiE responses, but in ways that narrow those conditions to better align with the limited capacity of actors without interrogating the role of those actors in producing or sustaining the status quo.

**COUNTERNARRATIVES AND BUILDING TOWARD A MORE JUST FUTURE:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WOD IN DEAD PREZ'S "SELLIN' D.O.P.E."**

In contrast to *Traffic*, the 2002 song "Sellin' D.O.P.E." from the hip-hop duo dead prez offers a much more explicit political and economic treatment of the drug war from within Black communities, and it does so from a first-person vantage point offered by MCs M-1 and stic.man. The song was featured in the 1998 independent film *Slam* and released on a mixtape by the duo in 2002. Artistically, dead prez is part of a long tradition of political and didactic rap that has origins in hip-hop music. The group is known for its explicitly political music characterized by a commitment to Black liberation, anticapitalism, and social justice. In this respect, dead prez can be understood to occupy a role of organic intellectuals in hip-hop in the Gramscian tradition (Dyson 2003, cited in Ciccariello-Maher 2005). This stance is exemplified in a 2003 interview with bandmember stic.man:

I have a belief in political education in the sense that if we can get a firm understanding of how we got in this social situation, it will unify people to change it . . . With Dead Prez, we want to be something that black people can find as a link, instead of another attack on black people. We want black people to feel like, I'm being represented.<sup>3</sup>

Political scientist Ciccariello-Maher observes that "there are several central didactic axes that extend throughout the work of dead prez . . . the 'war on drugs' and the criminalization of Black urban youth" (2005, 144). These axes represent what Roitman (2014) would term the narrative constructions of crisis that are set forth in their music, which address the impacts of there being more than one million African Americans in the US prison population. "Sellin' D.O.P.E." engages with both axes and represents a critical understanding of the impact of criminalization on Black communities, as well as a deeper exploration of the political economy of the drug war. The first-person narrative and its treatment of

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<sup>3</sup> See "Walk Like a Warrior: Interview with Dead Prez." <http://rosaclemente.net/walk-like-warrior-interview-dead-prez/>.

the drug trade stands in jarring contrast to *Traffic*'s use of Black bodies to simply suggest criminality and (white) moral degradation. In the chorus and opening verse of the song, stic.man positions drug dealing relative to the persistent poverty and lack of opportunity in Black communities:

[Chorus]

Sellin' dope, serving weed. We had  
To hustle to hustle just to eat

[Verse 1: stic.man]

Ain't no hope in the streets—you broke, you sell dope  
All my young n\*\*\*\*\* outside hustling coke  
Know the drama. If you ain't sellin' crack, then it's ganja . . .  
Bagging up my nickels and dime, going through  
Difficult time, writing my life's story in rhyme  
But when I look at all the n\*\*\*\*\* they hit with mad time  
In proportion to the big kingpins, it don't fit  
You could get caught with barely a half a slab  
And the judge sentence you like you ran the ave  
I ain't planned to get rich from sellin' that shit—it was survival  
My game plan was not to get knocked by 5-0

In this verse, stic.man argues that drug dealing in Black communities is a survival mechanism, something done to secure basic human necessities, like food. The words “you could get caught with barely half a slab” (a trivial amount) and get a sentences like you “ran the ave” (avenue) indicates that the decision to deal is not made lightly but with the recognition that, as a Black man, the consequences of selling drugs are severe and that there is a fundamental difference in the risks and rewards between those positioned at the top of the drug game and those struggling at the retail level. In contrast to *Traffic*, “Sellin' D.O.P.E.” makes it clear that law enforcement and the criminal justice system are not part of the solution or that the protagonists are fighting the good fight, but that they in fact are systemic drivers of a crisis that disproportionately affects Black communities in the US.

The disparities in criminal sentencing named in dead prez's lyrics are not merely a passing observation in the song; rather, they draw the listener's attention to the class- and race-differentiated harm wrought by the WoD. That is to say, “Sellin' D.O.P.E.” gives us a critical understanding of the impact of criminalization in Black communities and a more robust exploration of the political economy of the WoD. As Ciccariello-Maher (2005) cogently notes, the sophistication of dead prez's analysis is that, while they are able to explain the rationality of selling drugs, they

also recognize the overall effect on the Black population: “The one thing bigger than dope games is prison: one million n\*\*\*\* inside.” This observation is prefaced with the line, “Statistics show it’s sick *how we living* [my emphasis],” which draws the listener’s attention to a crisis that is protracted and open-ended and without an end in sight. Here dead prez anticipates Roitman’s (2014) formulation of crisis as an experiential condition and as the defining category of our contemporary situation, and as such poses an open-ended moral demand to address the crisis of Black life as overly policed and incarcerated. Toward the end of the song, stic.man asks, “But what we gonna do when we’re caught up and have to face responsibility?” Though not explicit in its demands—which is not a limitation, given the group’s collectivist political investments—the question does not leave the listener with a sense of passivity or condescending judgement. In “Sellin’ D.O.P.E.,” the narrative construction of crisis around the drug war evokes a moral demand for a different kind of future, but the song simultaneously functions less as a specific call to “just say no” than as an invitation to critical collective reflection that envisions a more just future in a system that currently dehumanizes and devalues Black life. Ciccariello-Maher (2005, 154) identifies this as the “dialectical development” of political hip-hop’s pedagogy, one that is emergent and ongoing. Arguably, these pedagogical efforts can not only interrupt dominant narrative constructions of crisis as they pertain to the WoD but turn them on their head. In so doing, they challenge uncritical answers to the questions of what went wrong and what we are to do now—the very questions narrative accounts of crisis are meant to frame and answer (Roitman 2014).

## DISCUSSION

The analyses of these two narrative constructions of the WoD offer important insights to scholars and practitioners of humanitarian aid in general, and those in EiE in particular. As Wibben (2011) argues, narratives offer us an order and account of the world. By constructing a situated account of reality, narratives inform the possibilities of knowing, response, and action. Narrative constructions of crisis, seen in the media analyzed in this article, can direct our gaze in incommensurable directions and contribute to how we identify and delimit the possibilities of humanitarian response (or nonresponse). In *Traffic*, the crisis of the WoD is best understood through the challenges of enforcement and corruption, rather than as a humanitarian crisis. Consequently, the possibilities and prospects for a humanitarian response within such an account are dim, in that those implicated in this narrative account of crisis are primarily state law enforcement agents and those deemed by the former

as operating outside the law. *Traffic* suggests that the human cost of the WoD is discernible only in affluent suburban communities in the US—hardly a staging ground for humanitarian aid—rather than in the many communities displaced by the cultivation, enforcement, and distribution of drugs (Paley 2014).

Dead prez's "Sellin' D.O.P.E." queries the assumption that drug enforcement serves the public wellbeing by highlighting the devastating effects it has had in the US, particularly in Black communities. The upshot of this narrative construction could be that it is criminalization, and racialized policing and sentencing more specifically, that is fueling a crisis of incarceration that continues unabated because law enforcement and incarceration are themselves lucrative activities sustained by the WoD. Despite its significantly different narrative construction of the drug crisis from that of *Traffic*, dead prez's rendition of crisis is also not one in which an appropriate humanitarian response is immediately apparent. The difficulty translating this crisis narrative into a humanitarian response in which EiE practitioners have a central role to play may stem from the limits of humanitarian aid itself. Humanitarian aid, especially when understood as a form of "soft power" (Egnell 2010), is almost always projected outward from the Global North to the Global South. The exemption of low-income and minoritized communities in the Global North from the humanitarian imagination is not questioned, as they are sites that cannot be seen (i.e., hegemonically understood) as a humanitarian emergency. And yet, the US WoD has very much fueled a humanitarian crisis in these communities. It has systematically undermined the gains of the civil rights movement by over-policing and disproportionately incarcerating poor people of color (Alexander 2012), to the point that the many forms of state violence, discrimination, and surveillance directed toward Black communities in the US would justify claims for asylum protection for the affected individuals if they were not already living in this country (Jorjani 2015).

Such a formulation, along with the call to rethink the notion of crisis at the heart of the EiE field, undoubtedly poses more of a challenge than answering the question, "What is to be done?" Following Roitman (2014), this article does not aim to settle on the correct definition of crisis or prescribe an explicit pathway to better crisis management. Some will argue that this limits its ability to inform EiE practice. As Bengtsson (2011) concluded, clarifying conceptual frameworks—in this case the framework of emergency—will likely clarify the task of what is to be done and promote better responses. I certainly see value in that argument. However, it is also important to extend her insights by arguing that more precise language alone does not resolve questions of power or of which stories can be told, or of who gets to construct narratives of crisis and make moral demands for a different kind of future. My juxtaposition of *Traffic* with "Sellin' D.O.P.E." illustrates that narratives

pertaining to a particular phenomenon, in this case the WoD, can construct incredibly divergent understandings of what has happened, what is to be done, and where the theaters of humanitarian action are to be found. “Sellin’ D.O.P.E.” reveals a number of blind spots in *Traffic*’s construction of the drug war crisis and points to an altogether different set of moral demands that are not readily translatable to contemporary EiE responses. When read against existing policy and advocacy efforts, such juxtapositions also demonstrate which crisis narratives predominate, that social suffering is unequally distributed, and which actors shape the possibilities of action. That there is not an obvious humanitarian response to the narrative constructions of the deleterious effects of the WoD set forth in both media illustrates the need to consider both the scope and the sites of humanitarian action in crisis circumstances produced by the “normal” functioning of political and economic arrangements.

### REFLECTIONS FOR SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS

In this article, I have argued that the existing temporal and spatial frames of the related terms “crisis” and “emergency” represent a conceptual stumbling block in the field of EiE at a time when situations deemed as such are increasingly a product of “normal” political and economic arrangements. I draw from Roitman’s (2014) theory of crisis to suggest that there is analytical utility in rethinking the concept in ways that reflect that crisis is not necessarily a momentary shock or the product of something going drastically wrong, but the product of things working as they normally do. Looking at the US WoD, there is ample evidence indicating that the policies and practices of the war are not failing but are, in fact, succeeding in entrenching and enriching those with powerful vested interests (Vera 2013; Paley 2014; Cohen 2015). Roitman’s (2014) urging to consider what narrative constructions of crisis do—meaning which questions, histories, and actions they sanction and which they do not—enables a consideration of frames of crisis as critical sites of politics. Is the Trump administration’s border-security crisis one of so-called “drug dealers and rapists” from Mexico (and Middle Eastern terrorists hiding among them) overrunning the US, as President Trump has repeatedly argued without any supporting evidence? Or is the real crisis the coerced migration of individuals, families, and unaccompanied minors from Central America and Mexico who have been compelled by violent conflicts, economic insecurity, and forced displacements—much of it actively funded and supported by the US government, as were the Guatemalan and Salvadoran civil wars—to flee their homes and their nations? Attending to different narrative constructions of crisis gives us different understandings of the impact of the WoD, which then direct us to thinking more systemically about those who are

bearing the brunt of the harm caused by the WoD and those who are benefiting from it. As the conditions that create or count as emergencies continue to evolve and escalate, it is reasonable to expect that humanitarian agencies and actors will increasingly find themselves contending with their own crisis—that of containing the scope and charge of their efforts.

These points are not meant as an indictment of international humanitarian aid practices or emergency response *tout court*. They are meant instead to instigate a more explicit engagement with the narrative constructions of what are understood as crisis events and situations, particularly the normative and ontological assumptions that constitute an ethical basis for acting on behalf of a community's or an individual's welfare. From a critical constructivist and poststructural inquiry perspective, it is vital to attend to how the production and circulation of knowledge is affected by relations of power, and how they sanction certain accounts, actions, actors, and institutions as reasonable or unreasonable. The critical analysis of WoD narratives in popular culture presented in this article is one way of doing so, but an assumption of shared or universal understanding (e.g., “humanitarian aid ultimately has a positive effect” or “this is an emergency situation in which I am morally compelled to act in X way”) will be problematic. As Dubois (2018, 1) argues, a current flaw in the current global humanitarian system is a deep Western bias in the interpretation of its core principles—including humanity and impartiality—and in how these principles are applied in relation to the human communities at the center of crisis responses. Grappling with these questions and critically revisiting these principles should not be an invitation to passivity in the face of harm—rather, as Roitman (2014) suggests, they can initiate critical reflection on how knowledge of crisis is produced and mobilized, and to what ends. Engaging with questions of what counts as an emergency and who can pronounce one can lead to a mapping of political and economic interests that enables some situations to be named and others to be ignored or to remain impossible to name. This knowledge may in turn allow different understandings of the WoD and its pervasive effects to emerge.

Intentionally drawing from a broader set of voices in decisionmaking and strategic planning around humanitarian interventions may complicate taking decisive action, but it will simultaneously reveal valuable tensions, contradictions, and new terrain for action and advocacy that were previously dismissed or seen as unrelated. For example, educating youth to avoid possible imprisonment by avoiding drug traffickers or dealers as a “life skill” may also be instructing them to shun family and community members who are economically and emotionally integral to their lives. As Abu El-Haj et al. (2018) argue in their examination of refugee

civic education, EiE practitioners must consider the broader social and relational effects their education responses have. Further, they must plan their responses more intentionally in order to facilitate collective action and critical conversation on the broader policies and economic and political conditions that push people toward drug production and trafficking in the first place. By the same token, giving critical attention to narrative constructions of crisis may reveal that some modes of humanitarian work, intentionally or not, are merely bandages that help to maintain a particular normative and political order. We have to be willing to recognize that existing mechanisms of naming and acting on crisis must be considered not only problematic but as problems (crises) themselves. There is something further to explore in slow-onset emergencies and in rethinking the temporalities of crisis discussed above; namely, what slow and deliberate advocacy and transnational coalition-building may mean in the face of crises produced by systems that also provide relief, and how they may need to become more central tasks for EiE scholars, advocates, and practitioners. In this sense, the work of EiE scholars and practitioners can be transformed so they not only put out fires “out there” but also envision and create alternative structures to confront the crises that emerge from the militarism and securitization that make so much of current humanitarian work possible.

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# THE EFFECTS OF AERIAL SPRAYING OF COCA CROPS ON CHILD LABOR, SCHOOL ATTENDANCE, AND EDUCATIONAL LAG IN COLOMBIA, 2008-2012

CLAUDIA RODRIGUEZ

## ABSTRACT

*Since 1999, one of the main strategies the Colombian government has used to mitigate coca cultivation is to spray the crops with herbicide, which is carried out from airplanes. In this paper I evaluate the consequences of this strategy for rural households in areas where coca is cultivated, specifically the effects of aerial spraying on child labor and education. Since the areas where spraying takes place are fundamentally different from those where it does not, I use a two-stage least squares model, instrumenting for aerial eradication with the number of days high-speed winds in the municipality made spraying difficult. These were days in which the wind was one standard deviation above the municipality's monthly average. This corrects for possible sources of endogeneity due to selection bias. The results of this study show that aerial spraying was associated with a one percentage point increase in the likelihood that children ages 12-17 would work instead of going to school. Crop spraying was further associated with a 0.15 percentage point increase in the probability that older siblings in families living in a coca-growing area would fall behind in school, and a five percentage point increase in the probability that younger siblings would drop out of school. Thus, the findings of this research, based on data that cover the period from 2008 to 2012, suggest that the war on drugs has the potential to generate new barriers to educational access for children who live in areas where aerial spraying occurs.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The presence of illicit coca crops is a complex problem for Colombia, given that the coca leaf is the main input in the production of cocaine, the illegal trafficking of which leads to violence and crime (Angrist and Kugler 2008; Mejía and Restrepo 2013). In the last two decades, the Colombian government has adopted policies that combat drug trafficking by reducing the drug supply, primarily by fighting the cultivation of coca leaf crops. This paper studies the consequences of this forced eradication, the government's main mitigation strategy, for child labor and education in areas where coca is cultivated.

As the name indicates, the state carries out the forced eradication of coca crops without the participation of the rural population that cultivates it. There are two types of forced eradication, aerial and manual. Aerial eradication, which involves spraying coca crops with an herbicide called glyphosate, is carried out from planes that fly over the territory. Manual eradication is done by Colombia's armed forces, who enter the growing regions and manually remove or spray the coca plants. I focus in this article on aerial eradication, as it was used most frequently until 2015 and, thus, is relevant for the data analyzed here, which cover the period from 2008 to 2012.

Intensive aerial eradication was introduced in 1999 as part of Plan Colombia, a monetary and military aid program jointly designed by the US and Colombian governments to end drug trafficking using several strategies, which included mitigating cultivation of the coca leaf (Camacho and Mejía 2017). Between 2000 and 2015, the United States invested around US\$9.6 billion in the implementation of Plan Colombia (DNP 2016), thereby demonstrating the transnational nature of the policy. Eradication seemed to be an efficient practice, as the coca plants died when sprayed. The strategy was used extensively for 16 years, even though it was only effective for the short term, as the crops were replanted each season.

Studying the impact the eradication policy had on rural households is fundamental, since evidence shows that these households perceived a drop in their income when the crops were sprayed; in other words, they experienced an income shock (Tobón and Restrepo 2011; Espinosa 2009). A qualitative study by Espinosa (2009, 42) described the situation of rural families after the intervention in La Macarena, a region 300 kilometers south of Bogotá, where coca had been cultivated for more than 30 years, making it a focus of the state intervention: "Army planes fumigated

[the] crops and in the process the glyphosate . . . killed several chickens, sickened several cows, contaminated the water well and ruined several hectares of corn.” There is similar evidence in other regions of the country that eradication over time led to a loss of employment and assets without reducing the targeted illicit crops, as the conditions in the drug market encouraged farmers to replant the coca (Rivera 2005; Osorio 2003).

According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE 2017), 10.2 percent of children in Colombia between the ages of 5 and 17 were working in 2012. The literature claims that the primary reason for child labor is poverty (Basu and Van 1998; Ray 2000; Edmonds and Pavcnik 2005), which makes it particularly relevant in the context of coca-growing households, which have high levels of poverty. In addition, regions where coca is cultivated have higher unsatisfied basic needs indices, less access to public services like electricity and roads, and a limited presence of state institutions (Zuleta 2017).<sup>1</sup> This becomes especially relevant in a context of violence and war, as children who work in illegal economies are more likely to earn a living outside the law later in life (Sviatschi 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to study the consequences of the war on drugs’ forced eradication of coca crops for child labor and education among children living in coca-growing regions.

The field of education in emergencies (EiE) is focused on the ways crises caused by armed conflict or natural disasters affect access to education. Lewin (2009, 171) defines access to education as “entry and progress at an appropriate age, regular attendance, satisfactory completion, opportunities to study beyond primary school and more equitable distribution of opportunities.” EiE researchers highlight how antidrug policies in the framework of the war on drugs have created a state of emergency for the affected population. Although this article does not attempt to evaluate all components of Lewin’s definition, it does estimate the impact the war on drugs has on school attendance and progress at the appropriate age for children laboring in the cultivation of coca.

This analysis uses data from DANE’s Quality of Life Survey (QLS) for the period 2008-2012, which includes information on child labor and education for children ages 12-17. I crossed this information with municipal data on illicit crops and

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<sup>1</sup> The unsatisfied basic needs index determines if the needs of a population are covered. Households that do not reach a minimum threshold are classified as poor.

their eradication, which I obtained from the Colombian Drug Observatory and the International Center for Strategic Anti-Narcotics Studies of the Anti-Narcotics Police. This information has two important limitations: first, it is not possible to identify what sector children were working in, and second, it is not possible to be certain if members of a household were indeed growing coca; we can only know that the household was located in a rural part of a coca-growing municipality. Therefore, I cannot determine whether children were involved in illicit or criminal activities.

Between 2008 and 2012, coca cultivation was already ingrained in the economy of rural areas in Colombia, which supports an analysis of the intersection between education, child labor, and coca crop spraying. Focusing on this time period makes it easier to understand the dynamics of Colombia's coca economy before the peace agreement was signed between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known as FARC) in 2012. This fact, particularly the expectation that they would benefit from the peace accords if they were growing coca, changed the incentives of farmers in coca-growing areas and possibly led them to increase their crops after the accords were announced (UNODC 2018; Zuleta 2018; Garzón and Llorente 2018). It is also likely that the peace process influenced the government's war on drugs strategy, given that crop spraying decreased dramatically in 2012-2013 and remained low until 2015. Therefore, this article studies the relationships between spraying, child labor, and education prior to 2012.

Using these data, I first ran a municipality and year fixed effects regression to analyze the impact coca crop eradication had on the likelihood a household would send children to work, to school, or to work and school simultaneously, and on educational lag, which refers to children not making progress in school at the appropriate age. I then correct for endogeneity in the spraying decision and for the fact that municipalities where the coca crop was eradicated were fundamentally different from those where it was not.<sup>2</sup> I estimate a two-stage least squares model, instrumenting for aerial eradication with days of strong wind in the municipality because spraying did not take place on those days. Therefore, winds are correlated with eradication but not with child labor or education.

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<sup>2</sup> Endogeneity occurs when the relationship between two variables is not causal. This is due to three main reasons: double causality, omitted variable, or measurement error on either variable (Angrist and Pischke 2009).

The results show that aerial spraying of coca crops is associated with an increased likelihood that children in a household are working, but no effect was found on the likelihood that they would attend school, that they would be in a lower grade than expected for their age, or that they would do housework. There also is evidence that crop spraying increases the likelihood that older siblings lag behind in school and reduces the likelihood that younger siblings will go to school.

This research contributes to discussions about the war on drugs in various ways. First, it contributes to the careful assessment of a policy that directly affects coca farmers, especially the children in their households. Second, I created a municipal-level wind database using information provided by NASA, which enabled me to use winds as an instrument for aerial spraying, this being the first time this instrument was used in scholarly work. This work also contributes to the discussion on economic shocks, child labor, and education, and to the field of EiE, by providing evidence on the barriers to education that have existed during the war on drugs.

The paper is divided into seven sections: the first contextualizes aerial spraying in Colombia and the coca economy. The second reviews the literature on coca crop eradication policy and the consequences of economic downturns for child labor and education. The third section describes the QLS data for Colombia, the fourth specifies the empirical methodology, and the fifth explains the results. The sixth section offers additional specifications, and the last section presents the study conclusions.

## **AERIAL SPRAYING OF ILLICIT CROPS IN COLOMBIA AND THE COCA ECONOMY**

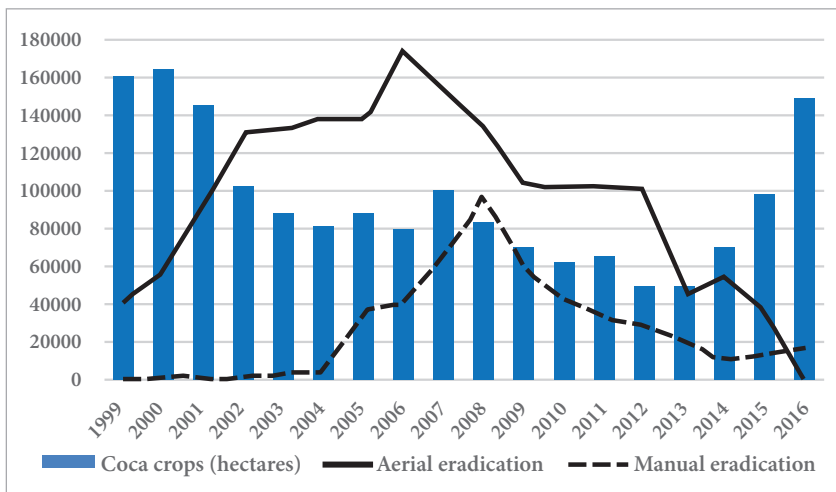
As mentioned above, the United States during the Clinton administration and the Colombian government under Andrés Pastrana signed Plan Colombia in 1999, with the aim of working together to reduce the supply of drugs (Camacho and Mejía 2017). Under this agreement, approximately US\$9.6 billion was invested in the eradication of coca crops by aerial spraying, which was the main strategy for destroying illicit crops in Colombia until 2015. That year, the National Council on Narcotic Drugs passed Resolution 0006 (Consejo Nacional de Estupefacientes 2015), which prohibited using glyphosate in the aerial spraying of crops because it had negative consequences for the health of the population. In the 17 years its



use was allowed, more than 1,700,000 hectares of coca were sprayed.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1 shows the measure of illicit crops and spraying. It shows that spraying was used intensively in the first decade of the 2000s, reaching its peak in 2006 during the Álvaro Uribe administration. It also shows that, until 2015, aerial eradication was more widely used than manual eradication.

Figure 1: Crops and Eradication, 1999-2016

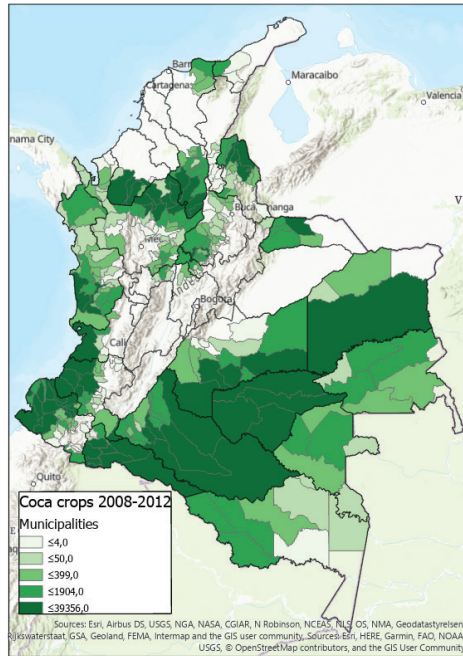


Source: Own elaboration, with data from the Colombian Drug Observatory

Map 1 shows the distribution of coca cultivation in Colombia. Between 2008 and 2012, crops were located in the east of the country, on the Pacific coast, in Catatumbo, and in western Antioquia. Map 2 shows that aerial spraying occurred in these areas. Thus, it is evident that more aerial spraying occurred in the regions with a higher concentration of coca cultivation. Social conditions in the areas where spraying took place were different from those where it did not, in that they had less access to education, health care, and state institutions such as justice or security.

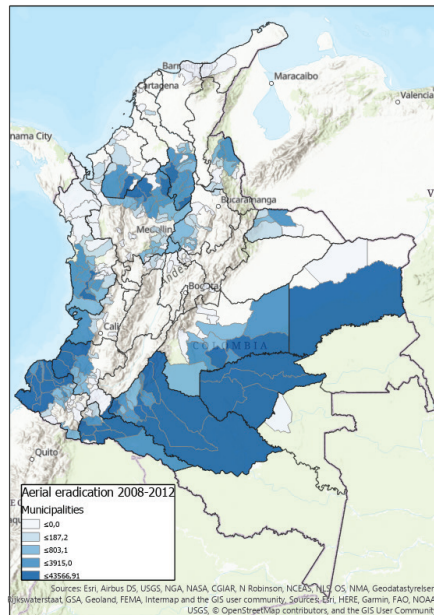
<sup>3</sup> One hectare has approximately the same area as two American football fields. In other words, the Colombian government sprayed the equivalent of 3,400,000 football fields during implementation of the policy.

Map 1: Coca Plantations, 2008-2012



Source: Own elaboration, with data from the Colombian Drug Observatory

Map 2: Aerial Eradication, 2008-2012



Source: Own elaboration, with data from the Colombian Drug Observatory

To study child labor in coca-growing areas, it is important first to understand how the coca economy works. Coca crops are labor intensive (Riley 1993; Morales 1986), as they require plowing the land, then planting, fumigating, and harvesting the leaf. The production stage that demands the most labor is the picking or scraping of the leaf, which is demanding, unskilled labor that is both suitable for children and essential to the coca economy (Riley 1993). In Colombia, there is ethnographic evidence of child labor occurring in the villages where coca is grown. Espinosa (2009, 39) found, for example, that even if the parents of a family do not grow coca, “the children have worked with coca under contract: they scrape it, chop it, act as chemists in the artisanal laboratories and transport it to places where the guerrillas buy it.”

Children who live in coca-growing regions are likely to be less educated because there is a limited state institutional presence, which contrasts with a high presence of armed forces. In these regions, which are poorly connected to big cities and have high poverty rates, education quality and access are below the national average (Zuleta 2017; Espinosa 2009). For example, a survey of 6,350 coca-growing families conducted in 2018 found an illiteracy rate of 36 percent, while the national average was 5 percent (Garzón and Gélvez 2018). Moreover, the decision to go to school becomes more complex when joining the armed forces is considered an alternative to attending school (Sviatschi 2019).

### **AERIAL SPRAYING AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF ECONOMIC SHOCKS FOR CHILD LABOR AND EDUCATION**

Forced eradication, especially aerial spraying, has been studied in terms of how effective it is in reducing coca cultivation in specific areas of Colombia. Much of the economics literature shows that aerial spraying does not reduce the number of cultivated hectares (Moreno-Sánchez, Kraybill, and Thompson 2003; Reyes 2014). However, Mejía, Restrepo, and Rozo (2015) show that aerial spraying at best helps to reduce the number of hectares planted with coca leaf, but it is not cost-effective. A negative side effect of spraying is that glyphosate has been found in the soil, in fruit and plants, and in animals (Cox 1995; Relyea 2006). Finally, there is evidence that aerial spraying reduces coca-growing communities’ confidence in the state and its institutions (Rivera 2005; García 2014), displaces farmers (Espinosa 2009), has negative effects on health (Camacho and Mejía 2017), can exacerbate poverty, and causes infant deaths (Rozo 2014). This study explores how rural families counter the negative economic impact of spraying and the

consequences it has for their children's access to education and opportunities in the labor force.

The prevalence of child labor responds to incentives and opportunities (Basu and Tzannatos 2003). However, the economic literature is mixed on what happens in an economic downturn, as two effects—the income effect and the substitution effect—act simultaneously, as in the following example. A household living in a coca-growing area must decide between their children working in the drug industry and earning wages now, or sending them to school so they will be able to earn a higher salary in the future and probably do so working in legal markets.<sup>4</sup> When the government unexpectedly sprays the plantations the children are working in, the region's economy is negatively affected, which results in lower wages earned from the production of drugs.

The income effect refers to the fact that this economic shock reduces household income. Children then must work more hours and reduce the time they dedicate to their education in order to maintain the household's level of consumption. In contrast, the substitution effect refers to what occurs when wages fall after crop spraying and the opportunity costs of not attending school increase. In other words, a child's wage is reduced to an amount lower than what they might earn in the future by getting an education. This reduces child labor in the affected regions and increases the time children dedicate to their education. The final result will depend on which effect is stronger.

Empirical evidence supports the dominance of both effects, and this paper contributes to this discussion. Much of the literature points to the strength of the income effect in the poorest households—that is, a negative income shock leads to an increase in child labor and reduces school attendance (Beegle, Dehejia, and Gatti 2006; Thomas et al. 2004; Guarcello, Mealli, and Rosati 2010; Cogneau and Jedwab 2012). Conversely, improved socioeconomic conditions have been found to reduce child labor and increase school attendance (Edmonds 2005; Beegle, Dehejia, and Gatti 2009). This evidence, collected in Vietnam, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, and Brazil, gives reason to believe that income is the dominant effect of this issue.

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<sup>4</sup> A household can consist of a family, several families, or unrelated people who live together and share expenses.

On the other hand, in some cases the substitution effect is dominant. For example, after 2002, when gold prices increased significantly and the mining industry was paying a higher wage, Colombia's mining regions had more child laborers than those with no mines, and school attendance and school-level attainment were lower in the mining regions (Santos 2014). The substitution effect also dominated in Brazil, where child labor increased during the coffee boom (Kruger 2007). This paper aims to determine whether crop spraying generates patterns of exclusion from access to education, or if it helps guarantee children's right to education.

Previous studies have analyzed the effects of other drug policies on child labor and education. Dammert (2008) and Angrist and Kugler (2008) examined a policy in Peru, which sought to attack coca leaf trafficking between Peru and Colombia, to estimate the effects on the labor supply of children and adolescents. Dammert (2008) found that the resultant reduction of the coca leaf supply in Peru increased child labor in rural areas of the country but found no reduction in education. In contrast, Angrist and Kugler (2008) showed that coca crops in Colombia expanded after the policy was implemented, which increased adolescent labor. There is also evidence that crop spraying reduced secondary school attendance at the municipal level in Colombia (Rozo 2014). These studies had opposite results, one demonstrating the income effect and the other demonstrating the substitution effect.

This research contributes to the evaluation of forced crop eradication in Colombia, to understanding of the consequences of aerial glyphosate spraying, and to the debate in the literature on the income effect and the substitution effect on child labor in the face of household economic shock. It also contributes to the field of EiE by assessing the relationship between drug policies and the right to education by looking at school attendance, school progress at the appropriate age, and child labor.

## QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY FOR COLOMBIA

The data used in this study correspond to the QLS for Colombia from 2008 to 2012 (no QLS occurred in 2009). The QLS was conducted by DANE in accordance with the World Bank's "Living Standards Measurement Study" (Scott, Steele, and Temesgen 2005). The four resulting cross-sectional datasets are nationally representative for five regions in urban, rural, and scattered rural areas.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In Colombia, DANE classifies rural areas into rural and scattered rural areas, the latter being the smallest and most remote towns in the country.

The study used data from 60 coca-growing municipalities in Colombia that cultivated at least one hectare of coca between 2007 and 2012. Data on coca crops were obtained from the Colombian Drug Observatory. The study sample comprised 2,859 children ages 12 to 17 who lived in rural and scattered rural areas in municipalities where coca was being cultivated.

Prioritizing this age group was important because it is the age at which children make the transition from primary school to basic secondary.<sup>6</sup> Education provision in Colombia is higher for primary schools than secondary schools; in 2013, primary education had 87.34 percent coverage in rural areas, middle school education 57.45 percent, and secondary education just 26 percent (DNP 2016). Consequently, the costs associated with schooling for children in this age range are higher than for younger children, and the effect of an economic shock on household income may have a greater impact on education decisions from age 12 upward.<sup>7</sup>

In the QLS sample, 1,226 children lived in areas where crops were not sprayed, while 1,633 lived in municipalities where spraying occurred. Table 1 presents child and household characteristics, along with the socioeconomic characteristics of the municipalities. There were no significant differences between the groups in individual variables such as age, gender, household size, or socioeconomic stratum, which is determined by the level of public services received; for example, public services for those in the lower strata were subsidized by the those in the higher strata. Heads of household in areas where crop eradication occurred had, on average, a lower level of education than heads of household in areas where there was no eradication. Municipal variables also differed between the two groups. For example, municipalities where eradication occurred received less tax revenue, had a higher homicide rate, cultivated a larger area with coca, and experienced more violent actions by armed groups. There were no significant differences in students' results on the Saber 11 standardized test, although the municipalities where crop eradication occurred had more schools per one thousand inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> These findings confirm that the areas where spraying took place were systematically different from those where it did not.

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6 Although the theoretical age for this step is 10 or 11, according to the Ministry of National Education (Angulo, Diaz, and Pardo 2011), students in Colombia typically do so at age 11 or 12.

7 As the number of secondary schools is lower, the cost of schooling is higher; for example, students must travel a longer distance to get to school and there are fewer places available in the schools.

8 This is the Colombian standardized test for high school seniors.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Sample

	No aerial eradication (=0)	Aerial eradication (=1)	Difference of means
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<b>A. Characteristics of the child</b>			
Percentage of women	0.46	0.47	-0.02
Age	14.42	14.39	0.02
SES stratum	1.28	1.88	-0.60
<b>B. Household characteristics</b>			
Education level of the head of household	3.03	2.86	0.17***
Household size	5.69	5.56	0.13
Households in the residence	1.03	1.02	0.01**
<b>C. Socioeconomic characteristics of the municipality</b>			
Tax revenues (billions of pesos)	78,382	55,436	22,946**
Coca fields (ha)	74.65	980.12	-905.5***
Homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants	40.84	66.69	-25.86***
Number of subversive actions	0.07	0.77	-0.69***
Saber 11 score	45.30	45.18	0.13
Educational establishments per 1,000 inhabitants	2.38	2.79	-0.41***
<b>Sample size</b>	1,226	1,633	2,859

Source: QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, Municipal Panel of the Center for Economic Development Studies (CEDE). Children who were between 12 and 17 years old, living in rural and scattered rural areas in coca growing municipalities. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

The labor variables chosen for this analysis are in keeping with the International Labor Organization definition of child labor; that is, a child is considered economically active if they worked for at least an hour in the previous week, including housework (Edmonds and Pavcnik 2005). I used the following variables: whether the child did mainly housework, whether they worked outside the home, whether they went to school, and whether they worked and attended school

simultaneously.<sup>9</sup> While it was possible to determine whether a child was working, it was not possible to verify the sector in which they worked. In addition, to calculate educational lag, I constructed a dichotomous variable that took the value of 1 if the child had not passed the school grade stipulated for their age by the Ministry of Education and 0 if they had. The ages are shown in Table A1.

Table 2 shows the labor and education variables between municipalities with and without aerial eradication. No significant differences occurred in the labor variables between the two groups; however, most children in the coca-growing municipalities were lagging behind in school and this proportion was higher in municipalities where there was aerial spraying. About 1,700 observations are not accounted for in the measurement of lag, since many individuals did not report the grade they were in or the last grade passed.

*Table 2: Labor and Education Variables for Children Ages 12-17 as Percentages of the Sample*

	No aerial eradication (=0)	Aerial eradication (=1)	Difference of means
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Housework	0.12	0.12	-0.001
Work	0.07	0.08	-0.01
Study	0.76	0.75	0.01
Work and study	0.05	0.06	-0.004
Children lagging behind	0.92	0.95	-0.03
<b>Sample size</b>	1,226	1,633	2,859

Source: QLS (2008-2012). Children who were living in rural and scattered rural areas in coca-growing municipalities. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## METHODOLOGY

As mentioned above, the areas where spraying took place were fundamentally different from those where it did not. This can cause endogeneity on the effect with child labor because child labor in poor areas may be influenced by socioeconomic

<sup>9</sup> The QLS has a question about hours worked in the previous week. However, this is not used as an outcome variable, as high underreporting prevents making estimates.



conditions. To eliminate endogeneity, I propose the following model to estimate the effects of forced eradication on child labor and education:

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 E_{jt} + X_i \beta + X_j \alpha + \delta_j + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} ,$$

where  $Y_{ijt}$  are the dependent variables for child  $i$ , in municipality  $j$ , in year  $t$ : whether the child studies or not, whether they work or not, whether they do both simultaneously, whether their main activity is to engage in household chores, or whether they are lagging behind in school.  $E_{jt}$  is the independent variable of interest and corresponds to the number of square kilometers eradicated in municipality  $j$  in year  $t$ . Matrix  $X_i$  refers to child- and household-level variables. Child-related variables include age, gender, household size, number of households in the residence, stratum, and head of household education level. Age is included, as children are more likely to drop out as they get older. Household-related variables include household size, number of households in the residence, stratum, and head of household education level. These household variables are included as an approximation of the child's socioeconomic conditions.

Matrix  $X_j$  refers to the municipal controls: hectares cultivated with coca, tax revenues, homicide rate, subversive actions, results of the Saber 11 test, and the number of schools. The number of hectares cultivated with coca is included because the larger the area planted, the greater the amount of spraying. The rates of homicides and subversive actions are included to capture incidents of violence and the presence of armed groups in the municipality; tax revenues are a proxy for state institutional capacity; and the number of educational establishments and results of the Saber 11 test indicate the educational opportunities available and quality of education in the municipality. The coefficient  $\delta_j$  corresponds to municipality fixed effects to control for variables that do not change over time, such as the size of the municipality or its altitude, and  $\delta_t$  corresponds to year fixed effects to control for shocks that affect all municipalities equally. Standard errors are clustered by household.

This methodology controls for unobservable variables that are constant over time in each of the municipalities and for annual shocks that affect all municipalities equally. Therefore, the threat to the identification strategy is unobservable variables that change over time due to systematic differences between the two groups. To solve this problem, an instrumental variable strategy is adopted, which I explain in the following section.

### IDENTIFICATION STRATEGY USING INSTRUMENTAL VARIABLES

High wind shocks in municipalities are used as an instrumental variable to solve endogeneity problems, since this factor is taken into account when spraying. In fact, the police information system reports climate, coca crop, and conflict variables for the entire national territory. On the day of spraying, the police decide where to spray based on variables such as wind, temperature, if the area has a mountainous terrain, and the presence of armed groups. Spraying flights require favorable conditions because pilots must descend quickly to a few meters above the ground, spray, and return to their previous height, all at a high speed. If the information system reports strong winds, they do not spray.

The more wind there is, the harder it is to spray, so the instrument meets the relevance condition. This identification strategy assumes that there is no relationship between wind and child labor or education. This is a safe assumption, as it is unlikely that households take the wind into account when making decisions about their children's work and education, or that the wind directly affects the decisions they make; therefore, the exclusion assumption is met. The wind data were obtained from the NASA GES DISC base, which contains satellite information on winds at a resolution of 1 degree or in pixels of about 60 km<sup>2</sup>. This information was aggregated at the municipal level in order to cross it with the spraying data. The instrument is calculated as follows:

$$V_{jt} = \sum_{d=1}^{365} 1 \{v(d) > v_m' + \sigma_m\} ;$$

that is, the number of days when the winds were one monthly standard deviation ( $\sigma_m$ ) above the monthly average ( $v_m'$ ) in municipality  $j$  in year  $t$ . This way, the variable captures the number of days on which a municipality experienced abnormal wind shocks. This indicator is calculated monthly to take into account the seasonality of the winds. Table A2 shows some descriptive statistics for this variable, under which the municipalities had wind shocks for a fifth of the year on average. These shocks vary a lot between municipalities: the minimum value is 0 and the maximum is 311.

Thus, the first-stage estimation is

$$E_{jt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 V_{jt} + X_i \beta + X_j \alpha + \delta_j + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} ,$$

where  $E_{jt}$  is the number of square kilometers sprayed in municipality  $j$  in year  $t$ ,  $V_{jt}$  is the calculated indicator,  $X_j$  is the matrix of municipal controls,  $X_i$  is the matrix of individual controls,  $\delta_j$  municipality fixed effects, and  $\delta_t$  is time fixed effects.

From this regression, an estimate of aerial eradication is recovered ( $E_{jt}^{\wedge}$ ), and the second stage is calculated as

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 E_{jt}^{\wedge} + X_i \beta + X_j \alpha + \delta_j + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} ,$$

where  $Y_{ijt}$  are the variables of child labor and education, which are regressed on the eradication estimate, individual and municipal controls, and municipality and year fixed effects.

### HETEROGENEOUS EFFECTS

I estimated additional specifications to verify if forced eradication had differentiated effects on child labor and education. I included gender differences because of the working conditions in the coca-growing areas, or for cultural reasons. Differentiated effects also were verified by birth order. I conducted this exercise to assess whether older or younger siblings within a household were affected differently. The equation to estimate these heterogeneous effects is

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 E_{jt}^{\wedge} + \beta_2 D_i + \beta_3 D_i * E_{jt}^{\wedge} + X_i \beta + X_j \alpha + \delta_j + \delta_t + \varepsilon_{ijt} ,$$

where  $D_i$  is a dummy that varies according to the differentiated effect being explored. The endogenous variables  $E_{jt}$  and  $D_i * E_{jt}$  are instrumented with the indicator  $V_{jt}$  and with the interaction between the indicator and the dummy ( $V_{jt} * D_i$ ). The dichotomous variable for gender is equal to 1 if female and 0 if male. I also ran two regressions for birth order, in which  $D_i$  is equal to 1 if the child is the youngest in the family and 0 if otherwise, and another in which  $D_i$  is 1 when the child is the oldest in the family and 0 if otherwise.

### RESULTS

This section presents the results of two models: one that only includes municipality and year fixed effects, and one that includes the two-stage least squares estimate. The descriptive statistics show no significant differences in labor-related variables and, given the income and substitution effects, it is not clear what the expected bias of the regressions may be.

Table 3 summarizes the results of the model with municipality and year fixed effects. In this case, spraying an additional square kilometer is related to an increase in the probability of a child working by 0.026 percentage points, and an increase in the probability of a child working and attending school simultaneously by 0.024 percentage points. This shows that, for this particular case, the income effect dominates in labor and education decisions after an economic shock resulting from spraying. I find no effects on the probability of children doing housework, attending school, or lagging behind in school.

*Table 3: Effect of Aerial Eradication on Variables of Interest, Including Fixed Effects of Municipality and Year*

Variables	Housework	Work	Study	Work and study	Falling behind
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Aerial eradication (km <sup>2</sup> )	0.00180	0.00266*	-0.00173	0.00246*	0.00236
	(0.00144)	(0.00138)	(0.00215)	(0.00131)	(0.00189)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instrumental variable	No	No	No	No	No
Sample size	2,251	2,251	2,251	2,251	521
R-squared	0.145	0.108	0.184	0.102	0.222

*Source:* QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory and CEDE Municipal Panel. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . All regressions are controlled by age, household size, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments, and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are clustered by household.

The results of the instrumental variable estimate are presented below. Table 4 shows the coefficient of the first stage of the regression. As expected, the relationship between wind shocks and aerial eradication is negative: the more days of strong winds, the less aerial eradication in the municipality during the year. The coefficient is significant at the 1 percent level and the F statistic is equal to 17.72, so the relevance assumption is met.

Table 4: First Stage. Effect of Wind Shocks on Aerial Eradication

Variables	Aerial eradication
	(1)
Winds	-0.143***
	(0.0409)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes
Sample size	2,251
R-squared	0.945
F statistic	17.22

Source: QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, CEDE Municipal Panel, and NASA. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . We control for age, size of the household, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments, and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are corrected by household clusters.

The second stage is summarized in Table 5. Like the fixed effects estimate, spraying an additional square kilometer is associated with an increase in the probability of a child working by one percentage point. This estimate is significant at the 10 percent level. It is important to note that, on average, 530 square kilometers were sprayed per year during the study period. The coefficient of the fixed effects estimate is biased downward when compared to this result. This is because the two-stage model accounts for unobservable variables that can result in less child labor in these areas, such as safety conditions, health, economic dynamism, and others. No significant effects are found on a child doing housework, on working and attending school simultaneously, or on their educational lag.

*Table 5: Effect of Aerial Eradication on Variables of Interest  
Using Two-Stage Least Squares*

Variables	Housework	Work	Study	Work and study	Falling behind
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Aerial eradication (km <sup>2</sup> )	0.00998	0.0100*	-0.00879	0.00560	0.00349
	(0.00690)	(0.00584)	(0.00949)	(0.00531)	(0.0102)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instrumental variable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample size	2,251	2,251	2,251	2,251	521
R-squared	0.131	0.091	0.178	0.098	0.214

Source: QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, CEDE Municipal Panel, and NASA. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. We control for age, size of the household, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments, and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are clustered by household.

**HETEROGENEOUS EFFECTS: GENDER AND BIRTH ORDER**

## HETEROGENEOUS EFFECTS BY GENDER

Table 6 shows that, on average, girls do more housework than boys, work less, are less likely to work and attend school simultaneously, and attend school more. However, I find no gender-differentiated effects. This is because the data do not identify what the children are working on and, while it is true that men work more on the crops, women may be working in other sectors.

*Table 6: Heterogeneous Effects of Aerial Eradication by Gender*

Variables	Housework	Work	Study	Work and study	Falling behind
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Aerial eradication (km <sup>2</sup> )	0.00138	0.00232	-0.000669	0.00193	0.00198
	(0.00141)	(0.00131)	(0.00212)	(0.00122)	(0.00185)
Female	0.145***	-0.0532***	0.0630***	-0.0448***	0.0287
	(0.0146)	(0.0111)	(0.0179)	(0.00976)	(0.0259)
Aerial eradication* female	3.41e-07	6.86e-06	-1.12e-05	8.95e-06	1.79e-07
	(5.66e-06)	(7.74e-06)	(8.50e-06)	(7.39e-06)	(5.51e-06)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instrumental variable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample size	2,251	2,251	2,251	2,251	521
R-squared	0.143	0.109	1.183	0.103	0.221

Source: QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, CEDE Municipal Panel, and NASA. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. We control for age, size of the household, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments, and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are clustered by household.

## HETEROGENEOUS EFFECTS BY BIRTH ORDER

Table 8 presents the results of the heterogeneous effects on older siblings. In this case, older siblings are more likely than younger siblings to fall behind in school. Spraying an additional square kilometer is related to an increase in the probability that the older sibling is behind in school, 0.15 percentage points more than for the rest of the children in a family. I find no effect on the other dependent variables. This shows that older children do not stop attending school, but their academic performance may be affected.

Table 8: Heterogeneous Effects of Aerial Eradication by Birth Order

Variables	Housework	Work	Study	Work and study	Falling behind
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Aerial eradication (km <sup>2</sup> )	0.000422 (0.00146)	0.00432*** (0.00177)	0.000549 (0.00218)	0.00411** (0.00172)	0.00405** (0.00199)
Oldest sibling	0.0130 (0.0147)	0.0203 (0.0135)	-0.0191 (0.0196)	0.0217* (0.0114)	-0.0537* (0.0290)
Aerial eradication* oldest sibling	0.000731 (0.000526)	0.000435 (0.000820)	2.35e-05 (0.000885)	0.000925 (0.000787)	0.00150** (0.000644)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instrumental variable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample size	1,819	1,819	1,819	1,819	362
R-squared	0.117	0.136	0.192	0.126	0.308

Source: QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, CEDE Municipal Panel, and NASA. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. We control for age, size of the household, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments, and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are clustered by household.



Table 9 shows that younger siblings have a lower probability than their older siblings of being in school, and that eradicating an additional square kilometer of coca is associated with a 5.03 percentage point lower probability of a child attending school. No heterogeneous effects were found for the rest of the variables analyzed.

Table 9: Heterogeneous Effects of Aerial Eradication by Birth Order

Variables	Housework	Work	Study	Work and study	Falling behind
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Aerial eradication (km <sup>2</sup> )	0.000646	0.00458***	0.000904	0.00388**	0.00458**
	(0.00150)	(0.00168)	(0.00216)	(0.00162)	(0.00213)
Youngest sibling	0.000507	-0.000638	-0.00186*	-0.000810	0.000668
	(0.000567)	(0.000900)	(0.00102)	(0.00799)	(0.000822)
Aerial eradication* youngest sibling	0.00619	0.00619	-0.0503**	-0.00342	0.0426
	(0.0167)	(0.0167)	(0.0236)	(0.0134)	(0.0323)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instrumental variable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample size	1,819	1,819	1,819	1,819	362
R-squared	0.117	0.136	0.192	0.126	0.308

Source: QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, CEDE Municipal Panel, and NASA. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. We control for age, size of the household, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are clustered by household.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN RESULTS

The previous sections show that spraying an additional square kilometer of coca crops is associated with an increase of one percentage point in the probability that children ages 12-17 are working. However, there is no statistical evidence of effects on the probability they are attending school. For older siblings, spraying is associated with a 0.15 percentage point increase in the probability of falling behind in school, which suggests that this policy may be affecting their academic

performance. Finally, for youngest siblings, aerial eradication is negatively related to the likelihood of attending school.

The results show that the income effect dominates in this case for education and labor decisions after an economic shock caused by aerial eradication. This suggests that Colombia's spraying policy may be creating barriers to education access and to regular school attendance among children in coca-growing regions.

## ADDITIONAL SPECIFICATIONS

### RESTRICTION OF SAMPLE

As proposed by Imbens (2015), I removed extreme values from the sample. To do this, I built a propensity score for the probability of being in a municipality with aerial spraying. The sample was restricted to observations between 0.1 and 0.9 of that score and to those within the region of common support.<sup>10</sup> Thus, as outliers and atypical values were eliminated, the results were met for a comparable proportion of the sample. Table 10 shows the composition of the new sample. The differences between areas with and without crop eradication are still statistically significant for the municipal-level variables, but the observations in municipalities with high coca cultivation and in conflict-intensive regions were eliminated from the sample.

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<sup>10</sup> The variables that determine the spraying were used to calculate the propensity score: cultivated hectares, subversive actions, homicide rate, and tax revenues.

EFFECTS OF AERIAL SPRAYING OF COCA CROPS

Table 10: Comparison between the Complete Sample and Sample Restricted to the Common Support and Removing the Tales of the Distribution

	Full sample			Restricted sample		
	No aerial eradication (=0)	Aerial eradication (=1)	Difference of means	No aerial eradication (=0)	Aerial eradication (=1)	Difference of means
<b>A. Characteristics of the child</b>						
Percentage of women	0.46	0.47	-0.02	0.46	0.46	0.00
Age	14.42	14.39	0.02	14.42	14.39	0.03
SES stratum	1.28	1.88	-0.60	1.28	1.22	0.06
<b>B. Household characteristics</b>						
Education level of the head of household	3.03	2.86	0.171***	3.04	2.90	0.14**
Household size	5.69	5.56	0.13	5.67	5.41	0.26*
Households in the residence	1.03	1.02	0.013**	1.04	1.03	0.01
<b>C. Socioeconomic characteristics of the municipality</b>						
Tax revenues (billions of pesos)	78,381	55,435	22,946**	45,202	37,917	7,285***
Coca fields (ha)	74.65	980.12	-905.47***	73.65	227.95	-154.3***
Homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants	40.84	66.69	-25.857***	39.11	60.7	-21.59***
Number of subversive actions	0.07	0.77	-0.697***	0.076	0.39	-0.314***
Saber 11 score	45.30	45.18	0.127	45.3	45.91	-0.61
Educational establishments per 1,000 inhabitants	2.38	2.79	-0.411***	2.330	2.840	-0.51***
<b>Sample size</b>	1,226	1,633	2,859			2,390

Source: QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory and CEDE Municipal Panel. Children who were between 12 and 17 years old, living in rural and scattered rural areas in coca growing municipalities. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

As shown in Table 11, the effect of eradication on the probability of a child working is positive, and is slightly lower than the one found with the complete sample (0.02 percentage points). This means that aerial spraying increases the probability of a child working, even if I do not take outliers and atypical values into account. There also are no significant effects on the other variables of interest.

*Table 11: Effect of Aerial Eradication on Variables of Interest with Sample Restricted to Common Support and Removing the Tails of the Distribution*

Variables	Housework	Work	Study	Work and study	Falling behind
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Aerial eradication (km <sup>2</sup> )	0.00775	0.00840*	-0.00720	0.00494	-0.00233
	(0.00493)	(0.00419)	(0.0712)	(0.00388)	(0.00808)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instrumental variable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample size	2,084	2,084	2,084	2,084	475

*Source:* QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, CEDE Municipal Panel, and NASA. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . We control for age, size of the household, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments, and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are corrected by household clusters.

### RAINFALL INCLUDED AS A CONTROL

A threat to the identification strategy is the relationship between winds and rain. If it is a strong positive relationship, the previous results may not be causal because, like wind, rain makes aerial spraying impossible and is also considered a shock to agricultural productivity. Rain also can be associated with school attendance, as it makes it difficult for students and teachers to get to school and can even affect school facilities. Therefore, results could be biased by rain shocks. Tables 12 and 13 show that, on the one hand, the first stage holds when rainfall shocks in the municipality are included as a control (calculated similarly to wind shocks). On the other hand, the results of the second stage are similar to those found without controlling for precipitation, when this control is included. Therefore, rain does not affect the instrument and the identification strategy is valid.

*Table 12: First-Stage Effect of Wind Shocks on Aerial Eradication, Including Rainfall as a Control*

Variables	Aerial eradication
	(1)
Winds	-0.189***
	(0.0467)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes
Sample size	1,998
R-squared	0.945

*Source:* QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, CEDE Municipal Panel, NASA, and IDEAM. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . We control for age, size of the household, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments, and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are clustered by household.

*Table 13: Effect of Aerial Eradication on Variables of Interest, Controlling for Rainfall*

Variables	Housework	Work	Study	Work and study	Falling behind
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Aerial eradication (km <sup>2</sup> )	0.00857	0.00960*	-0.00858	0.00477	-0.00370
	(0.00656)	(0.00544)	(0.00821)	(0.00498)	(0.0117)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instrumental variable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample size	1,819	1,819	1,819	1,819	362
R-squared	0.117	0.136	0.192	0.126	0.308

*Source:* QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, CEDE Municipal Panel, NASA, and IDEAM. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . We control for age, size of the household, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments, and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are clustered by household.

### PLACEBO TEST AS A ROBUSTNESS CHECK

The analysis carried out in this study limited the sample to the rural and scattered rural areas of coca-growing municipalities because aerial eradication did not occur in urban areas. Therefore, there should be no effect of spraying on child labor in urban areas. Table 14 shows the results of this exercise. I examined children living in urban areas only in the same municipalities as the original sample, and there was no relationship between aerial crop eradication and children's labor and education variables. Furthermore, although the coefficients were not significant, the signs of the coefficients were the opposite of those found above.

Table 14: Placebo Test in Urban Areas

Variables	Housework	Work	Study	Work and study	Falling behind
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Aerial eradication (km <sup>2</sup> )	-0.000393	-0.00181	0.00217	1.79e-05	-0.0176
	(0.00583)	(0.00371)	(0.00504)	(0.00340)	(0.0191)
Municipality fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instrumental variable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample size	3,505	3,505	3,505	3,505	486
R-squared	0.099	0.059	0.128	0.062	0.234

Source: QLS (2008-2012), Colombian Drug Observatory, CEDE Municipal Panel, and NASA. Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. We control for age, size of the household, number of households in the residence, stratum, education of the head of household, gender, hectares cultivated with coca, tax income, homicide rate, subversive actions, educational establishments, and the results of the Saber 11 test. Standard errors are robust and are clustered by household.

## CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the empirical evaluation of the aerial spraying strategy in Colombia and its consequences for rural households in areas where coca is cultivated. Forced eradication was the country's main strategy for combating coca cultivation from 1999 to 2015; however, little was known about the effects this policy had on households, how loss of the crop was counteracted, and how spraying affected rural children.

The analysis used a two-stage least squares methodology, with NASA satellite wind data as the instrumental variable. I found that spraying one additional square kilometer of coca crops was associated with a one percentage point increase in the likelihood of working for children ages 12 to 17; I found no effects on their probability of attending school. The results are relevant because an average of 530 square kilometers were sprayed per year between 2008 and 2012. The results show that the income effect dominated in the case of aerial eradication because children were more likely to work in the event of an economic shock to a household.

There also is evidence of the heterogeneous effects of aerial eradication on educational lag. On the one hand, spraying was associated with a 0.15 percentage point increase in the probability that the oldest sibling would fall behind in school. This suggests that, even if the oldest children did not stop attending school, their academic performance may have declined. On the other hand, there was a negative relationship between aerial eradication and the probability that the youngest sibling in a family would attend school, making them five percentage points less likely to attend school than the rest of the children. Thus, this study shows that aerial spraying of coca crops, a policy framed in the logic of the war on drugs, may be creating barriers to children's access to education in rural areas. If children must perform work activities in addition to attending school, their progress in school at the appropriate age will be negatively affected.

According to these results, the forced eradication of illicit crops may be generating unexpected effects in coca-growing areas, such as an increase in child labor, which translates into less time spent on education or recreation. Future investigations should explore the sectors children are working in, as this study does not do so. This is important, because many young people in the coca-growing areas start their working life in an illegal economy (Sviatschi 2019; Espinosa 2009), which could have negative consequences for their future. The number of hours dedicated to work also should be studied, since the cost to children of working while also

attending school is that they have less time for studying, leisure, recreation, and rest, all of which are key to their healthy development.

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## APPENDIX

*Table A1: Number of Normative Approved Years of Education by Age*

Age	Number of normative years approved
7	1
8	2
9	3
10	4
11	5
12	6
13	7
14	8
15	9
16	10
17	11

Source: Angulo, Diaz, and Pardo (2011)

*Table A2: Descriptive Statistics of Wind Shocks*

	Wind shocks
Mean	77.61
Standard deviation	97.29
Maximum	311
Minimum	0
Sample size	2,859

Source: Own construction from NASA's GES DISC base

# “PEDAGOGY OF CONVERSION” IN THE URBAN MARGINS: PACIFICATION, EDUCATION, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL IN A RIO DE JANEIRO FAVELA<sup>1</sup>

SARA KOENDERS

## ABSTRACT

*In this article, I make an empirical contribution to the scholarship on education in urban settings that are affected by militarized policing and illicit drug markets. I offer insights into the role education played in the Pacifying Police Units (UPPs), a pacification project in Rio de Janeiro favelas. Rio State authorities began to install UPPs in 2008 in an effort to regain control over favelas dominated by drug-trafficking groups and marked by high levels of violence. In this paper, which is based on an ethnographic case study I conducted between 2008 and 2015, I discuss the UPPs' struggle to gain the allegiance of favela residents. I focus in particular on police involvement in public primary schools and nonformal education geared toward young children living in the favelas that were part of the UPP project. Looking at one primary question—How does pacification influence education and what does this mean for local perceptions of police?—I reveal how the UPPs brought on the further militarization of education in Rio's favelas and show how paradoxical police practices in the urban margins may actually perpetuate the violence they are intended to combat.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, Rio de Janeiro has been marked by a “reality of violence” (Perlman 2010) that disproportionately affects the city’s *favelas*.<sup>2</sup> Violent territorial struggles between rivalling drug gangs and *milícias*, the armed groups that dominate the majority of these areas (Zaluar and Barcellos 2013), and a militarized police response conducted in the name of the war on drugs have taken their toll. Between 2001 and 2011, the Rio de Janeiro police alone committed 10,000 killings that were justified as self-defense (*autos de resistência*) (Misse et al. 2013), often to cover up arbitrary and summary executions (Farias 2014). These hazardous conditions have severely affected the already precarious education opportunities available in the city’s favelas (Ribeiro and Katzman 2008; Penha and Figueiredo 2009; Carapic and Lopes Cardozo 2016).

In 2008, Rio State authorities started a process of pacification in Rio’s favelas. Pacifying Police Units (*Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora*, or UPPs) were installed in a growing number of strategically selected favelas. A 24-hour police presence and closer relations with the residents were intended to guarantee the reestablishment of state control over these areas. While leaning heavily on the discourse of community and proximity policing, the UPP project also has been informed by current transnational experiences of counterinsurgency and irregular warfare (Müller 2018), and it could be seen as part of the “new war on the poor” (Gledhill 2015) being fought under the pretext of providing security and ending drug-related violence. Pacification, I will argue, is based on the combined use of (extralegal) force and a “pedagogy of conversion” (Das and Poole 2004b, 9) that is impacting the lives of favela residents and their education spaces, often in paradoxical ways.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the UPP project, state security forces organized an array of formal and nonformal educational activities and events, often geared toward children.<sup>4</sup> José Mariano Beltrame, Rio’s public security secretary at the time and the person responsible for rolling out the pacification project, stated that, “when it comes

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2 There is no widely accepted definition of the term “favela.” The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics places favelas in the category of “subnormal agglomerates,” irregular urban settlements on land owned by others (public or private), often characterized by a disordered and dense pattern and lacking essential public services (IBGE 2010). In reality, this sociospatial category is extremely varied, representing different land status, socioeconomic, spatial, and historical situations, and housing a heterogenous population (Gonçalves 2013).

3 I use the concept “pedagogy of conversion” (Das and Poole 2004b, 9) to refer to tutelary practices that are part of a civilizing mission to transform subjects deemed dangerous or immoral into “good citizens” (Oliveira 2014), in order to promote a certain social order.

4 Nonformal education takes place outside formal education institutions, but it is institutionalized, intentional, and planned by an education provider (as opposed to informal education); provides an addition or alternative to formal education; and may be of short duration and/or low intensity (ISCED 2011, 81).

to public security, we lost a generation.”<sup>5</sup> This is why, as another UPP official explained, “Our focus is children. The youth of the favela ‘*não tem jeito*’ [are hopeless]. They have already been co-opted by the drug trafficking. Those, we already lost. Now we have to invest in the new generation” (Leite and Machado da Silva 2013, 146, translation mine).

Nevertheless, while much has been written about the UPPs (see, e.g., Machado da Silva 2010; Cano 2012; Leite 2012; Carvalho 2013; Machado da Silva and Leite 2014; Menezes 2015), few have analyzed the roles education and children play in the context of pacification.<sup>6</sup> In a broad sense, there is a lack of scholarship on education in urban settings affected by militarized policing and illicit drug markets (see Rodríguez-Gómez and Bermeo 2020; Carapic and Lopes Cardozo 2016). As Carapic and Lopes Cardozo point out, giving attention to the role education plays in efforts to mitigate or prevent urban violence is key to understanding potential pathways for peacebuilding in cities, which is an increasingly salient topic for the field of education in emergencies.

By offering insights into the role education played in the UPP project in Rio de Janeiro, this article makes an empirical contribution to filling this gap in the literature. I specifically ask, How does pacification influence education and what does this mean for local perceptions of police? Based on ethnographic data collected during 30 months of field research in Rio de Janeiro between 2008 and 2015, I analyze the workings of pacification in children’s environments, using Vila Cruzeiro, a favela in the city’s North Zone, as a case study. My analysis shows that, although intended to gain the allegiance of the targeted population, the education strategies that are part of a broader set of ambiguous police practices that constitute pacification may actually reproduce the violence and distrust they are said to combat.

I begin with a background section on the UPP political context and the role education plays in Rio’s favelas. I then provide a conceptual framework centered around pacification, followed by a description of my field site and methodology. I present the research findings in three parts. The first section discusses how drug trafficking and policing have influenced the education endeavor in Vila Cruzeiro. The second examines policing practices with an educational purpose oriented toward children. Finally, I describe how Vila Cruzeiro residents navigated these pacification efforts and highlight the factors that complicated the proximity of police and residents.

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5 Field notes, October 21, 2013, OsteRio event.

6 Some notable exceptions include CECIP (2010), Leite and Machado da Silva (2013), and Ribeiro (2013).



## PACIFICATION AND EDUCATION IN RIO’S FAVELAS

Late in the first decade of the 2000s, in light of Brazil’s booming economy and upcoming mega-events, including the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympic Games, efforts to position Rio de Janeiro as a global city gave urgency to the need to address the high levels of ostensive violence related to the war on drugs. The UPPs, which started as an ad hoc solution to problems in specific favelas, soon developed into a broader pacification project. While the continuation of violent crackdowns in other parts of the city and neighboring municipalities suggested the continuation of a war on drugs approach, pacification, with its rhetoric of community policing, became Rio’s latest showpiece.<sup>7</sup>

Political support for pacification, secured through a political alliance established in 2007 between the Worker’s Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*) at the federal level and the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (*Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*) at the state level and strengthened by the latter’s win in Rio’s 2009 municipal elections, materialized in the form of personnel and financial resources. This effort was essential to the implementation and expansion of the UPPs and, according to then secretary Beltrame, distinguished it from earlier community-policing initiatives (Menezes 2015, 68; see Misse 2014 for a comparison of the UPPs and earlier projects). The term “community policing,” which usually refers to policing strategies involving close collaboration between the police and neighborhood residents (Ungar and Arias 2012, 1), initially was used to describe the UPPs. It served as a powerful discursive resource in winning the support of political and economic forces, and popular opinion. However, when it soon became clear that the UPPs could not live up to the most basic criteria of community policing, the action was retermed “proximity policing,” although the two terms have been used interchangeably.<sup>8</sup> Proximity policing is an approach based on foot patrols, the aim being to make police more visible and open to forming new state-society relationships (Willis and Prado 2014, 237).

When the tide started to turn in 2014 as a consequence of disappointing results, the UPPs came under ever more pressure economically, politically, and operationally. UPP founding father Beltrame resigned after the 2016 Summer Olympic Games, leaving the project adrift. In 2018, Rio suffered a large-scale federal security

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7 While pacification is officially a state-level project, it has primarily targeted the municipality of Rio de Janeiro. Only one UPP was installed in another Rio de Janeiro municipality, in 2014, in Complexo da Mangueira, Baixada Fluminense.

8 See Ungar and Arias (2012) for an assessment of community-oriented policing in Latin America. For a more elaborate discussion of the discursive shift from community policing to proximity policing, see Saborio (2014), Franco (2014), and Menezes (2015).

intervention that put the Brazilian military in charge of the city's policing, which resulted in a serious increase in homicide rates (Grillo 2019, 66). Although the UPPs formally still exist and Wilson Witzel, Rio State's governor since 2019, has alluded to continuing the project, he has in fact taken a heavy-handed approach to security issues. However, at the time of my research, pacification was still an important conjuncture for educational interventions by military police.<sup>9</sup>

For a long time, education has been thought of as a way to achieve social mobility and a better future for and by those living in Rio de Janeiro's favelas (SAGMACS 1960; Paiva 1992; Perlman 2010; Bartlett 2010). While education provides an opportunity to challenge and push the boundaries that construct these places as marginal, the education project at the same time reflects and is disadvantaged by these boundaries (Ribeiro et al. 2010; Ribeiro and Katzman 2008; Christovão and Santos 2010; Paiva and Burgos 2009), which causes disappointment among favela residents (Perlman 2010; Paiva 1992).

Additional problems exist in favelas with high levels of violence which contribute to discrepancies in the quality of the schools and education available across Rio de Janeiro (Gay 2005, 112). In Vila Cruzeiro and similar settings, violence and drug trafficking in the vicinity of the schools affect daily school activities, as well as the individual trajectories of staff and faculty members and of students. They limit education opportunities by interfering with the students and the school routines (Ribeiro 2013, 35-36). This interference can be direct, with the interruption of classes and school shutdowns during violent confrontations between police and drug traffickers, or indirect, through increasing stigmatization and the existence of norms and values that conflict with the education endeavor (Paiva 1992; Perlman 2010). In these areas, education spaces also have become increasingly subject to military interventions by both military police and the armed forces, a process that can be better understood through an examination of the concept of pacification.

### **CONCEPTUALIZING PACIFICATION: VIOLENCE AND A "PEDAGOGY OF CONVERSION" IN THE URBAN MARGINS**

I examine the effects of Rio's UPP education project through the lens of pacification, which has been used as both a practitioner's term and an analytical concept. Agier and Lamotte (2016, 8) argue that moving from a political notion of pacification

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<sup>9</sup> Because I only collected data until 2015, this article does not elaborate on the implications of political shifts at the municipal and state level since then, or on the changes the country has suffered since the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016.

to a conceptional definition enables us to understand and compare the control of territories and populations ethnographically, and to examine the roles of different actors therein. It also places policing efforts like the UPPs within a broader global context of (post)colonial rule, the use of coercive means to establish order, and the political economy of capitalism (Müller 2018, 223-24), thereby allowing for a critical examination of security interventions in situations of emergency, and of emergency situations. Through my conceptualizing of pacification, which highlights the pedagogy of conversion, I put into perspective the role of formal and nonformal education strategies in the pacification process.

Although the term “pacification” has a long history that originates in times of colonial warfare (Neocleous 2011), it has only more recently been reappropriated as a theoretical concept. Scholars dedicated to developing a critical pacification theory (Neocleous, Rigakos, and Wall 2013; Neocleous 2014; Wall, Saberi, and Jackson 2016a; Rigakos 2016; Kienscherf 2016) draw attention to both the destructive and the productive qualities of pacification and highlight the role security entrepreneurs play in the fabrication of capitalist relations (Neocleous et al. 2013, 4) through a “war for accumulation” that “involves the production of . . . conditions for capitalist accumulation” (Wall, Saberi, and Jackson 2016b, 8). Building on this framework, others (Das and Poole 2004a; Oliveira 2014; Agier and Lamotte 2016) have propagated an anthropology of pacification that is dedicated to the ethnographic study of pacification processes, including how they affect targeted populations and the orders they produce in the urban margins.

For the purpose of this paper and drawing from several authors (Oliveira 2014; Das and Poole 2004b; Müller 2018; Neocleous et al. 2013), I define pacification as both a destructive and a productive control device for managing specific territories and populations through selectively applied force, and a “pedagogy of conversion” (Das and Poole 2004b, 9) for the construction of a certain social order. The creation of a (potentially) dangerous other or a “radical otherness” it simultaneously seeks to destroy is an essential aspect of pacification (Agier and Lamotte 2016). Such processes of othering lead to and are reinforced by the construction of margins, which are sites seen as “natural containers for people considered insufficiently socialized into the law . . . where the state is constantly refounding its modes of order and lawmaking” (Das and Poole 2004b, 8-9). In the margins of the state, the destruction of opposition or an enemy insurgency through military force goes hand-in-hand with the reconstruction of social order through a broad and far-reaching state intervention (Neocleous et al. 2013, 1-2), often in the form of

police actions, that revolves around promises of social and economic integration and is aimed at clearing the social environment of contamination by the enemy (Agier and Lamotte 2016, 23) through a pedagogy of conversion.

While demonstrating the ambiguous nature of pacification, I focus primarily on state pedagogical practices. The pedagogy of conversion, for example, constitutes tutelary practices that are part of a civilizing mission to transform subjects deemed dangerous or immoral into “good citizens” (Oliveira 2014). Education is an important tool in this process, as it is a space in which various sets of values and norms encounter each other and are constructed and contested. At the core of a tutelary regime, however, is the assignment of a group in power to speak and act on behalf of the other (Oliveira 2014, 144-46). It annuls any action or public expression of the subordinate, and plans are developed without the active participation of those concerned. Without a prescribed mode of action, the entitled agent has the liberty to choose how to act, as long as he guarantees the operationalization of the tutelary condition. Modes of action in the name of pacification are, thus, situational and dynamic, depending on a combination of different factors and characteristics that decide how one should be treated, who is worth saving, and whose life matters (Sanjurjo and Feltran 2015). These categorizations often reflect, are mediated by, and reinforce sets of assumptions and societal divisions along the lines of race, class, gender, and age (Neocleous 2011, 202-3; Kienscherf 2016).

Still, while marginal populations “are pathologized through various kinds of power/knowledge practices, they do not submit to these conditions passively” (Das and Poole 2004b, 19). In contrast to what dominant representations of marginalized populations suggest, empirical evidence shows their plurality and connectedness though intensive relations with social domains, such as family, work, religion, law, and social protection, and an effective relationship with the state (Perlman 1976; Goldstein 2003; Feltran 2011; Cabanes et al. 2011; Cunha and Feltran 2013). Hence, while looking at how forms of control as security practices reach into the everyday life of citizens (Neocleous 2011, 192) and at the human consequences of the securitization of social issues (Gledhill 2015), how people perceive, respond to, and influence these practices should also be addressed. Showing the empirical plurality in these areas counters the construction of bipolarities that the state’s presence in the urban margins has promoted (Feltran 2013, 11).

In the Brazilian context, Oliveira (2014) argues that pacification has been a central aspect of nation-building—through a mechanism of differentiation—for five centuries, from colonial history to republican Brazil. Historically, this combination of violent and tutelary practices was directed at controlling and “civilizing” indigenous populations. More recently, the term “pacification” and its logic were appropriated to urban areas and directed at specific segments of the urban population deemed dangerous (Oliveira 2014; Leite 2015), a development that can be linked to Brazil’s recent cycle of economic development (Feltran 2011, 2013). The war on drugs has been important in this process because it justifies the pacification of certain social groups and specific zones seen as dangerous and ungovernable (Neocleous 2011, 202-3). The UPP project is exemplary in this regard: it is legitimized through and reinforces the idea of favelas as marginal spaces of poverty and criminality, where the destruction of enemies and favela culture should be accompanied by the construction of a new social order. Favela pacification can therefore be understood as a form of state-making in the urban margins. Looking beyond distrust and the absence of the state through an ethnographic examination of the influence of pacification on education reveals how the contradictory, selective, and intermittent nature of law enforcement instigates and sustains violence and insecurity among marginal urban populations (Auyero, de Lada, and Berti 2014, 18).

## CHALLENGES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN SITUATIONS OF URBAN VIOLENCE

### RESEARCH SITE

Vila Cruzeiro, the primary research site of this study, is a favela in Rio’s industrial North Zone that is central to the city’s war on drugs and pacification efforts. Long a stronghold of Comando Vermelho, one of Rio’s major drug factions, the favela was invaded by state security forces in November 2010 and occupied by the Pacification Force (*Força de Pacificação*), which consists predominantly of elements of the Brazilian military. A UPP, consisting of specially trained pacification police, replaced the Pacification Force in August 2012. The drug traffickers who remained in the favela initially scaled back their activities and started operating in more covert ways, but over time the local drug traffic gradually regained its strength. This article situates the role of education within this context of a struggle for order and control.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

In this article, I present a qualitative ethnographic case study of the mechanisms of pacification and their influence on education in Rio's favelas, with a particular focus on the perspectives of adults living and working in Vila Cruzeiro at the time of my research. I offer an in-depth analysis of how these residents were affected by pacification through education. The often difficult conditions I encountered in the field called for a flexible and integrative methodology (Kovats-Bernat 2002, 210), thus I used a combination of techniques and relied heavily on informal methods of data collection. I paid particular attention throughout to ensuring the safety and confidentiality of the research participants, and my own safety.<sup>10</sup> I was introduced to Vila Cruzeiro and members of its residents' association by a locally operating nongovernmental organization, which also informed the local drug traffickers about my intentions. I worked through existing networks and trusted individuals to select the research participants. I draw from data I collected during approximately 30 months of field research between 2008 and 2015. Although the data used in this paper span a seven-year period, I did not originally design a longitudinal study. This study is the combined product of my master's research project conducted in Vila Cruzeiro (Koenders 2008) before the existence of the UPPs and my doctoral project on pacification, which I began in 2011. Between 2013 and 2014 specifically I studied the effects of pacification efforts on education.

The participants in this study are adults, parents, school officials, grassroots leaders, and others between the ages of 20 and 65 who lived and/or worked in Vila Cruzeiro at the time of the research and who, to my knowledge, were not directly involved in the illicit drug trade. I also included a few members of the military forces and the military police in this study. The part of my research related directly to formal education was focused on one school in particular, whose principal I met at a local meeting. Because women are overrepresented in children's environments in Vila Cruzeiro as primary caretakers and school officials, the majority of my research participants were female. This is also a result of my choice to use snowball sampling and, as a woman, it was more viable to get informal access to women (see Baird 2019 for a reflection on gendered access).

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<sup>10</sup> To ensure anonymity, I choose not to disclose the names of my research participants or specify the names of the specific organizations and institutions included in this research. For further reading about ethnographic research in (potentially) dangerous settings, I suggest Goldstein (2014), Felbab-Brown (2014), Baird (2019), and NORRAG (2019).

I used a variety of data-collection techniques, most importantly informal conversations, participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation and informal conversations proved invaluable in this precarious context, as people tended to be more open in informal settings. I participated in people’s daily routines, took part in community meetings and events, and frequented education domains where the police organized nonformal and formal educational activities, such as daycare facilities, social projects, and schools. All the while I observed and recorded interactions between members of the military and police forces and residents, and the continuities and changes in education brought about by pacification. I conducted approximately 40 open, in-depth interviews, which varied in length from 30 minutes to 3 hours.<sup>11</sup> The interviews covered an array of topics geared toward the selected participants: the living and/or working conditions in Vila Cruzeiro; people’s perceptions of changes and continuities relative to pacification; and the effects these had on their lives in general and on education in particular. In addition to the primary data, I analyzed various media and documents, including newspaper articles, Facebook posts, student essays, and, importantly, a booklet published by the Rio State Department of Security that was distributed at schools in UPP favelas. I examined the booklet in order to understand more fully how the police were employing educational material in their pacification efforts.

#### DATA ANALYSIS AND LIMITATIONS

I wrote field notes and memoranda during the course of the research, including my observations and impressions, informal conversations, and my reflections on particular observations, encounters, and interviews. I recorded interviews only with participants’ informed consent and when no added security risk or effect on participants’ openness and truthfulness was to be expected. For the unrecorded interviews, I composed a precise recollection of the interview based on my notes. I entered all the data into computer files and coded and analyzed these using NVivo, a qualitative analysis software. Using an array of qualitative research methods facilitated triangulation of the data and contributed to a more accurate understanding of the direct and collateral effects pacification efforts had on education.

Nevertheless, matters of safety, feasibility, and ethics limited this study in several ways. Vila Cruzeiro residents were always hesitant and sometimes reluctant to discuss topics related to violence and the armed actors operating locally, as they feared

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<sup>11</sup> I used topic lists to guide these interviews, aiming for an in-depth exploration of these topics while giving participants the opportunity to raise issues they deemed important, which in turn helped me to refine the topic lists I worked with.

being punished for breaking the drug traffickers' "law of silence" (Koenders 2008). This explains my reliance on informal methods and the limited number of formal interviews I was able to conduct, despite the long period of fieldwork. Although I consider this environment of silence and distrust important information in itself, it might have given me a distorted representation of participants' perspectives. I minimized this bias through triangulation and by building rapport and trust with the participants through my engagement in local activities.

Building the strong interpersonal relationships essential to ethnographic research involves walking a moral tightrope (Baird 2019). I avoided direct contact with people actively involved in the drug trade because involvement with them would have limited my access to other residents. I organized interviews with members of the military and police forces outside Vila Cruzeiro and did not attend meetings organized by the local UPP. Had I openly associated with the police, I could have been taken for a snitch or an undercover cop, which would have put me at personal risk. Also, given the ethical implications and the risk of prejudicing already vulnerable groups such as children and youth, directly including children was beyond the scope of this research (see, e.g., Christensen 2004; Schelbe et al. 2014; NORRAG 2019). So, while acknowledging the importance of children's voices, this study only glimpses young people's perspectives through "proxies," most importantly their parents and teachers. Thus, this study does not paint a full picture of the wide variety of experiences, perceptions, and responses found in the context of pacification. I encourage other researchers to develop comprehensive projects on education in settings of urban violence that address these gaps and build on this and other relevant studies. With the limitations of my research in mind, I now turn to the empirical findings on pacification and education in Vila Cruzeiro.

## PACIFICATION AND EDUCATION IN VILA CRUZEIRO

Vila Cruzeiro's population has access to a number of schools, but only one, which provides education up to the sixth grade, is located in the heart of the favela. Two other primary schools are situated next to each other—one for the lower grades, the other for the higher grades—just outside a main entrance to Vila Cruzeiro. Another school in the vicinity also offers higher primary education. There also are two Integrated Centers for Public Education (*Centros Integrados de Educação Pública*, or CIEPs) nearby.<sup>12</sup> Frequent violent confrontations between

<sup>12</sup> CIEPs originated with an initiative by Rio State governor Leonel Brizola, in office from 1983-1987 and from 1991-1994, who proposed comprehensive full-time education, but most units are now administered at the municipal level and provide only part-time education.



drug traffickers and the police had a direct impact on the lives of students and teachers at schools in the area and often caused them to shut down, sometimes for a few hours, sometimes for a few days, and occasionally for months, which seriously disrupted school routines and undermined the children’s learning.<sup>13</sup> When Vila Cruzeiro schools had to close their doors for security reasons, a nearby CIEP would sometimes serve as an operational base. This disruption affected the mobility of teachers and students, who often were not able to go to or home from school, or to do so only at great personal risk. Teaching and learning under such trying circumstances reduced the schools’ ability to attract and keep students, teachers, and other staff (Ribeiro 2013, 28; Leeds 2007, 25-26).

While the prevalence of violence and insecurity further prejudiced the already fragile education endeavor in Rio’s favelas, it added to its importance at the same time. Schools are widely seen as safe spaces in both physical and social terms, even though many parents prefer to keep their children at home during a police operation or shootout, and there are concerns about aggression and bad influences in schools (Koenders 2008). Education is associated with the “righteous life” or the right track, as opposed to the “iniquitous life” associated with street life and defiant behavior (Hecht 1998). Because of this respect for education among most Vila Cruzeiro residents, drug traffickers gained legitimacy by providing “protection” to local schools. One school official expressed in an interview the common sentiment that, “at the time [the] *bandidos* [were in charge] we never had things stolen, we never had spray-painted walls, because that wasn’t allowed.” Any person who disrespected a school was in serious trouble, and thieves were forced to return any goods they had stolen. This manner of protection contrasted with the perceived disrespect shown by state security forces, as in this incident described by the same school official, which happened before the start of pacification.<sup>14</sup>

One thing that stuck in school history and that shocked the community [is that] the one time the school was invaded, it was invaded by the police. With the *caveirão* they knocked down the gate, knocked down the door, and went to the roof to watch the *bandidos*.<sup>15</sup>

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13 Based on personal observations, social media analysis, newspaper articles, and interviews with parents and school officials.

14 Interview with a school official, October 10, 2013

15 A *caveirão* is an armored vehicle used by the military police, primarily during police invasions of favelas. I conducted the interviews in Portuguese; all translations are mine.

The occupation by state security forces initially reduced the number of armed confrontations and, thus, the mistrust teachers and students felt toward local schools. Also, children of drug traffickers, who previously would sometimes flee the favela during large-scale police operations, no longer had to move with their parents to other neighborhoods. Dropout rates declined, and in the years after the occupation the number of students in the school I studied climbed from 750 to 850. Moreover, the occupation facilitated the formation of a stable group of well-trained and motivated teachers.<sup>16</sup> However, shootouts between police and drug traffickers continued to take place and increased in frequency over time, which directly affected school life. Schools once again were closed and classes suspended numerous times, and teachers could organize only limited activities.<sup>17</sup>

Investment in infrastructure, education, and additional services such as garbage collection, judicial assistance, and regularization of electricity supply, however limited, accompanied the pacification process. Schools of Tomorrow (*Escolas do Amanhã*), a federal government program, was implemented almost in parallel to the UPPs in the most vulnerable areas of the city. Vila Cruzeiro's schools benefitted from this program, which provided extra investment and attention. Nonetheless, one school principal noted that "there are not enough teachers, so the priority is to resolve that. And construction projects. From 2009 onwards, we have received more attention, but we need more."<sup>18</sup> Although reform of the education system should have facilitated these improvements, many public schools—including those in and near Vila Cruzeiro—were in session only part of the day, and children attended school either in the morning or the afternoon.

Pacification temporarily reduced the number of shootouts, which had a direct effect on the frequency of classes and the availability of teachers. The calmer environment around the schools facilitated the continuity of learning and teaching, while the pause in ostensive drug trafficking and the exposure to other role models and opportunities seemed to broaden students' views of the future.<sup>19</sup> These improvements in education brought about by pacification—although temporary, limited, and to some degree contradicted by the lived experiences of favela residents—were used in the state discourse and by major media outlets to legitimize and gain popular support for the project. The UPP website, for example, featured a story about the positive impact pacification had on students' grades

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16 Interview with a school official, October 10, 2013.

17 Field notes, October 2013.

18 Interview, October 2013.

19 Group interview, March 2013.

and performance in Vila Cruzeiro’s schools (UPP-RJ 2013). Making children the center of attention was a strategy to win popular support for pacification and gain favela residents’ allegiance.

### EDUCATIONAL POLICING IN CHILDREN’S ENVIRONMENTS

Educational police practices geared toward children were an important tool the UPPs used to develop a bond with favela residents and a part of the broader pedagogy of conversion integral to their pacification efforts. The first commander of the UPPs, Robson Rodrigues da Silva, stated that pacification “is a medium- and long-term job. A job that involves the rapprochement and transformation of these children” (*O Globo* 2010). To this end, the UPP organized a wide variety of formal and nonformal educational activities for children, such as jiu-jitsu and soccer practice, theater classes, computer classes, and day trips. At a community network meeting in Vila Cruzeiro, a P-5, or social policeman, explained to everyone present that “one of our primary missions is to humanize the military police. With pacification we have a series of ways to [replace] the drug trafficking, to show the community that we are part of the same society, [and that they can live in a different way].”<sup>20</sup> Some police study participants explicitly acknowledged that, to achieve rapprochement, they had to deliver certain services because “that is what the drug dealers used to do.”<sup>21</sup> In addition to the various educational activities, the UPP also threw Christmas parties, distributed toys, and participated in the celebration of Children’s Day. Most of the UPP children’s activities were for the community at large and were held in public places or near the base of the UPP.

Other activities focused specifically on the schools. Although the police did not have a daily presence in the school I studied or close relations with its teachers, the UPP did develop formal educational activities. The P-5s usually organized these activities, which included lectures, day trips, essay contests, and lectures about drugs and citizenship, in consultation with local schools.<sup>22</sup> Classes dealt with issues such as drugs and how the children can protect themselves from the dangers of the street, and often involved “a graduation with a diploma and everything.”<sup>23</sup> One mother whose child was enrolled in a local primary school, explained that “[the police officers of the UPP] went into each classroom to talk

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20 The P-5 is generally responsible for public relations, including the organization and promotion of one-time public events and regular social activities. Field notes, April 4, 2013.

21 Field notes, 2013.

22 Interview, October 2013.

23 Addressing drugs was part of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education Program (*Programa Educacional de Resistência às Drogas*). Interview with a school official, October 10, 2013.

with [the students], to explain what was happening so that they wouldn't be scared of the UPP, [explaining] that they are here to help the students . . . to protect all of them."<sup>24</sup> Children had the chance to ask questions anonymously of the police involved in the program, who came to the schools every week for three months. They would ask things like, "Have you ever smoked pot?" or "Did you ever hit your wife?" As a school secretary commented, "I think they are trying to recover their image of the police, to create a new image other than the one they had."<sup>25</sup> The essay contests addressed themes such as how students viewed the role of the police. These programs were usually offered at schools in all UPP favelas, but it was up to each school principal to decide if they would be implemented.

### “UPP—THE CONQUEST OF PEACE”

The booklet “UPP—The Conquest of Peace,” written and illustrated by Ziraldo (2012), creator of the classic children's book and character *O Menino Maluquinho* (*The Nutty Boy*), is an example of increased police involvement in schools. Developed by the Rio State Department of Security, it explains the concept of citizenship, shows the importance of rights and the obligations of each person in society, and addresses the relationship between favela residents and police. The booklet was distributed among children and schools in UPP favelas, including Vila Cruzeiro, where teachers discussed it in their classes. The students produced illustrations and texts about peace as a related project and each student took a copy of the booklet home.<sup>26</sup>

This booklet can be seen as an instrumental part of the pedagogy of conversion. It served as a resource in the discursive dispute between state security forces and drug gangs, which gained importance as physical confrontations between the two initially diminished. The booklet presents the UPP project as an effort to end to the codes, norms, and values passed on by the drug traffickers, and to introduce a culture of rights and obligations intended to turn excluded favela residents into civilized citizens. “Soon will end for once and for all the fear, insecurity, distrust, war, false friends and false heroes,” it states, and on the next page it shows children walking by walls covered with graffiti depicting men with guns.

The booklet also made an appeal to the improvements in education and school attendance pacification could bring: “We can now go to school in PEACE,” it says above a UPP sign at which a boy looks up happily (Figure 1). It continues, “Now

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24 Group interview, March 13, 2013.

25 Informal conversation with a school secretary, field notes, October 30, 2013.

26 Field notes, March 2014.

we can play, dance, jump, enjoy ourselves, like children who are really safe, . . . which . . . make father, and mother very happy.” A two-page drawing shows a happy-looking father, mother, and grandmother with a policeman, who has his arm casually around an elderly woman’s shoulders (Figure 2). This reveals the attempt to gain sympathy among adults through the implied improvement of children’s living conditions.

Figure 1: “Now we can go to school in peace.”



Source: Ziraldo (2012)

Figure 2: “Now we can play, dance, jump, enjoy ourselves, like children who are really safe, which make father, and mother very happy.”



Source: Ziraldo (2012)

The booklet plays directly on the idea of the police as saviors: “Now we can count on real friends . . . They were the first to arrive.” This is followed by an illustration showing two police officers with a man and a woman, with a caption: “Behind them will come education, health, further cleaning, more justice, more comfort and more security.” This illustrates the militarized approach toward social reconstruction in these territories, as it is the military police who will pave the way for other public services that will add to the construction of a “better life.” Another image, showing a policeman, carries the caption, “Now we will get a RIO

OF PEACE.” “All together for a ‘united city,’” the policeman exclaims, while the boy in the next picture states contentedly, “I am a citizen.” The transformation is complete.

The UPP, the booklet suggests, will lead the favela population to a better life by destroying existing norms and practices and facilitating new forms of coexistence and social and economic integration. It demonstrates that the state, through pacification, “reasserts its being *as a state* by insisting on itself as *the* political mechanism for the fabrication of social order” (Neocleous 2011, 203) in its margins. This rationale neglects the lived reality in the favelas and assumes that favela residents are isolated from social life and politics. Therefore, it is important to look at the favela residents’ morality, values, and conceptions (Feltran 2013) and the ways they perceive and respond to pacification.

#### NAVIGATING POLICE ENCOUNTERS IN EDUCATION DOMAINS

In this section, I address how people navigate police encounters in the context of pacification, and how this is informed by their perceptions and experiences relative to armed actors in general and educational police practices in particular. A military police officer, puzzled about the lack of local interest in nonformal education activities organized by the UPP, complained that “the UPP has a holiday program, but especially in Vila Cruzeiro, the children do not participate . . . There are soccer clinics, for example, . . . but when you go there you’ll see only about 4, maybe 5 children.”<sup>27</sup> He suggested that parents did not value these activities, but a closer look at people’s motives reveals a much more complex reality. People’s reluctance to join in such activities reflects the insecurity caused by the historically constructed lack of trust in and fear of police, their disbelief that the police have come to stay, the continuation of drug trafficking, contradictory police behavior, and the favela population’s lack of participation and inclusion in the development and execution of the project.

Right after the occupation of Vila Cruzeiro in late 2010, pacification was a much-discussed subject among students, who highlighted the discrepancy between the way mainstream media reported on the subject and the way they experienced things. They also addressed the subject in the classroom, as one school official recalls:

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27 Field notes, January 2014.

There was a teacher who brought the newspaper headlines . . . for them to discuss those and give their opinion, an insider's perspective . . . [it was all the opposite from the reports] in the newspapers . . . the police [were said to] save that space, and [the student] had the *bandidos* as their saviors . . . Until that moment that wasn't the police. So they contested the images the media passed on. You should have seen the drawings of that time; it was police killing, police beating.<sup>28</sup>

After a while, however, as a school official explained to me in October 2013, pacification as a topic of conversation among students subsided, which hints at the denial of the UPP presence and the lack of rapprochement.<sup>29</sup> It was especially the older kids and parents who were reluctant to interact with police, as she explained:

Those in fifth and sixth grade, who still lived through that time [of the drug trafficking], are more afraid. Some of them did not want to attend the course given by a police officer.

Parents were also hesitant and afraid of this rapprochement. When a meeting was organized between caretakers and the police, only four mothers showed up. Parents had to authorize their children to participate in the police class, and there were mothers who did not sign:

[A mother] came here [and said], "I won't allow it. I even think it's an important subject, but I don't want it." So they still fear that contact, I don't see them turning to the police to resolve things yet.<sup>30</sup>

The process of rapprochement was complex, messy, and often contradictory. The youngest kids were generally the most receptive, which explains why the police started with children in their endeavor to win loyalty from favela residents. According to a school official, "children are much easier . . . When a police officer comes here . . . there are children who shake hands, approaching [the police], [saying] 'I also want to become a policeman.' That's something that didn't happen before."<sup>31</sup> A hesitant approximation between police and the youngest kids seemed

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28 Interview, October 2013.

29 Interview with a school official, October 2013.

30 Interview, October 2013.

31 Interview, October 2013.



to take place, something that was also expressed by a few women, all mothers, one working as a volunteer at a local school:

The children started by outright ignoring them . . . the police tried to play with them, but the children didn't accept it. Maybe because of the parents [they were] scared, but now, after a while . . . they are much closer . . . Before they didn't even play on the square of the UPP post. Now they . . . hang out there . . . They stay until . . . midnight . . . with their parents . . . [so these] lectures in school help.<sup>32</sup>

However, the historically constructed distrust of police has been passed on to the youngest children: “The little one [is] also terrified . . . [When she sees] the police, she starts shaking. I think it's because she hears others talking about them, sees things on TV, and she is afraid.”<sup>33</sup> One participant claimed that the distrust was also fostered by continuing episodes of arbitrary police behavior:

Many residents are afraid because when they started to come in here, in Vila Cruzeiro, they invaded the houses . . . looking for people. I thought [they did] this the wrong way . . . during the occupation this happened. Now they stopped with that . . . kind of, because there are still some places, some streets and alleys, where they still go in. But down here [the bottom part of the community] they stopped a bit. But it used to be very difficult . . . You are in your house, at ease, and then some police knock on your door. And if you don't open they will break down the door to get in.

Another participant concurred: “The children become terrified . . . of the police. They also know this is wrong.”

These episodes contrast with the image of the “social policeman” (Teixeira 2015) that the UPP has propagated and disclose the double moral within the police force. A UPP police officer said about his new commander, who previously worked for the Special Police Operations Battalion (*Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais*), “He doesn't have the right mindset. He only knows how to invade favelas.” With this change of command, the rules also changed: “The guy who used to give jiu-

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32 Group interview, March 2013.

33 Interview, September 2013.

jitsu classes . . . that is no longer being seen as part of the job . . . so he has to do his normal hours and in addition he still has to give those trainings. That's impossible. Or imagine that there is an incident during a class, and you have to take part in the action."<sup>34</sup>

The paradoxical repertoires of police behavior foster further mistrust and reluctance among residents and complicate the rapprochement between the two: "In December, the UPP handed out toys to the children of the community, but a few week(s) later that same police beat up the father of one of those children."<sup>35</sup> This is what makes people skeptical of the police intentions and feeds distrust of them among favela residents. Moreover, some students who attended lectures given by UPP police at school were subsequently questioned and searched in the streets, as one mother described:

The other day my [11-year-old] son was walking in the street wearing a necklace that I had bought for him from a street vendor. [A policeman] stopped my son, he was alone, asked if it was a golden [necklace], who had given it to him . . . my son was like "No, my mom bought it for me." So he came home and said, "Mom, the police stopped me, asking questions . . ." It scared him. It's these small things that terrify the children.<sup>36</sup>

These incidents illustrate the fact that different types of police behavior occur, depending on the context and on the particular characteristics of a police action target. The closer children get to adolescence, for example, the more likely it is they will be seen as suspects warranting repressive treatment.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have discussed the role of education in pacification efforts directed at areas in the urban margins that are affected by drug-related and police violence. Going beyond a political notion of pacification, I approached pacification as a device for controlling marginal populations through selectively applied force and a pedagogy of conversion aimed at fabricating a new social order. Starting in 2008, Rio State authorities installed UPPs to regain control over favelas dominated by drug-trafficking groups. The UPPs, which provided a permanent

34 Informal conversation, field notes, April 4, 2013.

35 Informal conversation, field notes, February 2013.

36 Interview, March 2013.

police presence, also pursued a closer relationship between the police and favela residents. Through an ethnographic case study of Vila Cruzeiro, I examined how pacification influenced education and how this affected local perceptions of police.

My findings reveal that the state relies on pacification efforts to gain legitimacy in areas where the level of distrust is high. In the state’s pursuit of a pedagogy of conversion, education, as a space in which values and norms are constructed and contested, proved to be a particularly important sphere of police intervention. At the same time, my study indicates that these education strategies, even though aimed at mitigating violence and gaining the loyalty of the targeted population, may in fact reproduce the violence and distrust they are supposed to combat. While discursively community-based policing was meant to repair state-society relations, in practice these educational practices continued to exist alongside more violent and repressive forms of policing, both within UPP favelas and in the city at large. This lack of structural reform, the tutelary nature of educational practices in the context of pacification, and the top-down nature of the project frustrated police-resident relationships, which explains the difficulty the police had in gaining widespread support among residents.

While the collapse of pacification in recent years has given way to full-out heavy-handed policing under Rio’s current governor, this does not mean the end of the militarization of education in Brazil. On the contrary, the education policy of the Bolsonaro government is incentivizing the construction of civic-military schools, which, even though they are created by state and municipal authorities, receive specific financial support from the ministry of education.<sup>37</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the implications of this political conjuncture, my study does point at the counterproductive effects of police involvement in schools and signals the grave consequences such policy measures may have for education and security conditions.

Building on existing theories of pacification, this empirical study contributes to the development of an anthropology of pacification by deepening understanding of the role of formal and nonformal education strategies in policing of the urban margins. Pacification, I argue, can be understood as a civilizing mission through paradoxical police practices directed at destroying enemy elements and at transforming, through education, those deemed worthy. In this sense, education is a fundamental tool in coercive order-making by the state, through which the state reasserts itself as the primary mechanism for the construction of social

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<sup>37</sup> See the Presidential Decree at <http://escolacivicomilitar.mec.gov.br/>, accessed on March 2, 2020. For an analysis of this civic-military school model, see Carneiro and Sant’Anna (2018).

order. Efforts to control segments of the population considered dangerous through educational police interventions can also be seen as an attempt to integrate these people economically as part of a larger project of capitalist accumulation. My research, however, shows that people in the urban margins are targeted and affected by such policies in varied ways and that many resist the patronizing, hierarchical, and authoritarian nature of pacification and in the process construct alternative urban orders.

By highlighting the role of the pedagogic state in the war on drugs, in particular the educational practices of military police in the context of pacification, I also demonstrate that linking the ethnographic study of the urban margins with the field of education in emergencies can be mutually beneficial. Future studies should look critically at how and to what end educational practices are undertaken in situations of urban violence, how they are applied—selectively negotiated by characteristics such as age, locality, gender, race, and class—and how such governance practices are lived, acted on, and resisted by different segments of the population. When it comes to designing and grasping the importance of adequate education and policing, Vila Cruzeiro’s residents and others who live precariously have a lot to teach us.

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# “IF YOU DON’T HAVE AN EDUCATION, YOU ARE NO ONE”: UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH INVOLVED IN DRUG-RELATED CRIME IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ AND MEDELLÍN

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## ABSTRACT

*The relation between being out of school and participating in criminal economies is widely documented in the literature on youth delinquency. However, the complex connection between these two phenomena has not yet been fully unpacked. This paper draws from two studies that we, the authors, conducted separately to explore the role educational experiences play in shaping the delinquent trajectories of male youth who participate in the drug business in urban centers located in Mexico and Colombia. The first consists of in-depth interviews and surveys conducted in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, while the second is based on long-term ethnographic engagement in Medellín, Colombia. We provide unique insights into the educational experiences of this hard-to-reach population and find that economic hardship does not wholly explain why these young people leave school and engage in delinquent activities. These youth do not “drop out” of school in search of money; rather, they are “pushed out” by a vicious cycle of stigmatization, segregation, punishment, and exclusion. By exploring these dynamics in two cities that have waged long drug wars, this article furthers understanding of the nexus between crime-related violence and educational experiences, thus making an important contribution to the field of education in emergencies.*

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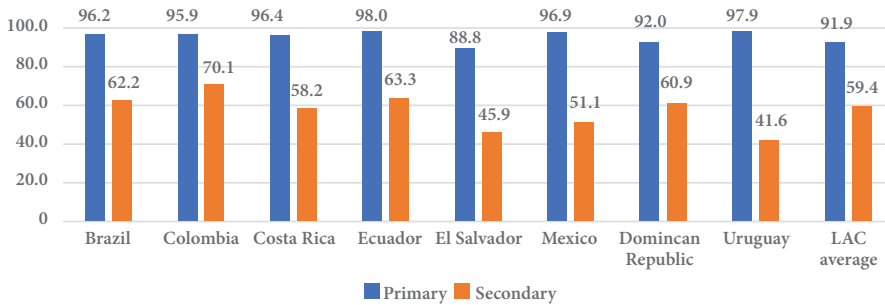
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## INTRODUCTION

The Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region is home to 8 percent of the global population but accounts for 37 percent of the world's homicides (Chioda 2017).<sup>1</sup> Being young and male have been found to be risk factors for participation in criminal activity in both the LAC region (Chioda 2017; Muggah and Aguirre 2018) and around the globe (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1995; Shoemaker 1990). Studies in the LAC region also show that low educational attainment is a persistent characteristic of those who engage in crime (Azaola and Pérez-Correa 2012), and that there is a clear correlation between being out of school and first instances of engagement in criminal activity. In some countries in the LAC region, the share of out-of-school adolescents at the secondary level is particularly high (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

*Figure 1: Percentage of Population between Ages 15 and 19 that Completed Primary and Secondary Education in Select LAC Countries, 2014*



Source: Data from ELAC statistics (2018), with authors' elaboration

Despite this correlation, an in-depth understanding of how educational attainment and criminal engagement are related is lacking. There is not enough empirical evidence available to understand whether the school experiences of youth involved in criminal actions in the LAC region have contributed to their engagement in the drug business and, if they have, how they do so. Existing research on the drug trade has concentrated primarily on the top members of criminal organizations (see, e.g., Grillo 2011; Molloy and Bowden 2011) while disregarding the perspectives of those in the lower echelons, even though evidence indicates that adolescence is a period when engagement in criminal behavior increases

<sup>1</sup> In 2014, the average regional homicide rate in LAC was the highest worldwide. Regional rates for LAC stood at 22.5 homicides per 100,000 in 2014, twice the rate for sub-Saharan Africa (9.5) and more than five times the rate for the Middle East and North Africa (3.9) (World Bank 2014). It is important to clarify that there is significant variation in the level of violence within the region.

<sup>2</sup> In 2015, the rate of out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age was 7.2 percent for LAC, compared to an average rate of 3.0 percent in OECD countries (World Bank 2018).

substantially (Chioda 2017; Trucco and Ullmann 2016). This is especially true in Mexico and Colombia, where the pathway to crime often starts in the early teens (Chavez 2018; Butti 2019).

Typically, the youngest participants in the drug business act as *carritos* (drug transporters) in exchange for candies or pocket money. As they get older, they start selling and guarding drugs, finding new buyers among their peers, getting protection money from shops, buses, and residents, and serving as neighborhood lookouts. Criminal activity is often something the youngest participants do when not in school, but these youth typically leave school when they are older, and selling drugs becomes their main activity and source of income (Chavez 2018; Butti 2019).

Despite this correlation between leaving school and engaging in criminal activities, to our knowledge, no work has yet focused on the educational experiences of the low-level participants of criminal groups engaged in the drug business in Mexico and Colombia. Our aim with this paper is to address this major gap in our understanding of education within a context of drug violence and insecurity. Moreover, drug-related violence is still not considered an emergency by a large part of the humanitarian sector or in academia, thus it is overlooked in fields such as education in emergencies. As we demonstrate in this paper, the young people who are implicated in this violence are exposed to as much if not more stress than young people living in conflict settings. The need to frame these youths' experiences within the education in emergencies debate is thus relevant and urgent.

Drawing from data we collected in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and Medellín, Colombia, this paper explores the relation between school experiences and participation in the drug trade among adolescents and young men, broadly between the ages of 12 and 29.<sup>3</sup> We specifically ask, How do the school experiences of youth in both contexts shape their entry into the drug business? To answer this question, we draw from two studies, one each in Mexico and Colombia, two countries that have experienced particularly violent episodes over several decades that can be attributed at least in part to criminal dynamics related to the drug business. By "drug business," we refer to both local dealing and transnational trafficking in illicit substances.

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3 Those involved in the drug trade are, to a very large extent, male. This age range was assigned by the National Youth Institute in Mexico City.

We structured this paper as follows. We first present a brief review of the evidence linking school experiences and delinquency, in Latin America and at the global level. We then make the argument for our focus on Ciudad Juárez and Medellín and outline the methodologies used in the two studies we bring together in this piece. We then turn to the core of the paper, an in-depth exploration of the school experiences of youth involved in criminal groups in the two locations.

In this paper, we make three main theoretical contributions to the debate on education in emergencies in the context of the war on drugs. One contribution is to problematize use of the term “drop out” to describe the process whereby youth disengage from school and end up leaving it (the term is used in a wealth of literature, such as Agnew 1991; Booth, Farrell, and Varano 2008; Thornberry et al. 2003; Henry et al. 2012). We provide empirical evidence to support using the term “push out” instead to refer to the exclusionary structures at play in the school environment that end up “pushing” certain students out.

We also show that social relationships matter in attempting to understand education access, which confirms Hirschi’s (1969) assertion that a lack of social bonds can play a role for those who stray from conventional norms. Without affective bonds with their parents and teachers, youth have either no emotional incentive to conform to conventional norms in the best case, or no exemplars of positive behaviors in the worst case. Echoing somewhat the findings of Burdick-Will (2013) and Garot (2010), we specifically emphasize the crucial role teachers play in the process of school disengagement. However, we also stress that teachers cannot be held individually responsible, as there is an exclusionary and repressive structure of education policies and regulations that guides and even restrains the extremely challenging work of teachers. Third, and most importantly, we bring to light the unheard voices of hard-to-reach youth who have participated in crime but are not sufficiently represented in current scholarly work. Based on their narratives, we argue that it is not these youth who have rejected school but the school system that has rejected them.

### **A BRIEF REVIEW OF EVIDENCE ON THE LINK BETWEEN SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND DELINQUENCY**

The link between school experiences and delinquency can be traced back to Hirschi’s (1969) theory of social control, which is based largely on the connection between individuals and conventional social institutions, including the family and the school. Hirschi argued that individuals with positive social bonds—including

those with a strong attachment to authority figures, positive friendships, and a commitment to socially accepted norms and institutions, and the belief that these things are important—are more likely to conform to conventional norms. Conversely, Hirschi posited that boys who are less attached to their parents and teachers or have weak or broken social bonds are more likely to engage in delinquent activities.

Since Hirschi's work, a plethora of mostly quantitative studies have explored the relationship between school dropout and delinquency. One strand of the literature signals that the factors leading to dropout may be more salient in explaining delinquent behavior than dropping out of school itself (Agnew 1991; Booth et al. 2008; Thornberry et al. 2003). For example, Henry et al. (2012) argued that leaving school is only the end point in a process of school disengagement, which usually begins in the early stages of education. Although this literature establishes a solid association between dropping out of school and participation in delinquent activities, the use of the term “drop out” is problematic. Rather than unpacking, as we do in this paper, the multilayered process of school disengagement that is shaped by structural exclusionary practices embedded in how schools operate, the literature implies that responsibility for the decision to leave school lies squarely with the student.

Some evidence shows that teachers can be an important factor in pushing students out of school. In one qualitative study that examined the educational experiences of youth involved in criminality, Garot (2010) identified the critical role teachers play in students' lack of interest in school. Garot found that teachers often had strong prejudices that made them consider some students unteachable and, further, that they had no incentive to teach these students beyond the minimum required. This led to these youths' overall disillusionment and apathy toward school in particular, which eventually caused them to abandon the institution. Ultimately, these students felt that leaving the school was their most viable (or perhaps only) reasonable choice. In this paper, we echo this line of argument and suggest that school environments and interactions can in fact push students out.

Another significant body of qualitative work with youth engaged in delinquency (e.g., participating in gangs, the drug business) has focused on economic marginalization and stigmatization as important drivers of illicit activity. Densely (2013, 40), who studied youth gangs in London, argued that “gang members clearly have high aspirations to succeed and share with their non-gang counterparts the material expectations encouraged within advanced capitalism,” thus suggesting that criminal behavior is the result of a mismatch between material aspirations and economic



opportunities. Anderson's *Code of the Street* (2000), which focuses on street culture in Philadelphia, and MacLeod's *Ain't No Makin' It* (2008), about poor men from low-income housing projects in Massachusetts, offer similar arguments.

In Latin America, there is a long tradition of studies on youth engagement in criminality (see, e.g., Rodgers and Jones 2009; Zubillaga 2009; Ward 2013; Wolseth 2014), which points to the connection between socioeconomic exclusion and delinquency. In his research with young men involved in crime-related violence in Caracas, Venezuela, Zubillaga (2009) noted how engagement in delinquent trajectories is, for these young men, a way of proving their social existence and gaining respect. While a handful of studies from the LAC region suggest an association between school experiences and participation in some forms of delinquency (Azaola and Pérez-Correa 2012; González-Pérez et al. 2012) or dissocial behavior (de la Rubia and Ortiz Morales 2012), no work has reached this explicit conclusion or specifically included youth who participate in the drug business. In sum, while insightful, the literature on youth criminal engagement and their economic motivations has only marginally addressed the role of youth educational experiences (particularly feeling excluded from school) in shaping delinquent trajectories. However, this connection is empirically evident and is often cited peripherally in the literature (see, e.g., Wolseth 2014; Ward 2013), which suggests the presence of important links between youth engagement in violence, being pushed out of school, and feeling stigmatized and excluded. Such relationship warrants further exploration of the kind we undertake in this paper.

Several nationally representative studies in Mexico and Colombia shed light on the reasons for school abandonment among the general population, but these are not specific to youth who engage in criminal activity. A recent report in Mexico, for example, found that the main reason for abandoning school at the secondary level was economic hardship (48.2%), followed by disliking school (19.9%) (SEP 2012). A study on school desertion at the secondary school level in Colombia found that the key drivers of temporary school abandonment for the largest share of respondents was that "school was far from home" (37.1%), followed by "there were financial constraints at home" (33.2%) (Obregón et al. 2010). Because these results are generalized for the secondary level school population in Mexico and Colombia, they have little to say about whether these factors help explain delinquency, as youth who engage in delinquent acts may be underrepresented in these figures. These large-sample studies on school desertion in the countries of interest do not specifically highlight the diverse experiences of different youth subgroups, which could provide a better understanding of what links school experiences with delinquency.

One main contribution we make in this paper is the rich qualitative data provided in the largely unheard narratives of a hard-to-reach population group that has been overlooked in the literature on school desertion in Latin America—that is, our study participants, who have been actively involved in the drug trade in Medellín and Ciudad Juárez. Our findings add nuance and complexity to some of the direct associations presented in the literature and problematize some of the assumptions underlying concepts and terminology commonly attributed to these youth. While theoretical frameworks emphasize the notions of dropout, nonattachment, noncommitment, and disinvestment in school, we argue that these explanations provide simplistic renditions of the relationship between school experiences and delinquency in the contexts we studied and fail to appropriately acknowledge the role institutions play in pushing students out of school. In this article, we tease out the mechanisms that drive this connection among youth who have participated in the drug business.

### CONTEXTS, POPULATIONS, AND CASE SELECTION

We conducted the data collection and analysis for the two studies we drew from for this paper separately and in different contexts, and using somewhat different epistemologies. We decided *a posteriori* to write this article collaboratively, discovering not only that the research questions in the two studies were very similar but that the findings they uncovered using different approaches were strikingly analogous. This section elaborates on the comparability between the geographic areas selected, describes our methods and sampling techniques, and reflects on our limitations and ethical considerations.

As a starting point, Mexico and Colombia are two relevant and comparable cases for this inquiry, due to cultural and demographic similarities, and to high rates of criminality related to the drug trade. Significantly, the two cities in question—Medellín and Ciudad Juárez—have been and still are focal points in the production and commercialization of drugs and are key stops in the drug route from Latin America to the United States. Both cities have experienced a spike in violent crime that is attributed to criminal groups involved in the drug trade. Similarities and connections between Ciudad Juárez and Medellín, and the broader contexts in which they are located, provide solid ground for a joint analysis.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This work not only crosses the qualitative-quantitative divide, it also opens the possibility for authors using different research methodologies and subscribing to different epistemologies to work together. As far as we are concerned, it is uncommon for scholars who have used such different methodological approaches, particularly those implementing ethnographic and mixed-methods research, to conduct a joint analysis of their data to draw common conclusions.

## CIUDAD JUÁREZ

The situation in Ciudad Juárez reflects national developments in Mexico, where agreements were negotiated for decades between government officials from the Institutional Revolutionary Party—which ruled the country almost undisputedly for 71 years—and various organized criminal groups involved in the drug trade.<sup>5</sup> These agreements assigned fiefdoms—specific areas of the national territory known as *plazas*—to the control of particular organized crime groups that were free to transport and distribute drugs (Hernández 2010). The agreements broke down with the arrival of the right-wing National Action Party in the country's national political arena. In 2006, Felipe Calderón, the second president from the National Action Party, declared a war on drugs and vowed to put an end to the corruption and agreements that had characterized previous administrations. His declaration caused an eruption of violence between rival organized criminal groups, particularly in strategic areas that had a lucrative narcotics trade, such as Ciudad Juárez. This city, which is located on the northwest border between Mexico and the United States, has a long history of smuggling. Because it is so close to the border, it is a central and symbolic point of entry for drugs into the US, which is the reason it became coveted territory and precipitated a notorious war between rival organized criminal groups (Juárez and Sinaloa) at the beginning of the Calderón presidency.<sup>6</sup>

## MEDELLÍN

Violence increased in Medellín in the 1960s and 1970s, when a decline in textile manufacturing facilitated a surge of illicit economies, mainly those related to trafficking marijuana and cocaine. The city's criminal dynamics were revolutionized between the 1980s and the mid-1990s with the creation of the Medellín cartel, headed by Pablo Escobar. Bands of street children and marginalized young people were “employed” by narcotraffickers as informants, watchdogs, and assassins. During this time, drug-related violence intersected with the civil war between the state, leftist guerrillas, and the paramilitaries. These various factions engaged in successive alliances and confrontations with drug cartels—a complex history that goes beyond the purposes of this paper. Homicide rates in Medellín reached a peak of 395.4 per 100,000 people in 1991, and Escobar was killed in 1993 after

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5 In 1988, the first time Mexico introduced electronic ballot counting, the leftist candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas won the popular vote. However, under the excuse of a “system failure” in the vote counting, which was clearly showing a lead for Cárdenas, votes were recounted and the Institutional Revolutionary Party candidate was declared winner of the 1988 elections.

6 The use of the term “organized criminal group” rather than “cartel” corresponds with the problematization of the latter term, as explained by the Mexican historian Luis Astorga (2005).

a period of violent state repression. This marked the start of a new phase in the urban drug war, as the minicartels that emerged from the fragmentation of the Medellín cartel started to fight each other. Since then, homicide rates in the city have steadily declined (though they still are above the regional average), thanks to a variety of municipal and national policies.<sup>7</sup> However, the drug business remains solidly in place and is carried out primarily by large criminal groups called *BACRIM* (short for *bandas criminales* or criminal gangs) (McDermott 2014). During this time, a crucial rung in the drug chain—exports to the United States—has been falling into the hands of the Mexican cartels, which retain control to this day (*El Espectador* 2018).

### METHODS AND SAMPLING

Both of the studies this paper is based on explored adolescents' trajectories into organized crime and violence. Both focused on similar populations of adolescents and young men, who were approximately ages 12 to 29. However, it is important to note that the youth who participated in the research were at different stages of engagement in criminal activities. Those in Ciudad Juárez were serving time in prison for offenses related to the drug trade, while those in Medellín had just started to engage in very small-scale drug trafficking.

While seeking to answer similar research questions, the two studies employed different methodologies. The study in Ciudad Juárez used mixed-methods research, including in-depth interviews and surveys with a sample of youth (n=20) who engaged in delinquency and a comparison sample of youth who did not (n=360) (Chavez 2018).<sup>8</sup> The long-term ethnographic research conducted for the Medellín study involved daily observation, informal conversation, and interaction with about 20 key informants over a three-year span, and casual conversations, engagement with, and observation of hundreds of other informants during this time (Butti 2019).<sup>9</sup>

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7 This is according to the World Bank database, which relies on the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's International Homicide Statistics database.

8 This research was funded by a doctoral grant from Cambridge Trust/Scientific Council of Mexico. The research received approval from the University of Cambridge Centre of Development Studies.

9 This research was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ES/J500112/1), received ethical approval from the University of Oxford (SSD/CUREC1A/14-SSH\_C2\_15\_014), and was carried out in the spirit of the 1975 Helsinki Declaration. Ethnography is a well-established method in social science research, which entails the sustained observation of and engagement with a chosen population in a chosen context over an extended period of time. It does not entail the conduct and recording of structured interviews or focus groups but, rather, structured note-taking of the observations and informal conversations conducted.

## DATA COLLECTION IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ

Data collection for the sample in Ciudad Juárez, the city with the world's highest homicide rate during the war on drugs (Ortega 2010), was undertaken by Chavez in 2014 and 2015. The research involved surveys and interviews with young men who were serving a prison sentence for a variety of offenses related to the drug trade.<sup>10</sup> During the first stage of the study, 180 youth were randomly selected from a prison population of more than 3,000 to participate in a survey that covered a series of subjects related to participants' aspirations, as well as to their family, school, and the community environment they grew up in. At the end of the survey, all 180 participants were asked whether they would be willing to participate in the second stage of the study, a follow-up interview. From those who consented, after a quick preliminary scan of their survey responses (which either fell in line with or contradicted the study hypotheses), a subsample of only 20 participants was selected for in-depth, semistructured interviews that were conducted face-to-face in prison.<sup>11</sup> Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and an hour and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

## DATA COLLECTION IN MEDELLÍN

Butti collected data over the course of more than 18 months of fieldwork in Colombia between 2015 and 2018 using an ethnographic methodology. Most of the fieldwork was conducted in the Antioquia region in the city of Medellín, and in the small nearby town of San Carlos, which historically has been a center of drug-dealing activities and paramilitary violence (CNMH 2011).<sup>12</sup> Conversations were held predominantly with a group of youth ages 14-29, who were known to consume drugs and sell them for a business that was controlled by criminal structures operating in and around Medellín, and with their families and community members. These boys were selected through a process of snowball sampling, which is common in studies of marginalized populations involved in illicit businesses and of hard-to-reach groups more generally (see Shaghghi,

10 Law against organized crime in Mexico dictates that, when three or more individuals have organized to execute—in a permanent or systematic way—a series of crimes, they will be sanctioned as members of organized delinquency. The crimes considered in this research were, therefore, (1) crimes against public health, which included transport and possession of drugs, distribution, consumption, and/or cultivation, among others; (2) crimes related to arms trafficking; (3) other forms of organized delinquency, including human trafficking; and (4) theft. The study also considered individuals sentenced for crimes such as (5) kidnapping, (6) extortion, and (7) homicide related to organized crime.

11 For example, one hypothesis of the study was that participants who came from violent households were more likely to have participated in organized criminal activity. We selected a mix of participants for our interviews, some who experienced violence in the household and some who did not.

12 When we refer to Medellín in this paper, it includes the surrounding area.

Bhopal, and Sheikh 2011). Butti lived in the boys' community and, while making her research intentions explicit, she built rapport with a small number of youth who helped her slowly approach others. After she gained their trust, she held daily informal conversations with these youths while observing their routines and practices. She also followed them as they moved between San Carlos and the peripheries of Medellín. These conversations often revolved around the boys' engagement in illegal and violent activities, but they also addressed the range of topics that make up a typical adolescent's life, such as their aspirations for the future. Butti recorded the conversations in written field notes after each engagement; thus, the quotes presented in this paper should not be read as exact transcriptions but as her best attempt to report what her informants said. The quotes presented in this paper come from the limited number of participants with whom Butti was able to achieve a closer level of interaction; she also judged them to be emblematic cases of the population she intended to describe. Relying on the narratives of a few emblematic cases is standard practice in ethnographic research conducted with participants who belong to hidden populations (see, e.g., Goffman 2014; Bourgois 2003).

### ANALYSIS

We conducted a separate content analysis for each study, using the quotes and notes from Medellín and Ciudad Juárez. This involved reading through transcripts and notes multiple times, creating separate thematic codes for each study, and identifying segments of the interviews and notes that fit under the developed codes. For the Medellín study, we used the qualitative analysis software NVivo, and for Ciudad Juárez we used AtlasTi. To bring the data on Medellín and Ciudad Juárez together, we identified the main underlying themes of participants' experiences through a collaborative process. We first developed an outline for the paper. Chavez provided initial codes from the Mexico study and checked with Butti to determine if they matched the codes of the Colombia study. Butti then reviewed the initial codes and added more where necessary. We then assigned content from our respective analyses to the corresponding codes. What is interesting and valuable about this joint (rather than comparative) analysis is that we arrived at the same conclusions in different countries using different research methods.

### LIMITATIONS

This work aims to understand the school experiences of a male population engaged in crime in Medellín and Ciudad Juárez and how these experiences have shaped their delinquent trajectories in the drug business. While we have highlighted the strengths of putting together our different methodological approaches and uncovered similar findings in our research, we are aware that these findings are not generalizable beyond the specific contexts of Medellín and Ciudad Juárez. Furthermore, the questions we have addressed here—how school experiences contribute to youth being pushed out of school and how this relates to their delinquency—do not account for other factors that play a role in the decision to engage in delinquent behavior, such as the presence of fathers or father figures and other family members who are engaged in the drug business. There also are broad macro factors, such as the corruption and institutional weakness in both countries that have allowed the drug business to flourish. However, while important in their own right, these factors are not the focus of this article.

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

These studies posed three main ethical questions. First, while our research had the potential to be emotionally distressful for both researchers and participants, this was outweighed by the possible benefits of our findings, such as more inclusive education policies and including hard-to-reach youth in future academic research. Second, it was possible that the research work would effectively legitimate the youths' delinquent actions, as asking them about it could make them feel it is an attractive topic. However, we believe that talking to us prompted these youth to engage in some degree of critical reflection on their behavior, rather than pushing them further into it. Third, issues also arose about the publication of sensitive material. However, this study presents the subjective experiences of the young people we engaged with, which do not necessarily present a direct threat to the functioning of the criminal business itself. As such, our research was unlikely to trigger retaliatory reactions against us or our informants. Moreover, we have taken great care to disguise the identities of our young informants by changing their names and some biographical details, always doing so with their informed consent. All participants in the Ciudad Juárez interviews were asked for permission to use an audio recorder and were reminded at different points of the interview that the recorder could be turned off if they felt it was necessary. In the Medellín ethnography, consent was considered an ongoing process and was reiterated numerous times throughout the months of fieldwork.

## SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL GROUPS IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ AND MEDELLÍN

Our findings suggest that youths' school experiences and involvement in the drug business are inextricably linked through a vicious cycle of stigmatization, separation, punishment, and exclusion. For the young men in our study, leaving school and making a career in the street is a way of gaining the social recognition they lack elsewhere. Our findings also show that these youth do put high value on education, but once they have been excluded from school, their attempts to get back in usually fail, which leads them to embed themselves further in the realm of the street. As success at school seems impossible to them, engaging in delinquent behaviors becomes the only alternative way to achieve a better life.

### FINDINGS

#### DROPPED OUT OR PUSHED OUT?

During interviews, our informants often mentioned "*la falta de dinero*" (the lack of money) as a main reason for leaving school. However, many of the young people who participated in these studies had families that were able to provide for them. In fact, their living conditions were modest but not extremely poor. If it is not dire economic need that pulls these young people into the streets, what is it?

To understand what happens in the streets and why young people end up there, we need to look at what happens while they are still at school. It is not so much that these youth drop out of school for lack of money, as their own statements may suggest and many in their communities believe. A deeper, more nuanced analysis of their narratives shows that they are in fact pushed out of school by stigma, marginalization, and exclusion, as we illustrate in this section.

Our data from both Medellín and Ciudad Juárez show that youth involved in illegal activities are often stereotyped by their communities as students with low academic performance. Many mothers in both contexts, faced with teachers' repeated negative remarks about their children, become convinced that their child "*no es bueno para estudiar*" (is not good at school), as one mother in Medellín said. However, this stereotype did not necessarily match their academic performance. In fact, many of these young people performed well at school.



In Ciudad Juárez, more than half the young people surveyed (54.6%) disagreed and highly disagreed with the statement, “Your grades in school were usually low.”<sup>13</sup> When asked during the in-depth interviews about their experiences in school, participants confirmed this finding; at least three of the twenty youths explicitly mentioned performing well in school. When asked about his experiences, Rodrigo, who was 21 years old, mentioned that, before he dropped out of school, he was a highly engaged student involved in academic contests and competitive sports. Jorge, who was 27, abandoned school at the secondary level, but he mentioned liking school so much that he often did his sister’s homework.

Several youths in the Medellín study reported similar experiences. They often commented on how smart they were, thus suggesting that they had the ability to be good students. Their problems at school, they suggested, did not come from poor academic performance but from what was often referred to as “unruly behavior.” Oscar, who was 22 years old, reported that “they didn’t expel me from school because I wasn’t good but because I was making trouble all the time.” Indeed, as these youth themselves admitted, they routinely violated school regulations, for which they were continually reprimanded, punished, and, ultimately, expelled. As 24-year-old Pedro, from Ciudad Juárez, explained:

Well . . . in the beginning I was, in fact, very smart. Yes, I had good grades and had no problems there. The problem was that I was very much a *vago* [slacker], a disaster . . . I would often not pay attention to teachers, what they said, and I ignored them. I would present my homework, I would meet what was required of me, but I would not follow disciplinary rules, other norms . . . of keeping quiet, for example.

As a result, these youth are often considered “impossible to deal with,” as a teacher in Medellín said. In an attempt to “straighten out” this particular group of students, their teachers used strategies that further isolated and marginalized them. For example, the teachers typically separated the unruly kids from the others. Pedro, from Ciudad Juárez, explained that, before being expelled from school, he was moved from the morning school to the evening school, where there was a concentration of “ungovernable” students and students who did not perform well. He stressed that it was the school authorities who placed him in this group, rather than him choosing to associate with other “unruly” youths:

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<sup>13</sup> While social desirability is a constant factor that may bias survey responses, self-reporting one’s behavior is a widely accepted approach to understanding diverse social phenomena in social science fields, such as criminology.

They switched me from morning [school] to the evening . . . I think the evening shifts at any school are worse . . . this is where *la vagancia* [slackness] and all the unruly kids are concentrated. I mean, in the mornings, they give preference to students who pass exams, who have, well, a higher level. They are given preference. And the evening [school] . . . you could say that this is for people who do not have a good academic level.

As Pedro's case illustrates, although he was performing well in school, his unruly behavior led teachers to move him to an evening shift, where the association with people who did not have a good academic level negatively affected his experience. The teachers made this move despite abundant evidence that pairing students who struggle in the classroom behaviorally or academically with high performers produces better results (see McMaster, Fuchs, and Fuchs 2006). Evidently, labelling Pedro a slack and unruly student became a self-fulfilling prophecy (see Kaplan 1992). Teachers, school psychologists, and others who label some children as "problem" or "ungovernable" students and separate them from others in fact help to push these students out of school and down the criminal path, particularly in societies where criminal opportunity structures already exist. In Pedro's case, for example, the fact that he was performing well in school but was nonetheless placed with low-performing students who often got in trouble reinforced his negative behavior and ultimately contributed to his expulsion from school.

Another strategy often used to bring problematic students back on track was repressive, authoritative punishment. The youth in our studies often reported that teachers were very authoritative and that few played a supportive role for them. Close to one-third of the participants in Ciudad Juárez agreed or highly agreed that, in general, teachers at their school were impatient and distant with the students (30.2%, n=180). More than one-quarter also agreed that their teachers failed to motivate students to continue learning (27.7%, n=180), which suggests that teachers may contribute to negative school experiences.

Jesus from Ciudad Juárez, for example, mentioned that it really bothered him when teachers yelled at him for misbehaving, so he would often yell back. When asked why he had left school, he explained that the violence he suffered at home—he was physically punished by his parents—made him unwilling to accept authority figures in the school setting. In his words, "I did not like to be ordered around . . . maybe I am the way I am because of what I went through as a kid." The qualitative data from Medellín suggest similar conclusions. As 15-year-old Yerson explained when recounting his expulsion, "I really hated how the school principal

was talking to me, telling me what I should and what I shouldn't do, rather than listening to me and trying to understand me.”

In both cities, the isolating, repressive, and exclusionary strategies teachers employ to deal with unruly young people are supported by repressive school regulations and education policies. In fact, in Mexico, corporal punishment in the schools is not explicitly prohibited (Plan International and UNICEF 2015), and while Mexico's General Law on Public Education (2015, 45) does establish that “carrying out actions that jeopardize the health or safety of students” constitutes an infraction, Article 75 establishes that the provisions of the law are not applicable to education workers. This effectively entitles teachers to punish their students using physical violence. In fact, almost one-third (30%) of the respondents in the Ciudad Juárez sample agreed or highly agreed that teachers would react with violence, insults, and/or physical violence when students misbehaved (Chavez 2018). Although a major reform of school rules was mandated in Colombia in 2013, many schools in practice still have a punitive system based on repressive sanctions, such as extra homework, cleaning the school, and expulsion (Butti 2019).<sup>14</sup>

It is understandable that, for frustrated teachers faced with overcrowded classrooms and insubordinate students, punishment may be a logical response. Rather than simply policing unruly children, disciplinary practices in schools often impose the ideal that the teacher rules and the pupils obey, and that adult violence is pedagogical whereas child violence is unsettling. To maintain order in the schools, any behavior that disrupts this model must be promptly eliminated, as exemplified by the story of 22-year-old Oscar from Medellín, who at the time of the research was an active drug dealer:

One day, I found a mobile phone in the toilet and just took it for myself. I thought no one had seen me, but a teacher had. She came to me and told me, “Here's the little thief of the school! Oscar, where is the mobile?” So, I was taken to the school director's office. The director slapped me on my face: “It seems nowadays no one punishes these kids at home, so it's necessary to do that at school!” he exclaimed. I started beating him back. As a result, they expelled me from school, and that damaged *mi hoja de vida* [my curriculum vitae]. That gave me a reputation as the “problem student” of the school. They wrote that I am aggressive, and that they will never receive me again to study in

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14 Law 1620 of 2013 and Decree 1965 of 2013.

a school. Since then, I am considered a danger for other students. So, I don't feel like going back to studying.

Oscar's detailed account of how he was expelled from school sheds light on the vicious cycle linking stigmatization, punishment, and exclusion. Oscar's previous notoriety as a problem student, as he himself explained, led school authorities to react violently to the theft of the mobile phone. This triggered an aggressive reaction in him, which reinforced his existing reputation. The negative mark his expulsion left on Oscar's curriculum vitae, as he called it, emblematically reducing his life to a sheet of paper, crystallized the "bad kid" stigma attached to him and reduced his chance of being able—or even wanting—to return to school, which led him to embark on a criminal path instead.

Indeed, even when these youth are suspended from school for just a couple of days, they take it as an indication that they are no longer welcome there. In his account, Oscar emphasized that not returning to school was a personal decision, which many of these youth stressed in their narratives. While there certainly is a degree of agency in their decisions, our data demonstrate that, more than choosing to drop out of school (as some of them put it), these youth are in fact pushed out by a series of hostile practices and policies that end up stigmatizing, isolating, and eventually expelling them.

#### BEING SOMEONE IN LIFE

Once they are pushed out of school, these youth look for other ways of "being someone," as they often said, which is where the street life and its economically attractive options come in. This process begins by their framing school as boring and pointless. They express their preference for "hanging out" (*andar en la vagancia* in Ciudad Juárez and *gaminear* in Medellín). Manuel, a 29-year-old Mexican, explained the concept of hanging out: "As a *chavalo* [youth], one leaves the school, does homework, and then goes to hang out in the neighborhood. You go out to the street, out there, on the street corner . . . with all the other friends from the neighborhood, who are also in [the same] school with you. And we would all go there and hang out." Milán, a 28-year-old Mexican, mentioned that common neighborhood activities included "graffitiing . . . hanging out with people from the neighborhood." Ricardo, who started using drugs at age 13, commented that the most common activities in the neighborhood were "going from party to party, getting high, hanging out with *morritas* [girls]."

But is hanging out really all these young people aspire to? A nuanced appreciation of their statements and behaviors reveals a different story. Even when they have been stigmatized and rejected by the school, these youth continue to have educational aspirations. For example, when participants from Ciudad Juárez were asked to list five things they aspired to in life in order of importance, having an education ranked as the first priority among 37.8 percent (Chavez 2018), which highlights the importance they place on education.

In addition, the young people participating in our studies in both countries repeatedly tried to go back to school. Their statements about the nice and easy life in the streets were often intertwined with more reflective remarks about the value of education: “I would like to have a decent life, an education, a job,” said Pablo, a 15-year-old Colombian. However, he immediately added, “I would like to [go back to school], but it seems impossible.” Indeed, their attempts to go back to school were often in vain, as the structure that pushed them out the first time remained in place and they encountered the same obstacles—difficulties with teachers, with discipline, with peers—which pushed them out once again. As Pedro from Ciudad Juárez explained, “In my mind, I wanted to be a part of society, do you understand? But there were moments of anger, that made society believe that I was a bad person . . . which I was.” In these situations, teachers often do not offer a helping hand. “It’s useless to invest in them,” said one Colombian teacher. “They have already been lost.”

While these youth often describe leaving school as a decision that they have control over, their narratives are intertwined with a deep sense of regret. Data from the Ciudad Juárez study suggest that recognizing the value of an education often emerges in the later stages of the transition from youth to adulthood, and perhaps more so during a period of incarceration, when participants have had time to reflect on their life choices. Manuel, a Mexican youth serving time in prison, originally stated that he left school because he did not like it, but he also mentioned that, to prevent young people like him from engaging in criminal activity, the government needed to provide them with an education. Although primary and secondary school in Mexico are free and compulsory, Manuel is correct in stating that public education does not reach all children. School fees, supplies, and uniforms are often prohibitive costs for families who live at or below the national poverty line. Moreover, where public education is affordable, the difference in quality between public and private institutions is great. As a result, not all students have equal access to quality education. The importance of education as a preventative strategy was also highlighted by Milán, a Ciudad Juárez participant. When asked what advice he could offer Mexican youth to

steer them away from participating in crime, he said that “they [should] start studying *machin*,” a word derived from the English “machine” that indicates intensity. In other words, Milán was emphatically advocating for young people to invest in their education. In the participants’ narratives, education was often equated with the notion of *ser alguien en la vida* (being somebody in life), as Yerson from Medellín explained:

Studying is the only thing that counts, right? If you don’t have education and money, you are no one for the government. Today, you need a basic education even just to sweep the streets. If you don’t have that, you can’t do anything, so you are no one. Without a job, you don’t have anything. You don’t exist.

If having an education, and therefore a job, means existing, what becomes of those who, for a variety of reasons, are repeatedly pushed out of school? Convinced as they are that school is a place where they will never be able to succeed, these young people have only one option left: to craft an alternative school for themselves, *la escuela de la calle*, the school of the street. As José Luis, a young Mexican, explained, “Either you are a student or you belong to the street corner.” This suggests that, if one cannot have the identity of student, the only alternative is the identity of the street. Yerson from Medellín described his time as a youth on the street:

I learned so much there. I learned not to believe in anyone. I learned that the person who is closest to you is also the one who is most likely to stab you in the back. I learned to have more hatred, more anger. I learned to recognize people from one look—knowing if they are fake, if they can betray me, or not. I also had friendships that were worth it. I also learned some skills, like working wood.

Their statements reveal that these young people are in fact eager to learn but that the school was not a place they were welcome to do so. The choice to leave school was, then, also a choice to move out of an environment where these youth feel their intelligence is not appreciated to one where they feel it is: the street. As they often say, *la inteligencia criminal* (criminal intelligence) is essential to “make it” in the streets and to pursue a successful criminal career. The youth enjoy bragging about this quality and emphasize how skilled they are at planning criminal missions. Thus they stress that being a criminal is not something for everyone: you need to be street smart. As Yerson said, “I know I am very intelligent, but I only use [my]

intelligence to do bad things. I know how to build a bomb, you know! That's a very complicated thing. But that's very easy for me." In other words, these youth often stressed that they are smart and have a talent—talent the school system never recognized in them.

Rather than representing their genuine aspirations, these young people embrace the identity of the *vago/gamín* (someone who likes the street) and of the criminal as alternatives to that of the good student, which their parents, teachers, and communities have repeatedly told them they will never be. Engaging in delinquent acts, therefore, is a way—perhaps the only viable way they see—to have a better life.

Crucially, the better life and sense of recognition these youth find in the street also entail having money. This money is not necessary for them to live—as noted above, most of these youth did not live in extreme poverty—but to be able to afford more than others around them. This is something these youth have admired since their first years of life. David, a 24-year-old from Ciudad Juárez, explained: "Seeing, I don't know, that they [his friends] had a good car, or well, that they did not go to school and even then they had [material things] . . . I realized that it [school] was not necessary. If I can have the same things, it is not necessary for me to go [to school]." Like David, many of the participants in our studies cared about being able to display expensive material goods, not only as markers of social status but as a glaring reminder that the promise of capitalism is only for some: for the rich people who live in luxury districts, and for those who carve out a high place on the social ladder by engaging in criminal activities and manage to "succeed" without educational qualifications.

In societies that tend to equate masculinity with providing for the family through monetary success but that also are affected by high rates of youth unemployment and job scarcity, especially for the least educated youth, illicit activity is the only way of achieving this success. Having money—and especially more money than others—is key to being someone in social terms, to earning respect. As Yerson from Medellín explained, "*Ser alguien* (being someone) means that you have a house, a job, money. That's when you are someone. But if you have no money, you are no one." For these youth, who have failed to "be someone" at school, money becomes an existential necessity, as it proves, to themselves and to others, that their life matters.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Through a combined analysis of interview, survey, and ethnographic data from Ciudad Juárez and Medellín, we have explored how educational experiences shape certain young people's engagement in the illegal drug business. The available literature offers some explanation of why adolescents and young men in these contexts drop out of the school system, but it less often frames the issue as one of youth being "pushed out." Nor does it focus on a central theme of how their educational experiences contribute to their embarking on a delinquent path. While the literature on youth engagement in crime and violence points to the importance of the school-delinquency connection, this strand of scholarship lacks an in-depth analysis of the link between educational experiences and delinquent behavior.

In this paper, we have drawn from our research to offer some insight into the school experiences of a group of youths and how these experiences connect to their delinquency. Our findings demonstrate that educational experiences shape youth involvement in the drug business similarly across two different contexts, both of which are hotspots of the war on drugs.

We find that their desire for a better life does not imply that the study participants were living in extreme poverty. In fact, economic hardship does not wholly explain why these young people left school and engaged in delinquent activities. What money made through the drug trade represents for these young people is not a means of survival but a way of obtaining social recognition, which they lacked with their families and schools—in short, an illegitimate avenue for a legitimate want. A context of high inequality, as these youth experienced in Ciudad Juárez on the Mexico-US border and in the urban sprawl of Medellín, generates urgent material desires that are difficult to meet by following a traditional education pathway. This draws youth toward what is by far the most lucrative business in their neighborhoods: selling drugs. This finding runs counter to the idea that the main reason for leaving school is economic need. We suggest, rather, that among the urban poor, and particularly at-risk youth, it may be that relative poverty or inequality plays a larger role than pressing economic need in their decision to leave school. Being able to afford expensive goods allows these youth to feel they are someone, in both economic and social terms. This finding confirms previous research with young men who engage in illicit activity across the globe in cities like Caracas, Venezuela, where Zubillaga (2009) noted that young men engage in crime as an avenue to reaffirm their social existence—but also in London, Philadelphia, and elsewhere around the globe.



Second, participants' repeated failure in school does not necessarily indicate a lack of academic talent, an assumption that is contradicted by their high performance in their early school years, nor does it explain their participation in criminal activities. With this finding, we challenge the argument that youth who participate in delinquent or risky behaviors did not perform well or were not invested in school, and that poor school performance explains their engagement in criminality (see, e.g., Thornberry et al. 2003; Booth et al. 2008). Our findings reveal instead that repressive and exclusionary school regulations do not help to integrate children who, despite performing well, are particularly unruly and have a hard time complying with normative behavior. Being continuously punished by the system, these "unruly" youth often decide to leave school completely and instead to turn to the street life, where the opportunity to participate in the drug business is in place. Our findings confirm that students are not making the decision to leave school in a vacuum; rather, they are being pushed out of school by a series of relationships and disciplinary processes.

Third, despite these youths' continued assertions that school was boring, the fact that they repeatedly attempted to go back and often expressed ambition to complete their education and have a professional career demonstrates that they do not, in fact, lack the motivation to study. Our findings show that, despite all the challenges and conflicts these young people experience in the school setting, they continue to put a high value on education and try to get back into the system, only to be pushed out time and again. The feeling of being rejected and out of place in school leads them to develop oppositional behaviors in which hanging out is preferable to staying at school. Thus they turn to the realm of the street, where they feel their intelligence is more appreciated. As they become convinced that success at school is impossible, engaging in delinquent acts becomes the only alternative way to demonstrate that they are smart—even if street smart—and of getting what they view as a better life.

Our findings have several policy-relevant implications. First, gathering systematic data on students' background characteristics to identify those at risk of participation or engagement in criminal activity is essential to providing targeted support. This is especially necessary at the upper-secondary level, where the highest rates of school abandonment occur. Second, expelling children from school should be avoided, even for just a few days, as it discourages youth, particularly those living in marginalized areas, from going back to school altogether. Third, rather than concentrating unruly students in the same classroom, peer support networks should be established between these students and those who do not have conduct issues. Fourth, there should be alternatives to merit-based scholarships that can

cover school costs, as well as further studies, for students who are underperforming but nonetheless quite capable. Finally, it is worth reflecting on the mismatch between the skills typically valued by schools, such as discipline and diligence, and the skills the youth we worked with bring to the table, such as inventiveness and initiative. We ask, Is there room for reorienting the school curriculum to integrate and reward a wider variety of skills?

Taken individually, each of these young people seems insignificant to the broader drug trade, as their lives are often considered irrelevant and easily taken away. As a whole, however, this mass of drug-selling youths is critical—even vital—to the overall functioning of the criminal organizations that threaten security in the regions we studied. This points to the importance of conducting further research on this youth population. Our findings highlight the need to conduct more studies that explore young people's trajectories out of school and into crime, that span disciplinary boundaries, and that use diverse methodologies to deepen understanding of these young people and their lives.

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# CATALYST: EXPANDING HARM-REDUCTION EDUCATION AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WAR ON DRUGS

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## ABSTRACT

*Catalyst is a year-long, bilingual (English/Spanish) fellowship program for high school students and their teachers who live in communities affected by the war on drugs (WoD) that is being waged across the Americas.<sup>1</sup> This educational effort is a response to the social suffering caused by the WoD. Catalyst is working to forge transnational networks of solidarity and analysis among youth on the frontlines of the WoD and to ensure that their voices are heard by the growing drug-policy reform movement. In this field note, I argue that existing abstinence- and prevention-based programs fail to address the structural roots of the WoD and that a radical, more comprehensive approach to drug education is needed. I first lay out the context and rationale for the Catalyst program and then outline some of the challenges and lessons that emerged during its inaugural session. Based on facilitators' and students' experiences at that session, the program is seen as a promising first step toward an alternative approach to drug education. I conclude the field note by suggesting new avenues for inquiry and collaboration between the field of education in emergencies and drug-policy reform.*

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1 See [www.catalyst-catalizador.org](http://www.catalyst-catalizador.org). This field note uses the term “war on drugs” to refer to the series of government campaigns and policies of militarization, criminalization, and securitization that have been instituted in the name of eradicating the production, trafficking, and consumption of drugs. While the negative effects of the WoD have been felt across the globe—for example, in Afghanistan, Thailand, and, most recently, the Philippines—for the purpose of this field note, the WoD refers to the effects the prohibition of drugs has had in the Americas.

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## INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, the human cost of the war on drugs (WoD) has been devastating (Collins 2014). The Americas have been hit especially hard. In Mexico, more than 200,000 people have been murdered and more than 61,000 disappeared since Felipe Calderón declared his country's war on drugs in 2006 (Turak 2018; Villegas 2020). In Colombia, US-backed antinarcotics programs have assaulted the right to life, safety, and subsistence of millions of Colombians and worsened the country's forced-displacement problem (Restrepo-Ruiz and Martinez 2009). In the US, punitive drug policies have contributed to a mass incarceration crisis (Alexander 2010) and the national opioid abuse emergency (National Institute on Drug Abuse 2018). Meanwhile, US-led interdiction efforts in Colombia and Mexico have pushed US-bound drug-trafficking routes into Central America and the Caribbean. In the region, this has led to increased militarization, an intensification of gang violence, and the systematic criminalization of youth, all of which contribute to the ongoing migration crisis (Paley 2014).

Despite the human costs that prohibitionist drug policies have exacted across the Western hemisphere, illicit drug use has remained relatively stable over the last two decades (Porter 2012).<sup>2</sup> What's more, a large portion of the general public continues to view the prohibition of drugs favorably (Pew Research Center 2012; Mendiburo-Seguel et al. 2017; López 2016). Public support for the WoD across the Americas is unsurprising if one considers the prevalence of abstinence-only drug education programs, such as Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.). Founded under the Reagan administration, D.A.R.E. quickly spread to 75 percent of US school districts and to more than 50 countries, including Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, Colombia, and Brazil (D.A.R.E. 2018). Despite a series of studies that have questioned the program's effectiveness (Clayton, Catarello, and Johnston 1996; West and O'Neal 2004; Gorman and Huber 2009; Aikins 2015), the principles promoted by D.A.R.E. still permeate how school communities conceive the purpose and content of drug education (Cunningham et al. 2008; *La Vanguardia* 2012; Sanchez et al. 2017). Across the hemisphere, programs like D.A.R.E. have imparted a prohibitionist mindset to an entire generation, leaving unquestioned the assumption that drugs ought to be criminalized and those in the drug trade pursued by police and military forces.

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2 Prohibitionist drug policies include strategies to eradicate, interdict, and criminalize the production, trafficking, sale, possession, and/or consumption of illegal drugs through the deployment of police, military, and carceral force.



Alternatives to prohibition do exist. For example, since Portugal decriminalized drugs in 2001 as a response to a national opioid overdose crisis, the country has seen a dramatic drop in overdoses, HIV infection, and drug-related crime (Ferreira 2017). Drug-policy experts in Portugal attribute their success with decriminalization to a better understanding of drug use, which has changed attitudes among policymakers, judges, prosecutors, doctors, and the general public (Ferreira 2017; Roy 2018). Dr. Joao Goulao, Portugal's "drug czar," attributes this change in part to education (Roy 2018), which has helped to shift attitudes toward drug policy and created room for reform.

Decriminalization and legal regulation are far from silver-bullet solutions to problems often associated with illicit drugs. Indeed, they could open up new and unexpected problems, such as increasing children's unintentional exposure to drugs (Wang, Heard, and Roosevelt 2017) or causing a rise in the number of individuals who come into contact with the criminal justice system through a process of net-widening (Rosmarin and Eastwood 2012). To avoid creating such problems, new policy proposals must be evaluated carefully and critically. Moreover, while individual countries may opt to decriminalize or legalize certain drugs within their borders, the production and trafficking of drugs still are illegal at the global level. The United Nation's 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and 1988 Convention against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances continue to mandate prohibitionist standards in national drug-control laws, thereby hindering the kind of multilateral, nonprohibitionist drug-policy frameworks needed to disrupt the violence and harm currently experienced along illegal drug supply routes. Finding a sustainable alternative to the WoD will require working across borders to shift mindsets, undoing long-held taboos around illegal drugs, creating space for critical dialogue on drug policy reform, and initiating conflict-transformation processes to repair the damage wrought by prohibition.

Due to its distributed, transnational nature and the complex forms of violence it has unleashed across the Western hemisphere, the WoD is often overlooked as a "silent, chronic emergency" (Pigozzi 1999). As such, education research and interventions that address the WoD in the Americas specifically are scarce (Rodriguez-Gomez and Bermeo 2020). With the field of education in emergencies (EiE) gaining force (Alexander 2018) and a growing global movement that is rethinking drug policy (Youngers 2013; Pardo 2014), it is an opportune moment to build new bridges between the EiE field and drug-policy reform. Determining where and how these two fields can work together will enable more youth to

advocate for more just and humane drug policies and to participate more substantively in remedying the profound harm caused by the WoD.

## **RATIONALE FOR A NEW APPROACH TO DRUG EDUCATION**

Drug policies are often justified by claiming that they protect youth, despite the fact that young people are disproportionately affected by the negative impact of these policies (Barrett 2011). Across North and South America, marginalized young people are especially vulnerable to being recruited into the drug trade, thereby heightening their risk of being incarcerated or killed (Barrett 2015). Similarly, crop-eradication campaigns in drug production zones have contributed to human displacement, reduced school attendance, lower family incomes, food insecurity, and health problems (Barrett 2015). High levels of police harassment often drive young people away from the health services that are available and negatively impact their educational performance (Barrett 2015; Legewie and Fagan 2019). Minors are regularly caught up in home raids, where they see their parents being handcuffed and arrested and are themselves sometimes strip-searched (Barrett 2015). Those whose parents are incarcerated for drug-related offenses suffer a number of profound and lasting consequences, such as damaged family relationships and posttraumatic stress disorder, and they may develop antisocial or criminal tendencies (Robertson 2007).

Despite this grave state of affairs, there is relatively little space for young people to voice their own experiences and opinions in discussions of drug policy, especially those living in marginalized communities on the frontlines of the WoD.<sup>3</sup> The absence of this key demographic in such discussions is a major stumbling block to sustainable conflict transformation in the context of the WoD. If we are to avoid repeating the pitfalls of current drug policies, it is essential that we learn from those who have borne the brunt of the violence caused by the WoD. Thus, we must respond to this urgent need—and great opportunity—to explore how drug education can increase youth participation in discussions of drug-policy reform and conflict transformation in the context of the WoD.

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3 “Frontlines” of the WoD refers here to the wide array of communities that disproportionately experience the multiple forms of drug-related violence that are the result of prohibitionist policy regimes along the transcontinental drug supply chain, from drug-producing communities that face military and police crackdowns in rural Latin America, to communities beset by gang, cartel, and state violence in trafficking and distribution zones, to communities grappling with widespread overdoses and substance abuse disorders.

The vast majority of drug-education programs (Figures 1A and 1B) focus on individual choices and personal health without considering the wider sociopolitical dimensions of drugs (Wysong, Aniskiewicz, and Wright 1994; Stephens, Markus, and Fryberg 2008). Abstinence-only drug education programs, like D.A.R.E., focus on the harmful effects of individual drug use (Figure 1A). More progressive drug-education programs (e.g., the US-based UpFront or Beyond Zero Tolerance programs; Skager 2013) have moved beyond a strictly prohibitionist paradigm and operate within a harm-reduction framework (Figure 1B), which takes for granted that some youth will experiment with drugs. Rather than stigmatizing them, these programs offer information and strategies to help participants identify and reduce the potential harm associated with their personal drug consumption. A small but growing body of evidence suggests that harm-reduction education programs may successfully reduce risky behaviors among adolescents (Poulin and Nicholson 2005; Leslie 2008; Fletcher and Krug 2012; Jenkins, Slemon, and Haines-Saah 2017). With their narrow focus on drug use, however, these programs fail to connect individual drug use to the wider structural harm that current drug policies inflict on a wide range of individuals who do not use drugs (e.g., through mass incarceration, forced displacement, human rights abuses, militarization, the proliferation of organized crime, aerial fumigation of drug crops, etc.).

Figure 1A: Traditional Abstinence-Only Drug Education (e.g., D.A.R.E.)

	HARM	REDUCTION
WAR (ON)		
DRUGS	●	

Source: Rodríguez-Gómez and Di Castri (2018)

Figure 1B: Harm-Reduction Education (e.g., UpFront)

	HARM	REDUCTION
WAR (ON)		
DRUGS	●	●

Source: Rodríguez-Gómez and Di Castri (2018)

Getting young people who are being harmed by current drug policies to engage in transforming those policies and the conflicts they fuel will require a comprehensive, politically engaged paradigm for drug education that addresses the sociocultural, geopolitical, economic, and historic dimensions of drug use and drug policy.

Establishing cross-border exchanges will enable students and educators to come together to share their understanding of how the WoD is experienced in different parts of the world and to build a collective, transnational response to the conflict it generates.

## THE INTERVENTION

Catalyst is the first program to convene adolescents from across the Americas with the goal of fostering youth-driven analysis, solidarity, and action around drugs, drug use, and drug policy. The Catalyst 2017 session was an intensive three-week summer course held in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in July 2017. The inaugural cohort included 17 young adults ages 16 to 19 from communities affected by the WoD in Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and the US.<sup>4</sup> Working within a paradigm of expanded harm reduction, Catalyst fills important gaps in the existing drug-education landscape (Figure 1C).<sup>5</sup> The program was designed to equip youth living on the frontlines of the WoD with the ability to identify, analyze, and act to reduce not only the harm associated with individual drug use but also the wider social harm caused by current drug policies. The program represents a radical intervention, rather than a palliative or preventive one, that puts special emphasis on the structural roots of the WoD, such as colonialism, slavery, racism, Cold War politics, corruption, economic inequality, and US interventionism.

*Figure 1C: Expanded Harm-Reduction Drug Education (e.g., Catalyst)*

	HARM	REDUCTION
WAR (ON)	●	●
DRUGS	●	●

Source: Rodríguez-Gómez and Di Castri (2018)

4 Students' experiences of the WoD included having incarcerated family members, suffering police brutality or racist policing, having either personal or familiar experience with overdoses and/or addictions, having contact or involvement with gangs and organized crime, having experiences of counternarcotic state violence, guerrilla violence and/or (para)military violence, experiencing migration/displacement caused by drug-/gang-related violence, having contact or involvement with drug cropping and/or drug trafficking.

5 "Expanded harm reduction" refers to an approach to drugs that considers not only how the risks and harm drug users face can be reduced, but how the wider social and structural harm inflicted by prohibitionist drug policies on individuals and communities along the transnational drug supply chain can also be reduced and transformed.

At the outset of the project, the Catalyst team defined its four central aims:

1. To ensure that the program is accessible to youth who live on the frontlines of the WoD across the Americas
2. To articulate a new paradigm for drug education and present a comprehensive curriculum that recognizes the multiple ways the WoD is experienced across the Americas, and to increase participants' understanding of its complex, transnational roots
3. To equip participants with the skills and support they need to begin transforming the emergencies created by the WoD in their own communities
4. To create meaningful opportunities for Catalyst graduates to participate in the wider drug-policy reform movement after completing the program

Identifying these aims presented the team with unique opportunities and challenges. The following sections outline the lessons learned while pursuing these aims.

### **OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS**

Ensuring that youth who live on the frontlines of the WoD could access a program like Catalyst demanded intentionality at all stages of the program's implementation. Program staff conducted extensive outreach for the first session of Catalyst, both online and in person, through their relevant personal and professional networks. The benefits of having a transnational team with networks across the Americas soon became evident. The team was intentional in reaching out to teachers, organizations, and activist networks in both urban and rural frontline communities. For the first phase of the application process, prospective participants filled out an online application form that was available in Spanish and English. To ensure that applicants with diverse skills could attend the program, the application included questions to help gauge their affiliation with the WoD, their involvement in their community, and their capacity to think critically. It also required completion of a creative project, in the applicant's chosen medium, that expressed their vision of a world in which drugs no longer were the cause of violence. Ultimately, 164 students from 14 countries and a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, with a fairly even distribution between urban and rural settings, completed the monthlong application process.

The team took a qualitative, subjective approach to evaluating the applications. The first phase involved reading all the applications and creating a shortlist of the top 35 applicants. Shortlisted candidates were those whose applications suggested the greatest curiosity, open-mindedness, creativity, leadership, and an ability to see connections between different phenomena—for example, the militarization of Mexico's and Central America's counternarcotics efforts and increased migration to the US. To ensure that a range of perspectives from along the transcontinental drug supply chain would be represented at Catalyst 2017, the team also considered national, geographic, and socioeconomic diversity. The shortlist included a fairly even distribution of students from communities involved primarily in the production of drugs, facing the realities of drug trafficking, or dealing with the distribution and consumption of drugs.

The second phase of the selection process involved reviewing reference letters and conducting one-on-one phone interviews with the 35 candidates, after which 22 students were accepted as the inaugural Catalyst cohort. The group included seven students from the US, four from Mexico, one from Guatemala, four Colombians, one Peruvian, one Ecuadorian, and three Brazilians. Eight participants identified as female, eight as male, and one as gender nonconforming. Five were native English speakers, twelve native Spanish, and three native Portuguese; eight were bilingual to varying degrees.

A generous grant from the Open Society Foundations made it possible to provide need-based financial aid to all participants. The Catalyst team also raised funds from personal donors to meet additional costs and uphold the program's commitment to offering full, need-based aid. All but one of the participants self-reported their financial need and were awarded full scholarships.

Despite the financial support, many participants still faced significant social and bureaucratic barriers. The concept of a summer experiential travel program was not familiar to many of them or their families. The parents of some Latin American participants, mainly of girls, were understandably suspicious that the program was a human-trafficking scheme. Some of the US participants' parents were afraid to send their child to Mexico, due to the violent images of the country in US media. Multiple phone conversations and personal meetings enabled the Catalyst team to build rapport and trust with parents, and all but two of the selected students ultimately got their parents' consent.

Camilo's case is illustrative of the bureaucratic hurdles many students had to overcome in order to attend Catalyst 2017.<sup>6</sup> As a minor from Colombia traveling abroad alone, Camilo needed a permit that was signed by both his parents or legal guardians in order to exit the country. Camilo was raised by his grandmother and father, but as there had been no formal transfer of guardianship, he had to travel to another town to get his mother's signature. In addition, because nobody in his family had a bank account, Camilo had to rely on a sympathetic teacher to handle the funds Catalyst sent him to cover his expenses. However, while Camilo got what he needed, insurmountable bureaucratic delays prevented three other students from getting their passports in time to attend Catalyst, so of the 22 students accepted, only 17 were able to participate.

Lack of internet and telephone connections impeded many participants' communication with the Catalyst team and complicated the logistics of getting them all to Mexico. Advance planning and a great deal of patience was required to help participants obtain the required travel documents, and once they had their passports, visas, and permits, many needed help making sense of the flight tickets, the airport check-in process, and interactions with custom agents. To address this, the team designed a bilingual handout with detailed instructions and scripts to help students navigate the airport.

The experience of getting all the participants to Mexico was an excellent reminder that financial resources are not the only barrier marginalized youth face in accessing a program like Catalyst. Ensuring that youth from the frontlines of the WoD can access and participate in transnational conversations about drug-policy reform requires a proactive and well-resourced distribution of both financial capital and the social and cultural capital needed to navigate the bureaucracies and institutions of international travel.

Despite the team's best efforts to make Catalyst 2017 as accessible as possible, there is room for improvement. For one thing, students without access to the internet or computers were, by default, excluded from the application process. Therefore, future iterations of the program will experiment with allowing prospective participants to submit their applications via WhatsApp. Another problem is that students without sufficient local support to overcome the many barriers they faced were also prevented from accessing the program. The Catalyst team therefore plans to engage program alumni in developing additional support materials for future prospective participants. This will include conversation guides to help prospective

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6 All names have been changed to protect participants' identities.

participants obtain their parents' consent and support, a guide to finding other adult allies who can help them negotiate local bureaucracies, and a guide to navigating immigration regulations.

### **“IT ISN’T A WAR ON DRUGS, IT’S A WAR ON PEOPLE”: DESIGNING AN EXPANDED HARM-REDUCTION CURRICULUM**

One challenge of designing the first iteration of the Catalyst curriculum was to chart a coherent arc that would recognize the participants' richly diverse experiences and knowledge while providing sufficient conceptual tools for students to conduct deep, critical analyses of the WoD. The Catalyst team wanted the curriculum to facilitate an exploration of the interactions between micro-level considerations (e.g., How does our personal identity affect our relationship to drugs and drug policy? How do drugs circulate in our brains and bodies and what effect do they have?) and macro-level considerations (e.g., How and with what effect do drugs, money, guns, people, etc., circulate within a community? A country? A continent? How do drug policies facilitate the circulation of certain goods and people and impede that of others? How can history help us understand these dynamics?). Equipping students to think structurally and intersectionally about the WoD was an essential aim of the curriculum design.<sup>7</sup>

The Catalyst 2017 curriculum ended up covering nine topics, in the following order:

1. Personal identity
2. Drugs and the body
3. The history of the WoD in the Americas
4. The economics of the WoD
5. The types of violence of the WoD

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<sup>7</sup> Intersectionality here refers to what critical race theorist, lawyer, and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw describes as “a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It’s not simply that there’s a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things” (see Crenshaw 2017). In the context of Catalyst, students were encouraged to interrogate how their multiple identities (gender, geography, social class, race/ethnicity, nationality, etc.) intersected to produce different experiences of the WoD.



6. Drug policy and gender
7. Race and class in the WoD
8. The WoD in the media and political discourse
9. The WoD in art and culture<sup>8</sup>

The curriculum avoided lectures and instead used inquiry-based learning to help participants see themselves as active producers of knowledge. Most lessons included images, texts, YouTube videos, and role-playing scenarios in which participants put their critical skills into practice. To promote systematic and intersectional thinking, the teaching team relied heavily on hands-on visual aids and Post-it Notes to gather clusters of ideas/concepts/phenomena and encouraged participants to articulate the connections they saw between them (see Figure 2 and Appendix B).

*Figure 2: Students practicing intersectional thinking in the Catalyst classroom*



*Source:* Photo courtesy of Benjamin Fogarty Valenzuela

In the Catalyst classroom, participants were encouraged to recognize the stake each of them had in conversations surrounding drug policy and to see themselves as agents of social change within the complex systems in which they are embedded. Proceeding from the feminist principle that the personal is political (Hanisch 2006), the Catalyst team used storytelling and narrative analysis to connect students' lived

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix A for a more detailed overview of the contents of the Catalyst 2017 curriculum.

experiences of the WoD to the broader historical narratives of genocide, slavery, and colonialism that underpin the drug war. For example, the instructors hung a large timeline around the perimeter of the classroom. As participants learned about the major historical processes underpinning the WoD, they marked them on the timeline and were then invited to add significant events in their own family histories and to explore the personal effects of macro-level historical processes. Such activities enabled participants to share and reframe their personal affiliations to the WoD (Rodríguez-Gómez 2017) and to explore how their narratives complemented, complicated, or contradicted those of their classmates.

Teaching in the Catalyst classroom was not without its challenges. Fifty percent of the curriculum was delivered in Spanish, the other half in English, with simultaneous translation provided for monolingual students. Participants' academic skills varied widely, and their diverse academic and linguistic abilities required facilitators to be closely conscious of classroom dynamics. Extra support and instruction were offered as needed, and challenging questions were posed to participants who appeared understimulated. Catalyst is exploring the possibility of developing a pre-program academic skill-building correspondence course for future participants with academically disadvantaged backgrounds and a pre-program second-language course for monolingual students.

As was to be expected, some heavy stories were told in the classroom. At the end of every day, participants broke into small groups, accompanied by an adult facilitator. Together they processed the day's events, and these meetings helped to identify participants who needed one-on-one emotional support. A psychologist was on call to address any mental health issues that were beyond the team's ability to handle; thankfully, no such issues arose. However, by the end of the program, participants and facilitators were emotionally drained by the intensity of living in such close quarters and discussing heavy material for three weeks straight. In the postprogram debriefing, the Catalyst staff agreed that all facilitators should receive additional training to deal with trauma and that a mental health professional should be on campus throughout the program. The team also learned important lessons about taking sufficient breaks, having access to green spaces, and engaging students in regular physical activity. A key takeaway from Catalyst 2017 was the importance of creating an environment of emotional and mental wellbeing that encourages meaningful sharing, listening, and engagement with the curriculum.

Despite the challenges, participants' feedback suggested that the curriculum sparked the kind of analysis and understanding it was designed to. For example, one participant explained what she was learning at Catalyst:

Since at least the time of the conquest, drugs have been linked with relations of power. So whether you look at religion and its processes of imposing certain dogmatic ideas that have persisted through time, or whether you look at the importance of the pharmaceutical industry and consider the financial interests at play, you begin to rethink the terms by which things are deemed “moral” or “immoral.” And then there’s the link between groups who are marginalized from society, such as migrants who are excluded and must then seek alternatives in the illegal . . . It resists or, I don’t know . . . limits your ability to categorize “the good” and “the bad.” It’s really something much more complex. (from an interview for a documentary about Catalyst 2017, translated from Spanish)

The transnational component of the program also resonated with many participants. It was the first time many Latin American participants had heard about mass incarceration and police brutality in the US, and many US students were taken aback to learn about the effect their government’s policies have south of the border. In a blog entry, one student summarized the exchanges that took place during Catalyst 2017:

It amazes me how [one’s] experience and position within the WoD can alter one’s perspective drastically . . . The purpose of these lessons and Catalyst overall as a course was to connect the similarities and acknowledge the differences between each other. This experience was more than discussing the historical components of the WoD. It was a life experience that offered empathy, knowledge, and understanding.

The program culminated with students exhibiting the creative projects they produced during the course at a public exhibition in Mexico City, which was attended by roughly 50 people. Students who had struggled to speak up and share their viewpoints in the classroom at the beginning of the program could be seen discussing their projects with total strangers. Their projects included paintings, sculpture, photography, sound art, and performances, which spoke to the nuanced perspectives participants developed during the program. One student made a model that brilliantly depicted the many actors and diverse human costs of the WoD (Figure 3). The caption on his model echoed Paley’s (2014) argument about the WoD: “It isn’t a war on drugs, it’s a war on people.”

Figure 3: “It isn’t a war on drugs, it’s a war on people”: A model constructed by a Catalyst student illustrating the fallout of the war on drugs



Source: Photo courtesy of Benjamin Fogarty Valenzuela

The team ended Catalyst 2017 with many ideas for how to improve the next year’s program. For example, despite the facilitators’ efforts to link the personal and the political and to ground classroom discussions in students’ lived experiences of the WoD, participants’ engagement with concepts such as “racism” or “capitalism” often remained abstract and impersonal. The Catalyst 2017 team also realized that treating race, class, and gender as different topics on different days ended up reifying the concepts as separate phenomena, rather than allowing students to explore the ways they intersect to produce multiple experiences of the WoD. Accordingly, the Catalyst 2018 team began experimenting with a curriculum designed to engage students in a more material, historical, and intersectional analysis of the WoD. Surveys conducted at the end of each day of the Catalyst 2017 program helped the team identify where and how the curriculum could be made more engaging and responsive to students’ lived experiences. The team also agreed to dedicate more time to building specific skills that will help students launch their own initiatives upon returning home.

The Catalyst curriculum is a living document that will evolve from year to year, based on the input, knowledge, and experiences generated each summer. A group of graduates from each cohort will be invited to participate in designing the following year’s curriculum. In a few years, the team will begin bringing alumni in as facilitators and will eventually pass off leadership of the project to them. These strategies are intended to ensure that Catalyst remains youth driven and responsive to the multiple needs, experiences, and interests of future cohorts.

### CATALYZING CHANGE BACK HOME AND BEYOND

On the last day of Catalyst 2017, students participated in a community-organizing workshop that equipped them with a basic foundation in the theory and practice of community activism. All students were encouraged to use the conversations,

questions, and ideas that emerged during the program to launch projects in their own communities that would help to transform the violence caused by the WoD. Students were prompted to use the knowledge they generated at Catalyst to articulate locally relevant and contextually sensitive interventions of their own design. Thus far, 13 of the 17 participants have implemented projects to spread what they learned at Catalyst 2017. These projects have included giving presentations on drugs and drug policy at their schools; starting reading groups to learn more about the history and politics of the drug economy; pursuing research on indigenous inequality through an internship at the Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Fiscales in Guatemala; orienting their undergraduate thesis research toward the construction of masculinity within the context of Mexico's drug war; becoming a facilitator at Colombia's National Museum for Historical Memory in Bogotá to explore the links between the country's armed conflict and the WoD; being trained to assist people with expungement paperwork in the wake of California's recent legalization of marijuana and engaging in local and state forums on the effects that legalization will have on Latino communities; and participating as a youth stakeholder in consultations about the rights of children and adolescents in Colombia and internationally at a Latin American forum held in Guatemala.

A Facebook page for the alumni of Catalyst 2017 has helped keep students engaged in a transnational conversation about drug-policy reform since their participation in the program. Participants and facilitators regularly post articles related to the WoD and drug-policy reform. Emails, phone calls, and WhatsApp messages have enabled the team to stay in touch with students since their graduation. Upon their return home, each student was paired with a local mentor to help them launch their own initiatives and/or get involved in existing regional efforts. Unfortunately, it was wishful thinking to expect a meaningful relationship to grow between two strangers introduced via email, and most of these mentorships failed to get off the ground. Catalyst needs to develop a more comprehensive and rigorous system to engage with and support students once they return home.

While it is relatively easy to integrate meaningful youth representation into the design and leadership of a small-scale summer program like Catalyst, ensuring the substantive representation of frontline youth in government and international policymaking is significantly more challenging. In the eyes of its organizers, Catalyst's summer program is not just a one-off experience for a small handful of exceptional teenagers but the first step in a long process of translating what is being learned and achieved in a microcosm into structural change. There is much work to be done on this front.

## CONCLUSION: “SEEING THROUGH THE FOG”

Catalyst was not originally conceived within an EiE framework. That said, there seems to be much fertile and as yet unexplored common ground between the program and the field of EiE. Given the strong emphasis on community participation in the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies’ Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies (2010), Catalyst offers a model that could complement and enhance existing efforts to engage emergency-affected communities in transforming the conflicts that affect them. Rather than designing an intervention that operates directly on the frontlines of the WoD, Catalyst offers a space away from the violence and instability of communities affected by the drug war. In the midst of a crisis that often only permits reactive thinking, Catalyst aims to foster deep, collaborative thinking. The Catalyst model brings together disparate stakeholders of a conflict and affords them the space and time to think critically and transnationally about the root causes of the violence they experience. In such a setting, youth can participate meaningfully in negotiating and building a curriculum that is responsive to their experiences. They can begin to articulate radical visions for youth-driven conflict transformation and to cultivate the skills and capacities needed to realize their visions in ways that otherwise might not be available in their day-to-day lives. Valentina, a participant from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, expressed this in her spoken-word performance at the final showcase:

Fog is a spectre that feeds on the fear, sadness, and hopelessness that forms around the souls of the dead, our dead . . . But through Catalyst, we young people have been able to open our eyes and walk together through the fog. (translated from Spanish by the author)

The inaugural session of the program left the Catalyst team with many important questions: What does transnational, youth-driven social change look like in practice in emergency situations? What kinds of educational interventions are most conducive to fostering such change? How can the model and strategies Catalyst is developing be adapted to other transnational emergencies in the Americas (e.g., the Central American or Venezuelan migration crises, or protecting land and indigenous rights across the Amazon)? These are but a few of the questions that currently animate the Catalyst team and offer exciting possibilities for further research and collaboration between the program and readers of this journal.

While some may be inclined to dismiss Catalyst as a boutique initiative, the Catalyst team prefers to view it as a small but important laboratory for learning how to increase meaningful youth participation in the creation of new educational strategies to transform the violence of the WoD. As Hodgkin (2007) has argued, participation can “begin in small ways in individual classrooms and schools, without necessarily entailing wholesale national educational reform” (34). That said, the Catalyst team is also committed to making the curricular materials and best practices that emerge from the program accessible to a wider audience. We see a great opportunity to learn from EiE practitioners who are better versed in rolling out large-scale programs and guided by a commitment to ensure quality education for all.

The D.A.R.E. program was able to shape the attitudes of an entire generation. Catalyst aims to develop a more just and humane paradigm for the next. Catalyst offers a promising new vision of drug education that will contribute to sustainable, socially just conflict transformation within the context of the WoD in the Americas. Over the next five years, the Catalyst team will assemble and mobilize a robust and expansive network of actors, knowledge, and resources around their vision of drug education. The team has plans to develop and disseminate open-source curricular materials for educators across the Americas; launch teacher-training programs; provide ongoing support to graduates via seed grants, mentoring, and speaking opportunities; and evaluate and collect evidence on the impact of the Catalyst curriculum via a comparative research agenda. Recognizing the wealth of knowledge and experience the EiE field offers on all these fronts, the Catalyst team invites anyone who is interested exploring a potential collaboration to contact us at [info@catalyst-catalizador.org](mailto:info@catalyst-catalizador.org).

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## APPENDIX A

Table A1: Overview of the Catalyst 2017 Curriculum Objectives

<p><b>Day 1</b></p> <p>Who are we?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants and facilitators will know the names of everyone in the group.</li> <li>• Participants and facilitators will understand the personal reasons behind everyone's decision to participate in Catalyst and learn more about the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Participants and facilitators will express the expectations they have for the program and their participation in it.</li> <li>• Participants will be introduced to the general structure of the course.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Day 2</b></p> <p>Where are we standing?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants can explain Cuernavaca's importance in the history of the War on Drugs in Mexico.</li> <li>• Participants can tell the basic history of the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad.</li> <li>• Participants are familiarized with Cuernavaca's Centro Historico.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Speaker:</i> Pietro Ameglio, peace activist, on the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad</p>
<p><b>Day 3</b></p> <p>Personal identity and the War on Drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants can identify multiple dimensions of both their individual and social identity.</li> <li>• Participants can recognize the contradictions that emerge between their own self-perception and the perceptions of others.</li> <li>• Participants understand their individual identities as historically constructed and as operating within larger social structures and power relations.</li> <li>• Participants recognize, in themselves and others, different forms of privilege and disadvantages, and the ways in which these are linked to broader social structures and power.</li> <li>• Participants recognize their affiliation and contact with the War on Drugs as a possible dimension of their identity.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Speaker:</i> Jessica Marjane, lawyer and trans-rights activist from Red de Juventudes Trans, on personal identity and politics</p>

<p><b>Day 4</b></p> <p>Introducing the War on Drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants formulate questions that invite further investigation of the forms of indifference, intolerance, and inequality that perpetuate and are perpetuated by the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Participants familiarize themselves with the primary and secondary sources that will allow them to find answers to their questions about the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Participants understand the value in taking a multidimensional, intersectional approach to the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Students recognize the ways in which a single concept (e.g., the police) can take on multiple meanings in different localities and contexts.</li> <li>• Students identify key actors and institutions that participate in the War on Drugs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Day 5</b></p> <p>Social history is family history: Historicizing the War on Drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants construct a timeline of the main historical currents of the War on Drugs in the Americas.</li> <li>• Participants identify the ways in which the War on Drugs impacts everyday life.</li> <li>• Participants understand there is a connection between the history of the War on Drugs and their own personal and familiar histories.</li> <li>• Participants understand that individual actions impact wider social histories, and vice versa.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Speaker:</i> Nidia Olvera, historian and anthropologist, on the history of peyote in Mexico and on the practice of history as activism</p>
<p><b>Day 6</b></p> <p>Drugs or medicine? The neurobiology of psychoactive substances</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students can problematize the distinction between “drug” and “medicine.”</li> <li>• Students can articulate Norman Zinberg’s notion of “drug, set, and setting.”</li> <li>• Students understand the basic neurobiology of the reward circuit in the brain and the pathways that can lead to drug abuse.</li> <li>• Students can identify various models and explanations of drug abuse (e.g., moral, medical, criminal, social).</li> <li>• Students can pick out the argument of an existing text/video and learn how to argue from a perspective that may be different from their own.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Workshop:</i> ReverdeSvColectivo, Mexico City-based harm-reduction collective, on reducing the harms of personal drug use and of the War on Drugs</p>

<p><b>Day 7</b></p> <p>The economics of the War on Drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants can identify the general characteristics of the capitalist mode of production.</li> <li>• Participants can identify the principal components of a supply chain, from production through consumption.</li> <li>• Participants can compare (and question) the differences between a legal market (coffee) and an illegal market (cocaine).</li> <li>• Participants will identify the ways in which prohibition and protection within drug supply chains affect people’s everyday lives.</li> <li>• Participants recognize the structural and economic violence that feeds the War on Drugs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Day 8</b></p>	<p>Day trip to Mexico City</p>
<p><b>Day 9</b></p> <p>The War on Drugs in political discourse and the media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants identify ideas and stereotypes commonly employed in political rhetoric about drugs/the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Participants are familiarized with different explanations and justifications for the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Participants deepen their historical understanding of the War on Drugs by locating political speeches within their historical contexts.</li> <li>• Participants can identify biases and stereotyping within political speeches and media stories.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Speaker:</i> Marcela Tuarti, journalist, on journalism in the context of Mexico’s drug war</p> <p><i>Guest Workshop:</i> Graffiti and stencil art</p>
<p><b>Day 10</b></p> <p>Forms of violence of the War on Drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students recognize that the violence and social problems associated with the War on Drugs are differentially distributed across the hemisphere.</li> <li>• Students identify points of difference and commonality in the issues faced by their respective communities.</li> <li>• Participants learn how to make a basic podcast.</li> <li>• Participants learn to orally communicate the findings of their research about a case study illustrating the violence of the War on Drugs.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Workshop:</i> Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Francisco de Vitoria, on human rights activism in the context of Mexico’s drug war</p>

<p><b>Day 11</b></p> <p>Race, class, and the War on Drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants can identify the ways in which stereotypes about class and race play a role in the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Participants understand racism and classism as systems of unequal distribution of power, privilege, and resources.</li> <li>• Participants recognize the ways in which the effects of the War on Drugs are felt differently according to a person's race/ethnicity and class.</li> <li>• Participants can compare and contrast the way that race and class intersect with the War on Drugs as it is waged in different parts of the hemisphere.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Speaker:</i> Asha Bandele, Drug Policy Alliance, on race and the War on Drugs in the US (via Skype)</p>
<p><b>Day 12</b></p> <p>Gender and the War on Drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants can identify gender-related stereotypes at play within the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Participants understand <i>el machismo</i> (sexism) as a system that distributes power and resources unequally.</li> <li>• Participants can identify the relationship between <i>el machismo</i>/sexism and the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Participants recognize the ways in which the effects of the War on Drugs are felt differently according to one's gender identity.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Speaker:</i> Isabel Blas, Equis: Justicia para las Mujeres, on the incarceration of women in the context of Mexico's drug war</p>
<p><b>Day 13</b></p> <p>Bling-bling: Critical approaches to narco-esthetics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants recognize the presence of narcotrafficking in music, decorative art, painting, and popular culture in general.</li> <li>• Participants explore the relevance of popular culture in the normalization of the War on Drugs.</li> <li>• Participants can identify the elements of their everyday lives that are influenced by the practices promoted by narcotrafficking and militarization, including in the language and words that they use.</li> <li>• Participants recognize that art and culture can also serve as a space to critique narcotrafficking, militarization, and the War on Drugs.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Workshop:</i> Maria Emilia Fernandez, assistant curator at the JUMEX museum, on the War on Drugs in contemporary art</p> <p><i>Guest Speakers/Performers:</i> Kyle Rapps, spoken word artist and rapper, and Melina Gaze, performance artist, on art as a tool for political resistance</p>



<p><b>Day 14</b></p> <p>The past and the future: Different visions of drug policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants can compare and contrast prohibitionist drug policy with proposed policy alternatives (harm reduction, decriminalization, legalization).</li> <li>• Participants can explain the basic tenets of Plan Colombia and articulate their opinions on whether it was a success or failure.</li> </ul> <p><i>Guest Speaker:</i> Paul Mahlstedt, former counternarcotics officer with the US State Department, on Plan Colombia (via Skype)</p> <p><i>Guest Workshop:</i> Jorge Herrera, drug policy reform youth activist, on youth activism, alternatives to prohibition, and the future of drug policy</p>
<p><b>Day 15</b></p>	<p>Students work on final projects.</p>
<p><b>Day 16</b></p>	<p>Final exhibition in Mexico City</p>
<p><b>Day 17</b></p> <p>Catalyzing change back home</p>	<p><i>Guest Workshop:</i> Dean Chahim, community organizer, Community Organizing 101</p>

## APPENDIX B

### A TYPICAL ACTIVITY FROM THE CATALYST CURRICULUM

#### **From Day 4:** Introducing the War on Drugs

**Duration:** Two hours

In this activity, students are tasked with assembling a giant, octagonal puzzle made up of eight pieces (see Figure 2). Each piece of the puzzle has a “dimension” of the War on Drugs written on it: History; Health and the Body; Economy; Discourse and Media; Violence; Race and Class; Gender; Art and Culture.

The pieces of the puzzle are distributed face down on the floor. Participants form groups of two or three and each group selects a piece at random.

Once the students have been divided into groups and have picked their piece of the puzzle, they are invited to browse a cloud of Post-it Notes on the wall, each one containing a phenomenon related to the War on Drugs: Police Brutality; Mass Incarceration; Human Trafficking; Forced Disappearances; Drug Abuse; Militarization; Organized Crime; Drug Mules; Money Laundering; Aerial Fumigation; Corruption; Femicides; Paramilitaries; Guerrillas; State Violence; Human Rights Abuses; Unsafe Streets; Arms Trafficking; Opioid Crisis.

Individually, students make note of the phenomena listed on the Post-it Notes they feel best fit into the “dimension” of the War on Drugs that their puzzle piece represents. They then convene with their group members and compare notes with each other. They establish a list of the four phenomena that most belong to their puzzle piece. With the support of the facilitators, the participants search the internet for information and arguments that will permit them to explain the relationship between the subconcept and the macro-category of the puzzle piece they have been assigned. They are given a handout to assist them in constructing their arguments.

The group reconvenes. Each team reads out the four concepts they have claimed. If only one team has claimed a given concept, a member of that team takes the Post-it Note from the wall and sticks it to their piece of the puzzle, offering a brief overview of the concept and why it belongs to their “dimension.” In the case where two or more teams claim the same concept, those teams engage in a debate as to why they think the concept belongs to their “dimension,” employing

the arguments they previously constructed. Once all the groups have read out and claimed their four concepts, the students assemble the pieces of the puzzle together. Once assembled, the students realize that all eight of the pieces meet at the center of the puzzle. The facilitator calls attention to the fact that many of the concepts the students were arguing over are in fact multidimensional. Such multidimensional concepts can be studied and are probably best understood through a variety of disciplinary lenses. Accordingly, the contested Post-it Notes are placed at the intersection of all eight pieces.

Once all the Post-it Notes have been placed on the puzzle, the facilitators steer the closing of the discussion with the following questions:

- What struggles did we encounter when formulating our arguments?
- How did we overcome those struggles?
- Which Post-it Notes generated the most debate? Why?
- Why is it important to recognize the ways in which all these concepts are interrelated?
- What are the dangers of analyzing these concepts or even the War on Drugs as a whole through a single conceptual lens?

# BOOK REVIEW

***THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE:  
EDUCATION, DISCIPLINE, AND RACIALIZED DOUBLE STANDARDS***  
BY NANCY A. HEITZEG  
PRAEGER, 2016. VII + 178 PAGES  
\$48.00 (HARDCOVER)  
ISBN 978-1-4408-3111-9

While education is often positioned as a site of protection and peacebuilding, education policies inspired by the policies of the war on drugs have repositioned US education as a site that both violates human rights and perpetuates injustice. In her book *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Education, Discipline, and Racialized Double Standards*, Nancy A. Heitzeg highlights the effect on education of adopting war on drugs policies. Heitzeg explains how zero-tolerance policies copied by education systems under the guise of promoting school safety have led to higher rates of suspension/expulsion and higher dropout/pushout rates for youth of color, thereby exacerbating racial disparities. The harsher punishments imposed by these policies have tended to funnel young Black and Brown youth out of the education system and into the school-to-prison pipeline, thus creating what can be understood as a human rights crisis in US education.

In this book, which offers an introduction to the school-to-prison pipeline in the United States, Heitzeg illustrates how the results of a war on drugs policy that involved policing and punishing Black and Brown students became institutionalized in the US education system. The book is organized into three sections that detail how the pipeline came into existence, how it operates today, and how some are pushing back against the zero-tolerance policies borrowed from the war on drugs. To illustrate the consequences these policies have for today's students of color, each chapter begins with a vignette of a student's personal experience with the school-to-prison pipeline. These vignettes describe the wide-ranging ways Black and Brown students are pushed out of education.

Heitzeg explains that education policies incorporating zero tolerance do not distinguish between serious and nonserious behavior and that students are punished equally for unequal behavioral issues that range from dress-code infractions to weapons violations. Drawing from a growing body of research, Heitzeg argues that the current era of "colorblind" racism masks racial inequality in education by denying that school systems are a mechanism of social control that has a disparately negative effect on students of color. She details how abandoning certain civil rights era efforts, such as desegregation and equitable funding, combined with education

practices such as high-stakes testing and zero-tolerance policies, have converged to create a school environment that pushes underperforming students of color, mostly from underresourced, segregated urban schools, into the penal system.

Heitzeg describes how race serves as the unnamed indicator for controlling young Black and Brown lives in both war on drugs policies and zero-tolerance education policies through decisions to criminalize and medicalize. Policies and practices in society and in school produce racialized and discriminatory results. Labeling, stereotyping, and using coded language that positions White as normal and Black as “other” criminalizes young Black and Brown men. As the prison industry became a mechanism for removing unskilled labor from the market and for profiting government agencies and the private sector by providing the unpaid labor of inmates, criminalizing people of color increased dramatically to fill the demand. She explains that, while middle-class White drug users are tracked into drug-treatment programs, Black and Brown youth are pushed into prison. She argues that this disparity left over from war on poverty policies has created a double standard in today’s school systems, whereby Black youth are more likely than Whites to be diagnosed with an intellectual disability or behavioral disorder and thus to be tracked into special education or remedial learning programs. The result is a segregated education setting focused on behavior management rather than on the academic achievement of students of color, which is often the prelude to entering the school-to-prison pipeline.

As one volume in Praeger’s *Racism in American Institutions* series, this book provides an understanding of how racism, couched in post-civil rights era colorblind policies and practices, is the foundation of the school-to-prison pipeline. Yet the book does have some limitations. As it offers a broad understanding of the problem, it draws from general theoretical and historical information. It lacks rich ethnographic examples and offers only limited data analysis, and as a result the general concepts and themes are repeated throughout. A reader already familiar with the school-to-prison pipeline might come away wanting more information and analysis. Despite its limitations, however, this book is relevant and timely for education in emergencies scholars, in that it highlights the protracted crisis of the school-to-prison pipeline and its destruction of justice and human rights in the US education system.

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## BOOK REVIEW

### *POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION OF YOUTH: A PALESTINIAN CASE STUDY*

BY JANETTE HABASHI

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2017. X + 224 PAGES

\$99.99 (HARDCOVER), \$79.99 (E-BOOK)

ISBN 978-1-137-47523-7

In her book *Political Socialization of Youth: A Palestinian Case Study*, Janette Habashi challenges widespread understanding of political socialization. Projects that promote youth civic engagement are commonplace in countries emerging from conflict. Civic engagement is assumed to increase political participation in formal electoral processes and support the development of competent and responsible citizens. Education systems play an important role in this process. Schools convey knowledge about government structures and electoral processes to children and youth and, as such, provide a framework within which much of their political socialization occurs. The importance of these activities is often said to be heightened in countries experiencing or recovering from conflict, owing to the ways in which civic education can contribute to, or reproduce, the values, politics, or ideologies that can fuel conflict or support peace. However, Habashi challenges this understanding as a top-down Western assumption regarding political agency that does not accurately reflect the depth or scope of young people's political awareness in conflict-affected contexts. She argues instead that youths' political development needs to be understood within a broader ecological framework that accounts for the myriad local and global influences that shape their lives.

Habashi's book is based on a multiyear journaling project with Palestinian youth from the West Bank who were ages 12-15 at the onset of the study. The book is organized around key themes extrapolated from the data using a grounded theory analysis and presented across ten short chapters. This methodology not only allows Habashi to foreground youth voices but, crucially, it also treats youth political socialization as a dynamic and evolving process. Part one of the book examines the different ecological influences that shape youth political socialization, including community, religion, education, and media. The result is a convincing portrayal of youth political agency as a far more present, nuanced, and multifarious set of attitudes and actions than conventional wisdom suggests. Community context, Habashi argues, offers different opportunities for youth to act, which produces a range of outcomes that are variously filtered through social identifiers, including class, gender, and location. Their religious context provides youth with political meaning and insight, albeit in ways that may differ from the

tenets of faith itself. Education, on the other hand, politically socializes youth not only through the curriculum but through structures that reflect and transmit the oppressive realities of the military occupation in which Palestinian youth come of age. Lastly, media influence youth narratives and political discourses through the transmission of mainstream narratives, and via new digital media platforms that provide increased opportunities for young people to react, interact, and express different viewpoints. Throughout her book, Habashi demonstrates youths' astute political understanding of the local and global processes that shape their lives.

A particular strength of the study is its longitudinal approach. This is most evident in part two, which deals with the outcomes of political socialization. It is here that I found Habashi's critique against the dominant understanding of youth political socialization the most compelling. She argues that the status quo excessively emphasizes formal institutions and political processes and thus overlooks the ways in which children and youth actively engage and transform their situation. She shows that youth agency and civic engagement in conflict-affected contexts manifest in alternative forms of political participation that include acts of resistance, activism, and solidarity. This includes actions that outsiders may characterize as deviant, such as stone-throwing, protesting, or boycotting. This important and provocative finding challenges the dominant understanding of civic engagement as linear and necessarily positive. In doing so, it also forces us to question what is meant by related conceptions such as resilience and recovery, which are premised on many of the same underlying assumptions. Habashi shows that youth engage in a wide array of actions and strategies to manage and transform the adversities they live with, and that this variously manifests in outcomes that may be perceived as both adaptive and maladaptive.

Overall, the book is impeccably researched. At times, however, I felt that the extensive secondary literature that was cited in each chapter detracted from the rich youth narratives. It also was sometimes unclear which arguments related to a review of existing research or emerged from the study's primary data. The heavy emphasis on theory could also dissuade some readers whose work would directly benefit from the critiques offered in this book. Still, the book offers important lessons for policymakers and practitioners in the fields of education in emergencies and international development education. It is particularly recommended for those working in chronic crisis and longer-term reconstruction contexts where civic engagement tends to dominate the donor agenda (especially in the post-Arab Spring, Middle Eastern context). One message in particular stands out and bears repeating: the pervasive finding that children are acutely aware of their political environment and the local and global structures that shape their lives,

and that they act on these realities. For many working in our field, this is hardly news, not least for readers familiar with the Palestinian context. The implication of this is worth underscoring, however; namely, interventions that attempt to positively influence children's and youths' political attitudes and actions through education content alone, without addressing the implicit and explicit ways in which education structures and the wider environment reflect and transmit oppression and discrimination, will prove ineffective at best and could do more harm than good.

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