

# Research Statement

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### **Security, Post-Conflict and Reconciliation:**

Most post-conflict interventions after a civil war aim to build state capacity by transforming states' institutions and strengthening their security forces. These interventions in practice often emphasize training and investing resources to produce better-equipped security forces that can institute a new monopoly over the use of force within the territory post-conflict. This enhancement of state coercive capacity, however, also strengthens the government's power, often in the service of dominant social groups that were active parties in the previous conflict. We have seen this in Colombia, Somalia, Liberia, Burundi, and Afghanistan, among others. In these cases, even with well-equipped military and police that international support provides, state institutions often fail to protect civilians who were, or were seen to be, on the other side of the conflict, and show high levels of tolerance of state-sponsored repression, often used to contain political dissidents, including protesters. Many citizens thus continue to perceive the behaviour of state forces post-conflict as biased, corrupt, abusive, and in some cases, less effective in safeguarding their physical protection than competing non-state security providers. This only prolongs the transfer of legitimacy to the government and the achievement of a sustainable peace. Given these entrenched structural problems, scholars have recently suggested that any effective institutional transformation to restore post-conflict legitimacy of the government can only be achieved through a change in the perception, values, and beliefs of the members of these institutions, and the relationship between the agents of the state forces in the field and its civilians. Despite this, most civil war studies still focus on the role of non-state armed groups, and comparatively few studies have explored how state combatants form or shift their threat perceptions, and how this influences state forces' willingness to protect civilians after the end of conflict.

My PhD dissertation, *War Mentality and Post-Peace Accord Violence: A Field Experiment of Political-ideological Bias among Colombian Soldiers*, combines insights from political science and the political and social psychology of intergroup conflicts to develop and test a theory of individual and institutional bias. This research was supported (in part) through a grant from Rei Foundation for fieldwork in Colombia. During my four months of fieldwork in 2019, I carried out both an original survey among Colombian state combatants with embedded experiments (N=920), and interviewed 28 state combatants on their perceptions of the pre- and post-peace agreement with the FARC-EP. I found that combatants in state-armed forces may contribute to post-peace agreement violence in Colombia by failing to protect civilians due to their own bias towards the civilians' political-ideological identity. I argue that the fact there is a continuity between how state combatants define enemies and threats during and after the war has implications for the patterns of violence during war, as well as the extent to which these are likely to shift following the signing of the peace agreement.

My research seeks to advance our understanding of the impact of ideology in state forces and its influence in how their members perceive civilians, and their roles as state security providers. I challenge the conventional wisdom of the "apolitical" and none-ideological condition of state security forces, boundaries around the narratives of professionalization within the army and the police, and the neutrality of state forces toward civilians regarding their willingness to provide protection or justify the use of force. In contrast, my work suggests that state forces and its members could contribute to the perpetuation of violence even after reform takes place. I also argue that this phenomenon is not exclusive to internal conflict or deeply divided societies. The phenomenon of ethnic profiling could possibly reflect bias toward civilians in the state forces in diverse countries. Racial or ethnic profiling in policing shows that police forces may develop bias in labelling civilians as suspects because of their identity group, and this could incentivize intergroup conflicts, encourage state repression, and erode the relationship between the state and its citizens. Reports in Canada and the US reveal increases in white supremacist and right-wing (RWE) beliefs in members of the regular and reserve forces, including the police. These findings raise concerns about hateful conduct and extremism in individuals trained in the use of violence. Broadly, my research agenda examines questions around the relationship between civilians and state forces members, with a focus on new democracies and post-conflict settings, and it centers on the following questions:

- Under what conditions are soldiers and police more likely to deny or provide civilians with protection during and after conflict?

- Why do some soldiers and police shift their threat perceptions about certain civilian groups after the conflict ends and others do not?
- Under what conditions does the traditional strengthening of security forces become counter-productive to government legitimacy and a sustainable peace, given existing soldiers' biases toward civilians?

To explore these questions, I combine quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, I employ experimental and quasi-experimental designs, as well as intensive fieldwork and semi-structured and in-depth interviews.

### **State-Building, Displacement and Migration:**

My second line of research studies internal displacement in Colombia (IDPs) and refugees in New Zealand. I am particularly interested in the interplay between two types of trust: horizontal (among neighbors), and vertical (with state institutions), and the sense of belonging as elements that help to operationalize social cohesion. In the context of Colombia, I explore the factors that explain trust among civilians in war-affected communities, and between civilians and the state. Most research focuses on issues of interpersonal trust, neglecting its political dimension; most studies analyze horizontal and vertical trust and belonging separately. I intend to study them together, approaching different levels of analysis and using mixed methods approaches. I argue that lack of both vertical and horizontal trust and a sense of belonging may erode legitimacy in state institutions, and motivate radicalization and violence against a state that people perceive as unable to act on their grievances and take their social, economic or political demands seriously. This is particularly problematic in societies that intend to overcome political violence, such as Colombia. However, it also resonates with challenges in societies like New Zealand, where an increased commitment to resettling refugees has coincided with escalating concerns about internal security after the Christchurch terror attack. The need to facilitate social cohesion is a key recommendation of the report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the attack, which identifies social cohesion as central to national security.

I understand social cohesion as the interaction between institutions that enable individuals and groups to overcome social and economic divisions, supporting their subjective perception of wellbeing, belonging and inclusion, and access to upward mobility. My research agenda examines questions around how structural conditions and everyday interactions promote or disrupt social cohesion. I particularly focus on the role of schools and teachers as the first access points of public rights as “face workers” of the state. I apply a dual focus on micro-level experiences of encounters in school settings and macro-level structural conditions that shape refugee resettlement and generate novel understandings of mechanisms that foster or disrupt social cohesion. Micro-level analysis allows us to understand individual experiences and these can be contextualised through attention to archival and secondary sources. I consider this line of research vital considering the critical juncture in New Zealand's post-mosque attack environment, allowing us to theorise how structural and community factors foster and disrupt social cohesion, and inform social, resettlement, and education policies, and school practice.

To explore those questions, I utilise a youth-centred comparative case study methodology. I approach macro-level analysis, while drawing on macro-economic, demographic and Ministry of Education data; online school and community information; and interviews with school leaders and teachers to examine structural conditions. Through micro-level analysis I explore the encounter experiences of refugee youth, host community students and teachers, through one-to-one and focus group interviews, participant observation, and arts-based data collection activities such as visual narratives, and mind map tasks. During my experience working in New Zealand in topics related to refugee resettlement I have been studying the notion of Manaakitanga as a framework to think about the immigration system in New Zealand. A migration policy that prioritizes notions of mutual benefits, care and respect for people would be aware of addressing systemic conditions of exclusion and discrimination. But, it inevitably requires recognizing mana whenua, which allows us to balance our care responsibilities for existing communities and repair the historical legacies of exclusion. The intricate politics within the migration policies and the role of indigenous people in New Zealand's context is something that I aim to explore further in my research.