Surveillance & Society

Analysing Mutual Surveillance Practices During Long-Term Kidnapping Situations: The Case of Jungle Kidnapping Camps in Colombia

Camilo Tamayo Gomez

Article abstract

Kidnapping as a crime of (im)mobility can be understood as a social act of mutuality and reciprocity, where the interaction between kidnappers and kidnappees shapes a broader system of connected activities of surveillance, intimacy, control, and consent. This article argues that during situations of long-term kidnapping, novel forms of social interaction emerge as a result of mutual surveillance practices between surveillance agents (kidnappers) and surveillance objects (kidnappees). It focuses on analysing how members of The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (the kidnappers) and Colombian politicians, police, and army personnel (the kidnappees) conducted mutual practices and activities of surveillance during their lengthy cohabitation inside jungle kidnapping camps. It presents the results of thirty-three semi-structured interviews with victims of long-term kidnapping in Colombia and eleven structured interviews with FARC ex-combatants who were involved in kidnapping operations. The article demonstrates that the senses of mutuality, reciprocity, and intimacy were crucial to creating an unconventional surveillance regime inside jungle kidnapping camps in Colombia.

Article

Analysing Mutual Surveillance Practices During Long-Term Kidnapping Situations: The Case of Jungle Kidnapping Camps in Colombia

Camilo Tamayo Gomez

University of Huddersfield, UK
c.a.tamayogomez@hud.ac.uk

Abstract

Kidnapping as a crime of (im)mobility can be understood as a social act of mutuality and reciprocity, where the interaction between kidnappers and kidnappees shapes a broader system of connected activities of surveillance, intimacy, control, and consent. This article argues that during situations of long-term kidnapping, novel forms of social interaction emerge as a result of mutual surveillance practices between surveillance agents (kidnappers) and surveillance objects (kidnappees). It focuses on analysing how members of The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (the kidnappers) and Colombian politicians, police, and army personnel (the kidnappees) conducted mutual practices and activities of surveillance during their lengthy cohabitation inside jungle kidnapping camps. It presents the results of thirty-three semi-structured interviews with victims of long-term kidnapping in Colombia and eleven structured interviews with FARC ex-combatants who were involved in kidnapping operations. The article demonstrates that the senses of mutuality, reciprocity, and intimacy were crucial to creating an unconventional surveillance regime inside jungle kidnapping camps in Colombia.

Introduction

In recent years, academics including Haggerty, Ball, and Lyon (2012), Monahan and Murakami Wood (2018), and Eley and Rampton (2020) have argued that surveillance can be understood as a social process, where dynamics, activities, and practices of power, control, identity, institutional behaviour, and interpersonal relations configure new ways to create social structures. According to these scholars, surveillance practices and activities can deeply affect collective and individual social conditions and the construction of the social fabric of society. In other words, surveillance is embedded in social relations, including micro-level and macro-level social interactions between strangers, family members, private companies, governmental bodies, or work colleagues. Thus, the development of these social relations can create conventional and unconventional surveillance regimes, centring surveillance as part of everyday interactions at the micro-level, and surveillance led by states, governmental bodies, or private corporations at the macro-level (Trottier 2012). The use of the concepts of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019) and ludic surveillance (Mäkinen 2017) to understand unconventional surveillance regimes, as well as border controls and security checks at the airport to comprehend conventional surveillance regimes, exemplifies this nexus between social interactions and surveillance regimes.

In his classic work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) explains how relations between social actors are based on the meticulous management of the information they disclose, making a distinction between "front stages," where individuals perform roles, and "back stages," where they manage these performances as well as conceal information that is deemed inappropriate to share elsewhere. Trottier (2012), revisiting Goffman's (1959) scholarship, claims that this is both a spatial, geographical, and architectural distinction as well as one that is embedded in social relations. For both scholars, it is clear that social relations between any permutations of social actors are governed by a desire to disclose some types of information, as well as to withhold discrediting forms of information. In other words, social relations, at their core, involve the evasion of unwanted scrutiny (Goffman 1959; Trottier 2012).

In this context, what happens when we apply the understanding of surveillance as a social process to analyse actions, including politically motivated kidnappings, perpetrated against political opponents in the context of an ongoing civil war, where practices and activities of surveillance are central to shaping the war's social dynamics? Kidnapping as a crime of (im)mobility can be classified as a social phenomenon of mutuality and reciprocity, where the interaction between kidnapper and kidnappee shapes a broader system of connected activities of surveillance, intimacy, control, and consent. According to Tzanelli (2006), Bailliet (2010), and Shortland (2019), kidnapping is regulated by the laws of demand and supply, and it is reminiscent of the Weberian "instrumental/goal rationality," a type of social action that involves the calculation of the most efficient means. The development of practices and activities of surveillance during kidnapping situations is a crucial part of the implementation of these rational calculations. The exchange of information and the relationship between surveillance agents (kidnappers) and surveillance objects (kidnappees) during kidnapping events transform the performance of this criminality into a new social order regulated by unexpected rules and obligations.

In this regard, what type of activities of surveillance emerge in situations of long-term kidnapping where the surveillance agent and the surveillance subject must interact daily for extended periods of time, for years or decades, developing new social processes as a result? By what means do kidnappers exercise social practices of surveillance and control against kidnappees when both actors share the same extreme conditions of long-term captivity and vigilance, immobility, remoteness, and isolation? What forms of collective and individual social coexistence between surveillance agents and surveillance objects can take place when new expressions of intimacy and consent are creating a social structure of surveillance defined by proximity, mutuality, and reciprocity?

To address these questions, in this article, I am presenting partial results from a broader project called *Kidnapping, Armed Conflict, and Transitional Justice in Colombia* (1970–2023). Over the course of four years, I conducted thirty-three semi-structured interviews with victims of long-term kidnapping in Colombia and eleven structured interviews with ex-combatants of The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) who were involved in kidnapping operations, including the care of hostages and the administration of jungle kidnapping camps.[1] I identified and contacted interview subjects during my time as an Associate Professor at EAFIT University in Medellin, Colombia, and during my work as a Senior Adviser in Transitional Justice for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

This article contains three sections. The first revisits the relationship between surveillance and kidnapping. I argue that during situations of long-term kidnapping, novel forms of social interaction emerge as a result of mutual surveillance practices. In particular, I state that one of the main outcomes of the implementation of a system of connected activities of surveillance, intimacy, control, and consent during long-term captivities is the transformation of the sense of mutuality (a moral obligation to value and support the

---

[1] Ethical approval to conduct this research was given by the University of Huddersfield's School Research Ethics and Integrity Committee in the United Kingdom. This project also followed the British Psychological Society's (2021) and British Sociological Association's (2017) ethical guidance.

wellbeing of others and an essential element for social cohesion) and reciprocity (a social norm referred to as "paying back" what we received, positively or negatively, from others in order to gain a mutual or individual benefit) between kidnappers and kidnappees.

The second section considers the characteristics of the former Colombian armed conflict. It focuses on analysing how members of the guerrilla group FARC (the kidnappers) and Colombian politicians, police, and army personnel (the kidnappees) conducted mutual practices and activities of surveillance during their long-time cohabitation in jungle kidnapping camps. The final section concludes with some views on understanding how mutual practices and activities of surveillance inside jungle kidnapping camps in Colombia configured novel social relations and structures of surveillance between kidnappers and kidnappees, where the roles of mutuality, reciprocity, and intimacy were crucial in creating an unconventional surveillance regime.

Revisiting the Telationship between Surveillance and Kidnapping

From a traditional legalistic perspective, kidnapping can be comprehended as the illegal deprivation of people's liberty by abducting them and/or holding them captive in an unknown place against their will. It involves the use of force, the application or threat of violence, and the retention of the victim in a hidden and unknown place (Noor-Mohamed 2013). According to Alexander and Klein (2009), the motivations to kidnap a person or a group of people can be divided into "expressive motivations" (i.e., an effort to voice and/or publicise a grievance or express a frustrated emotion) and "instrumental or material motivations" (i.e., to obtain a particular outcome such as ransom). The mainstream approach to understanding kidnapping is, usually, to present disturbing statistics, display explicit graphic accounts of the human suffering it causes, or highlight victims' narratives of distress, sorrow, and anguish. In other words, it focuses more on describing human misery without reflecting on the sociological and cultural dimensions of this crime. However, Tzanelli (2006) understands kidnapping as a form of social transaction rooted in contemporary socioeconomics and political structures. For Tazanelli (2006), kidnappees have different forms of capital, value, and status that can be exchanged in a market regulated by power relations and economic or political motivations. In other words, kidnappees are carriers of symbolic capital, which is what the kidnappers aspire to gain through the crime. Human life, a universal value and inviolable right, is a precondition for any kidnapping to take place (Tzanelli 2006; see also Cunningham 2017).

Kidnapping is also a social act shaped by surveillance practices and activities. It is an exercise of voyeurism, power, and performance. It is a play with multiple acts but with improvised scenes and an unknown ending. In situations of captivity, the kidnappers watch, monitor, and track kidnappees and, at the same time, the kidnappees exercise tactics and strategies to do the same to their captors, configuring an ecosystem of mutual surveillance. The social interaction between kidnappers and kidnappees is emotional and intimate, because of the fear the kidnappee has of being killed, reflecting and reinforcing an imbalance of individual power (Slack 2019; Vogt 2016). Kidnapping situations can also reimagine the borders of kinship and care. Kidnappers become a point of closeness to kidnappees, overlapping the roles of perpetrator and protector in situations of captivity, which can be transformed or changed as a result of performing the practices and activities of mutual surveillance (Vogt 2018). As a result, mutual surveillance can change the dynamics of captivity in kidnapping scenarios. For example, it can provide fresh opportunities for kidnappees to escape, or, on the contrary, occasions for kidnappers to reinforce control and exercise individualistic power over kidnappees, such as through violence.

Moreover, there are two types of kidnapping where surveillance mechanisms are crucial to committing the crime: tiger kidnapping[2] and virtual kidnapping.[3] In both cases, the dual social act of conducting surveillance simultaneously on the victim and a third party (e.g., a family member, co-worker, or significant other) can illustrate how surveillance activities shape novel dynamics beyond the traditional kidnapper-kidnappee relationship.

Long-term Kidnapping: Surveillance and Unusual Forms of Coexistence

Another important element that outlines kidnapping as a social act is time. Kidnapping situations inflict extreme human suffering in part because of the feelings of uncertainty they provoke in families and kidnappees. Social interactions between kidnappers, kidnappees, and other actors involved in the kidnapping scenario (e.g., hostage family members, negotiators, local authorities, etc.) can create different time scales for the outcome of the situation (i.e., release, death, or the disappearance of the kidnappee). It could take just a couple of hours (e.g., express kidnappings), years (e.g., political kidnappings), or decades (e.g., kidnappings during long-term armed conflicts). Also, feelings of unsureness, doubt, and the unknown can produce collective and individual processes of "ambiguous loss" in the families of the kidnappees. "Ambiguous loss" (Boss and Dahl 2014) is the process of unresolved grief and the inability to move forward that can occur when there is no verification of a kidnapped person's status as alive or dead. Without knowing if the kidnappee will come back, the grief process is "frozen," and so is the mourning process. The uncertainty can last for years or decades, leaving victims' families in a kind of limbo, hoping against hope, and unable to say goodbye.

Moreover, during situations of long-term kidnapping, novel forms of social interaction between kidnappers and kidnappees can emerge as a result of long-time mutual surveillance practices. Analysing cases of long-term kidnapping in Colombia reveals a system of connected activities of surveillance, intimacy, control, and consent developed inside the jungle camps. Unusual forms of coexistence started to materialise as a consequence of years of cohabitation and copresence, where the transformation of the sense of mutuality and reciprocity between kidnappers and kidnappees was one of the main characteristics of this social order. The social act of spending or sharing time with another person in the same space is crucial to developing reciprocal senses of trust and intimacy between the social actors involved (San Martin, Schug, and Maddux 2019). In other words, the construction of social relations takes time, emotional effort, and daily interactions. Long-term kidnapping situations offer a considerable amount of time for kidnappers and kidnappees to establish social relations and develop bonds of care and dependence, as well as exchange positive and negative emotions (i.e., anxiety, sadness, happiness, etc.).

If we understand mutuality as a moral obligation to value and support the well-being of others and an essential element of social cohesion (Lamont and Berezin 2016), and reciprocity as a fundamental mechanism for sustained social relationships that intensifies over time and governs interpersonal exchanges (each individual reciprocates the behaviours of another) (Melamed, Simpson. and Abernathy 2020), then I argue that mutual surveillance practices between kidnappers and kidnappees during long-term kidnapping can deeply affect the development of both essential conditions for social interaction, creating unusual forms of coexistence. Social and symbolic interactionism focuses on the meanings individuals attribute to their

---

[2] Tiger kidnapping occurs when a criminal takes a hostage to coerce a family member, co-worker, or other closely connected person to facilitate a theft, robbery, or other crime for economic or political profit. The name refers to the predatory stalking of the victims and their families that takes place in preparation for the commission of the offence (Noor-Mohamed 2014). This type of kidnapping used to be a common practice used by the Irish Republican Army to force others into placing car bombs (Synnott et al. 2016).

[3] Virtual kidnapping is a cyber-enabled crime where criminals contact targets (falsely) claiming to have kidnapped a significant other, child, or other relative and threatening to cause death or serious bodily harm to the person unless a ransom is paid (Maras and Arsovska 2023).

interactions and the symbols they employ in communication (Carter and Fuller 2016). Thus, I argue that, within the context of long-term kidnapping, both parties continuously interpret and reinterpret each other's actions to construct significant collective or individual meanings. Consequently, mutuality may emerge as both sides develop a shared understanding or language to exert social control or engage in collective resistance. Through gestures, tone of voice, or small acts of kindness or punishment, a reciprocal relationship may evolve wherein both parties endeavour to humanise or dehumanise each other, thereby mitigating or exacerbating threats and fostering more or less manageable environments contingent upon the actors' intentions and goals.

In relation to issues regarding consent in long-term kidnapping scenarios, it is important to note that this is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond mere compliance with explicit demands made between kidnappers and kidnappees in their social interactions. It encompasses a broader understanding of agency, autonomy, and power dynamics within coercive contexts (Moreno and Brito 2022). In the scenario of long-term kidnapping, where the power dynamics heavily favour the perpetrators, analysing the kidnappers' actions through the lens of consent requires nuanced consideration of the structural constraints and coercive tactics at play. Kidnappers and kidnappees may engage in subtle forms of negotiation and adaptation to mitigate harm and maintain a sense of agency. Thus, allowing or not allowing the retention of personal belongings during captivity, for example, could be viewed as a strategic response aimed at preserving a semblance of normalcy or asserting limited control over their environment. However, it is essential to approach this analysis with caution and sensitivity to the complex dynamics of power, coercion, and trauma inherent in cases of long-term kidnapping.

In other words, the conceptual categories of mutuality, reciprocity, and consent offer the most comprehensive epistemologies for understanding the power dynamics inherent in long-term kidnapping situations, as well as the role of surveillance activities between kidnappers and kidnappees. I argue that by examining how these elements manifest between perpetrators and victims, it becomes possible to comprehend the asymmetrical distribution of power and control in long-term kidnapping contexts. For instance, analysing instances of reciprocity or negotiated agreements within the context of kidnapping sheds light on the ways in which perpetrators exert dominance and power while simultaneously acknowledging the agency or resistance strategies employed by victims. This analysis is crucial for comprehensively assessing the dynamics of coercion, manipulation, surveillance, and exploitation that characterise kidnapping scenarios.

Furthermore, the conceptual categories of mutuality, reciprocity, and consent offer valuable insights into the coping mechanisms and survival strategies adopted by kidnappees during long-term captivities. I argue that by exploring how victims navigate their captivity through acts of compliance, resistance, surveillance, or negotiation, it becomes possible to address the complexities of victimhood and agency in situations of extreme duress. Thus, understanding the interplay between victim responses and perpetrator tactics provides valuable information for developing interventions and support mechanisms tailored to the specific needs of survivors of long-term kidnapping. The next section will focus on analysing a case of long-term kidnapping in a jungle camp during the armed conflict in Colombia to explore and support these arguments.

The Former Colombian Armed Conflict

On September 26, 2016, the Colombian government and the FARC signed a peace agreement, concluding more than sixty years of armed confrontations. After 50.2 per cent of the electorate initially rejected the peace agreement in a polarised referendum process, and following new negotiations, the Colombian Congress approved a revised peace agreement on November 29, 2016. This date officially established the end of the Colombian armed conflict, initiating the process of the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) of FARC ex-combatants back into Colombian society. The peace agreement created three state-led mechanisms to deliver a transitional justice process for the country: the Special Peace

Jurisdiction (JEP), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CEV), and the Search Unit for Disappeared People (UBPD).

The armed conflict in Colombia was one of the longest-lasting that the world has ever seen. After six decades of conflict, it is estimated that almost twenty per cent of the population is a direct victim of the war (The National Centre of Historical Memory of Colombia 2018; CINEP-CERAC 2021). Some of the outcomes of this war include almost nine million internally displaced people, 200,000 enforced disappearances, more than 17,000 child soldiers, nearly 9,321 landmine incidents, and 16,324 acts of sexual violence (Human Rights Watch 2022; The National Centre of Historical Memory of Colombia 2013, 2018; The National Committee of Reparation and Reconciliation 2009).

The National Centre of Historical Memory of Colombia (2013) has established that there were more than 1,982 massacres of civilians between 1980 and 2012, and the Special Peace Jurisdiction has confirmed 6,402 extrajudicial executions perpetrated by the Colombian Army between 2002 and 2008 (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz 2021).

Phases of Kidnapping in Colombia

According to Colombia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report, during the Colombian armed conflict, almost 80,000 people were kidnapped in Colombia, where the FARC was responsible for forty per cent of the cases (Comisión de la Verdad 2022).[4] After comparing and analysing the information related to kidnapping developed by Colombia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission with databases regarding kidnapping cases made by governmental and state bodies, civil society organisations, and transitional justice institutions (Centre for Research and Popular Education 2019; Colombia's National Centre for Historical Memory 2013; Juridiscción Especial para la Paz 2022; The Office of the Attorney General of Colombia 2022; The Military Forces of Colombia 2021; The National Police of Colombia 2022; País Libre 2017), it is possible to identify six phases of kidnapping in Colombia.

The first phase was the development stage, which took place between 1970 and 1989. In this phase, the principal perpetrators were gangs and crime organisations (*delincuencia común*), including illicit drug trafficking mafias. The second phase was the increase and expansion stage, between 1990 and 1995, where kidnapping started to be a practice developed principally by guerrilla groups to obtain mainly economic benefits. The third phase was the escalation stage, between 1996 and 2000, where practices of kidnapping, particularly from guerrilla groups including the FARC and The National Liberation Army (ELN), became a crucial repertoire of violence during the Colombian armed conflict. The rise of political kidnappings was one of the main outcomes of this third phase. The fourth phase was the crisis and contention stage, between 2001 and 2005, where guerrilla groups used a method called *pescas milagrosas* (miracle fishing) to randomly kidnap civilians on the roads of Colombia.[5] Also during this phase, the FARC started to consolidate jungle kidnapping camps, predominantly in the Amazon region of Colombia.

---

[4] The exact number of people who have been kidnapped in Colombia is still under debate. For instance, the National Centre of Historical Memory of Colombia (2013) estimates around 40,000 cases, whereas Colombia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports a figure closer to 80,000 cases (Comisión de la Verdad 2022). The reasons behind these discrepancies include underreporting, fear of retaliation, informal resolutions, lack of trust in authorities, methodological differences (such as definitions and classifications), and the presence of multiple reporting bodies.

[5] Guerrilla groups used to erect illegal roadblocks in rural areas, using fake police or military uniforms to stop buses and cars and force the travellers out of the vehicles for identity card controls. Some of them were "arrested" after having been assessed for their likely ransom worth. The kidnappers took the most promising ones into captivity, resulting in a regular kidnapping (Phillips 2009).

The fifth phase was the de-escalation stage, between 2006 and 2010, where Colombian institutions including the police, the army, and the government started to contain the threat as a result of the successful implementation of counter-kidnapping strategies (for example, the consolidation of anti-kidnapping units across the country called "GAULA")[6] and international military cooperation (Plan Columbia). The final phase is the post-crisis and transformation stage, which spans from 2010 to today (2024). As a result of the peace agreement with the FARC, the success of GAULA units, and the crucial role of the Colombian civil society in creating citizen-led initiatives against kidnapping, this crime of (im)mobility decreased enormously in the country. Since 2018, organised crime organisations have been the principal perpetrators of kidnapping in Colombia, transforming the dynamics of this crime into kidnapping for ransom rather than political kidnapping or as a war strategy. It is important to note how the different stages of kidnapping in Colombia correlated with the market exchange of different types of capital (i.e., economic, kidnapping for ransom, and political, the kidnapping of politicians and army personnel) regulated by the laws of demand and supply that can shape contexts of armed conflict.

Furthermore, Rubio (2005) argues that the relationship between drug activities and kidnapping in Colombia has been complex. Initially, during the 1970s, the focus was on foreign victims who paid large ransoms. As time progressed, the drug trade shifted its focus to local victims, who paid smaller ransoms but were kidnapped in greater numbers. The influx of drug lords buying rural properties caused land prices to rise, displacing poor peasants and attracting urban middle-class families to rural areas. This demographic shift led to weekend house owners becoming frequent kidnapping targets in the 1980s, a period marked by a significant rise in kidnapping rates. Also, according to Caballero (2013) and Gallego (2023), FARC capitalised on kidnapping as a resource without adversely affecting agricultural production or its relationships with local peasants. Their strategy involved extorting wealthy farmers. Concurrently, drug dealers bolstered the formation of paramilitary groups to protect themselves from kidnappings. Some drug lords even began their criminal paths as kidnappers (Gallego 2023). Over time, drug traffickers employed kidnapping for political purposes and, since 2008, for debt collection. According to Caballero (2013), FARC has also seamlessly alternated between kidnapping, extortion, and drug trafficking to fund its military activities. Thus, Gilbert (2022) argues that funding from kidnapping and the drug trade were related, as the guerrillas used ransom kidnapping to enforce their taxation and protection of the drug trade.

Long-term Kidnapping in a Jungle Camp: Understanding the Dynamics of Mutual Surveillance

According to The National Centre of Historical Memory of Colombia (2022), between 1976 and 2017, the guerrilla groups of the FARC and the ELN kidnapped 1,214 police and army officers. One method that the FARC deployed to kidnap police and army personnel was the implementation of large-scale attacks on military bases. Some examples of these large-scale FARC attacks include the attack on the military base of "Las Delicias" in the Putumayo Department on August 30, 1996, where the FARC captured sixty army officers; the kidnapping of eighteen police officers during the attack on the army base on the hill of Patascoy in the Nariño Department, near the border with Ecuador, on December 21, 1997; and the attack on the army base of "El Billar" in the Caquetá Department on March 4, 1998, where forty-three army personnel were kidnapped. The FARC used to establish mobile and fixed jungle kidnapping camps to keep politicians and police and army officers in captivity across the country. One of the most famous fixed jungle kidnapping camps was "El Borugo," in the Meta Department (see Figure 1), where more than two-hundred kidnappees

---

[6] GAULA is an acronym for "*Grupos de Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal*." It is a military unit exclusively devoted to combating kidnapping and extortion in Colombia. The unit is composed of highly qualified personnel who conduct hostage rescues and dismantle the criminal gangs at the root of crimes that compromise the personal freedom of Colombians (Phillips 2009).

lived together for years, and even decades, in conditions similar to the concentration camps developed during the Second World War (NTN24 2016).

Figure 1: *The "El Borugo" jungle kidnapping camp established by the FARC (NTN24 2016).*

In agreement with Gilbert (2022) and Aparicio and Jetter (2022), the FARC also engaged in the kidnapping of police, army personnel, and politicians for publicity. Kidnapping, being a crime that attracted enormous media attention, provided the FARC with a platform to showcase strength, organisational capacity, and military power through media coverage of large-scale attacks on military bases and kidnapping operations. The FARC referred to the kidnap victims as "*retenidos*" (retained) or "*prisioneros de Guerra*" (prisoners of war) to underscore the political nature of these operations, known as political kidnappings, during the armed conflict. Consequently, the FARC explicitly considered politicians, police, army personnel, and public officials to be a distinct target group for kidnapping, naming them "*los canjeables*" (the exchangeables). This label reflected their potential role as "bargaining chips" in negotiations for the release of fellow rebels through a potential prisoner swap or humanitarian exchange with the Colombian government.

After analysing the interviews, it was possible to establish three main activities of mutual surveillance between kidnappers and kidnappees to distinguish between circumstances (e.g., eating, marching, cooking); goals (e.g., punishment, reward); and strategies to achieve the goals inside jungle kidnapping camps. I argue that the correlated interaction between these three elements (circumstances, goals, and strategies to achieve the goals) shaped the social dynamics inside this unusual socio-cultural order.

According to the interviewees for this research, inside mobile and fixed jungle kidnapping camps, one particular activity provided the best opportunity to practice mutual surveillance: cooking and communal eating. Martens (2015) defines communal eating as a social practice of dining with others in public or private establishments that is centred on food and sharing time with the people who come together to share the meal and conversation. In the FARC jungle kidnapping camps, breakfast and dinner were communal events during which kidnappers and kidnappees were reunited. Usually, lunch was skipped, or it was more of a non-communal activity. Breakfast consisted of a bowl of watery plain pasta with *cancharina* (thin and elongated sweet dough made of flour and fried in oil) and a cup of chocolate made in water. Dinner usually was a combination of beans, rice, peas, and lentils. *Empedrado* (pebbled), a mix of rice and lentils, and *agua de panela* (sugar cane drink) were the most popular foods in mobile jungle kidnapping camps. Thus, the first activity of mutual surveillance was the practice of *getting inside information* during communal eating. This was developed by kidnappers via trying to get "inside information" from kidnappees regarding possible plans of escape, usually by having informal conversations during breakfast. At the same time, during these informal conversations, kidnappees attempted to obtain information about the geographical position of the camp and the perpetrators' plans with reference to the near future. With respect to this practice of *getting inside information*, a former kidnappee stated:

> We used to talk a lot during breakfast, and the best way to approach FARC commanders to gather vital information was by asking for more *agua de panela*. I remember questioning, "Why does this *agua de panela* taste different today? Have you used a different *panela*? Could you use another ingredient to improve it?" Depending on the answer regarding the ingredients, we knew if we were close to a big or small town, and that information helped us plan our next move. (Former kidnappee, personal interview)

From a different perspective, a former FARC kidnapper expressed that:

> For us, the best way to collect information about a possible plan to escape was always at breakfast. My tactic was simple; I used to give more food to one of them to build trust. After breakfast, I would instruct the person to wash all the plates, providing us with more time together. This allowed me to ask directly about rumours and camp gossip. When I shared this strategy with my commanders, they congratulated me! During my time at the camp, I discovered seven escape plans thanks to this tactic. (Former FARC kidnapper, personal interview)

The second activity of mutual surveillance was the practice of *punishment or reward*. Kidnappers provided more or less food to kidnappees to recompense or castigate the quality of the information given by them, focusing the activities of surveillance on kidnappees suspected of lying. Simultaneously, kidnappees refused to eat if kidnappers did not give accurate information (creating a logistical problem inside the camp), focusing the activities of surveillance on targeting emotionally "weak" kidnappers to obtain the wanted information. The next narrative provides an example of the complexity of kidnappees refusing to eat in the jungle camps:

> We were fed up. The FARC had been promising us for months and months that we would be moved to another jungle camp with better conditions. It was all a bunch of lies. The situation became increasingly difficult because we hadn't had any food for three weeks, only water, and we were at our lowest point. Finally, one day, the FARC brought some food to the camp, but three of us refused to eat. We stated that we wouldn't eat until we received accurate information about whether we were moving to another camp or not. In response, they beat us, took our tents, and left us sleeping rough for three nights. We went without eating for another week. Eventually, the FARC informed us that we would stay in this camp for another six months, and for us, it felt like a small victory. At least we obtained the information we wanted. (Former kidnappee, personal interview)

Regarding how kidnappers used to focus the activities of surveillance on kidnappees suspected of lying, a kidnapper stated:

> Sometimes, the situation inside the camp was very complex in terms of food and health. Occasionally, access to food was very difficult because the camp was so far away. Some days there was not enough food for everybody, and I took this opportunity to punish the liars in the camp. My preferred method was to mix the food with glass and say to the prisoner, "If you keep lying about what is going on in the camp, your mouth will keep bleeding." Another effective method was moving the prisoner to sleep close to the pigs to give him a lesson. (Former FARC kidnapper, personal interview).

Finally, there was the mutual surveillance practice of welcoming new members. Kidnappers often used to welcome new kidnappees to the camp by giving extra portions of food during the first week as a method to establish proximity and closeness, and as a premeditated way to create trust between kidnappers and new

kidnappees. During that week, kidnappers deployed surveillance strategies to identify "troublemakers" inside the new group of kidnappees by analysing their reactions after being given more or less food during dinner. Alternatively, when new members of the FARC arrived at the camp, kidnappees asked them to cook in order to learn the region of Colombia they came from and, during the conversation, tried to get information about the future plans for the camp or knowledge about what was happening in the country. Also, there was a strategy to identify the personality of the new FARC arrivals and create actions of surveillance if they were considered necessary (e.g., towards new FARC members behaving badly or violently upon arrival to the camp). As the next quote states, this practice of welcoming new kidnappees was frequent for the FARC:

> The commanders used to inform us two or three weeks in advance about newcomers coming to the jungle camp to prepare for the process. We would use the new arrivals as guinea pigs, administering injections and providing them with decomposing food to analyse their reactions. Then, we compiled a list of newcomers we could trust or not based on their responses. We sought to establish connections with those who didn't complain, aiming to gather information about what was happening inside the jungle camp. Troublemakers were denied showers for weeks, and we punished them by confiscating the batteries from their radios or withholding toilet paper. If a troublemaker provided valuable information, we gradually started giving them small pieces of toilet paper or better food. (Former FARC kidnapper, personal interview)

One of the most interesting aspects of this practice of *welcoming new members* was the transformation from the former war logic of "enemy vs. enemy" to one of "kidnapper–kidnappee," where surveillance activities played a central role. Regarding this transformation, a former kidnappee expressed that:

> When I arrived at the jungle camp, the courage of war faded away, and humility took its place. The kidnapping brought about a humility subjected to numerous degrading experiences while tied to a tree. In the camps, the FARC treated you like an animal, constantly watching, interrogating, and observing. They provided us with a toothbrush only three weeks after arriving in the camp and never allowed me to go to the toilet on my own. My only wish was that the army would bomb us once and for all, that the bombs would fall on us in the camp. (Former kidnappee, personal interview)

Another example of the system of connected activities of surveillance, intimacy, control, and consent developed inside the jungle camps was when kidnappees were asked by FARC members to write letters or record video messages to their families as proof of life or to the Colombian government to send messages for political purposes. During the writing or recording of the messages, the disclosure of information was crucial. It was a double dynamic. On one hand, kidnappers wanted to control all the information and the narrative provided by kidnappees in their letters or recordings and, on the other hand, kidnappees aimed to bring vital and crucial information to their relatives.

The use of particular words or sentences to send coded messages to the families by the kidnappees, the consent of allowing some types of information in the letters as a result of social transactions between kidnappers and kidnappees (including physical intimacy or bribery), and the strategies of surveillance established by FARC to prevent possible suicides of kidnappees after reading the letters, are some examples of this web of surveillance and counter-surveillance. The narrative below is a relevant example regarding this aspect:

> The FARC asked us to write our first proof of life letter to our families two months after being kidnapped. They instructed us on what to write and which words to avoid, nothing that the army or the police could perceive as suspicious. The letter had to address only

your family and nothing else… The FARC read the first letter that I wrote and asked me to change the tone, portraying that I was in good spirits and happy to be in the camp… It was extremely humiliating... The FARC also asked me to write extensively about a future humanitarian exchange between us and members of the FARC in prison. They scrutinised the letters that our families sent to us through the Red Cross. If they disliked something in the letter, they would highlight the sentence or paragraph. We didn't have any freedom at all to communicate with our families. (Former kidnappee, personal interview)

The jungle kidnapping camps were typically shaped into four main spaces: the kidnappees' area, the kidnappers' area, the kitchen area, and the communal area. In order to exercise differential surveillance, FARC used to create "clusters of kidnappees" inside the kidnappees' area, separating politicians, police officers, and army personnel groups (see Figure 2). In some camps, FARC adopted the panopticon model, with the FARC area in the middle and the whole camp surrounded by wire, wood walls, and heavily armed FARC members along the perimeter. In mobile camps, the most common arrangement was to have the kidnappees' zone in the middle surrounded by FARC tents. Kidnappees used the reflection of small mirrors and broken glass to do surveillance against FARC members inside the camp. Other practices of surveillance employed by FARC included the allocation of child soldiers to cohabitate inside "clusters of kidnappees" from time to time and the use of candles to create perimeters along kidnappee's tents to restrict mobility.
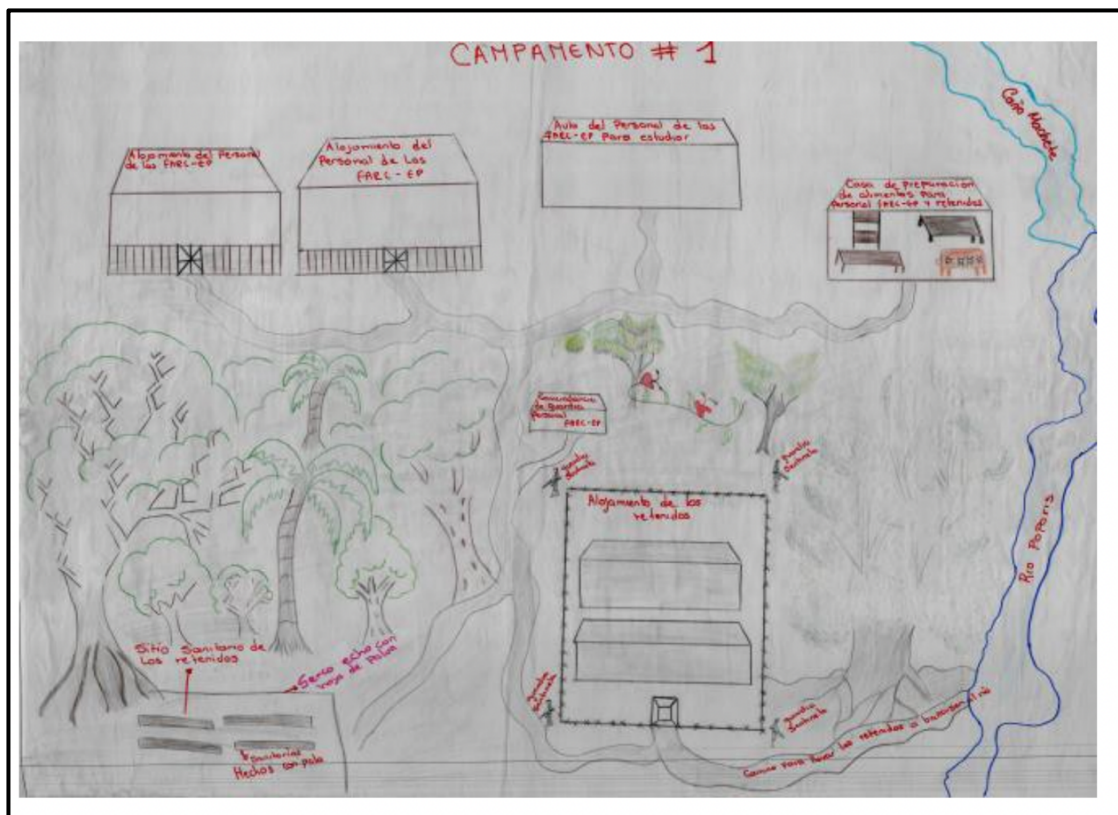

Figure 2: *Drawing of a jungle kidnapping camp made by a former FARC combatant (Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz 2021).*

Furthermore, after analysing the interviews, it became clear that the FARC used animals and insects as a method of deterrence, punishment, or reinforcement in jungle kidnapping camps, creating a novel system of control. The use of animals as surveillance tools is not a new phenomenon (Bonfanti 2014; Lilly and

Puckett 1997). Nevertheless, what is innovative in this case is that, as a result of spending considerable amounts of time with some of these animals, particularly dogs, and due to the nature of this long-term captivity, some kidnappees established relationships of trust and friendship with some of these creatures. Addressing this topic, a former kidnappee expressed:

> I remember they brought this dog to scare us; it was huge! He used to bark at us all the time in the camp. During the first couple of weeks, we were petrified. However, one day, I started to feed the dog with my own food, and I began to talk with him. Feeling lonely, I started asking him if he had any news about my family, my girlfriend, or my grandfather… After that initial conversation, something changed. The dog became my best friend and confidant for two months… Suddenly, one morning, the commander in charge of the camp killed the dog in front of everybody, shouting that we were not here to make new friends… (Former kidnappee, personal interview)

One cruel expression of the novel system of control imposed by the FARC was the use of mosquitoes to threaten the lives of kidnappees. Leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease common in the Colombian jungle, is caused by infection from Leishmania parasites spread by the bite of infected sandflies. It was the most common illness in jungle kidnapping camps. FARC kidnappers routinely exposed kidnappees to mosquitoes, instilling constant fear as a means of exercising control and power over them. As one former kidnappee recalled:

> I got five sores because of leishmaniasis. They had to inject me 200 times to cure me. In the end, I wanted to die in the jungle. There were days when all I did was ask God to take me away, to please stop this suffering. Look, that was so many years ago, and even today, I still suffer from tachycardia and must take pills every day because of the treatment. As much as I want to, these scars will never let me forget the kidnapping. (Former kidnappee, interview with the project Recuerdos de Selva, 2019).

Another situation where aspects related to mutuality, reciprocity, and intimacy were expressed during captivity was during the long walks from one jungle camp to another. Typically spanning from 4:00 am until 3:00 pm, both kidnappees and kidnappers shared food and water, assisting each other in crossing turbulent river flows or dealing with dangerous snakes. Despite the mutual aid, kidnappers committed crimes against the intimacy of the kidnappees during these walks. FARC commanders prohibited kidnappees from using the toilet privately, demanding that they fulfil their physiological needs in front of everyone participating in the long walks. The average distance for these walks was between eight-hundred and nine-hundred miles, crossing rivers, mountains, swamps, forests, and tangled vegetation in the southern geographical areas of Colombia.

Methodological Note

It is important to note that the length of the interviews ranged between forty minutes and two and a half hours. To protect subjects' privacy, confidentiality, and safety, and to reduce the likelihood of trauma during interviews, I conducted risk assessments and chose safe and neutral interview locations where participants could feel comfortable and secure, avoiding places that could put participants at risk or cause distress. Furthermore, I established emergency protocols for handling emergencies or distress during interviews and I had training to recognise signs of distress and how to respond appropriately. I used a sensitive questioning approach, designing interview questions to be respectful and non-intrusive. I also avoided questions that might re-traumatise participants, allowing participants to skip questions they found distressing and giving participants control over the interview process. I let them decide the pace of the interview, take breaks when needed, and stop the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable. I conducted a debriefing session after

the interview to help participants process their experiences, providing them with resources and contacts for support services if they experience distress.

In order to categorise the information, a conceptual clustering analysis was developed (Talavera and Béjar 2001). This method was used to classify interviews as clusters of information, following a conceptual description to group narratives together by similarity into classes and to generate a classification structure. This approach, related to fuzzy set theory (Zimmermann 2001), allowed the creation of five diverse clusters of information to manipulate the qualitative data by combining a dialectical inductive/deductive reasoning process and a hypothesis-generating method (Holyoak and Morrison 2005). This methodological design consents to improving the data analysis process by combining the use of clusters of information (characterising topics and narratives in terms of logical rules) with the inductive/deductive technique to derive knowledge and verify hypotheses. It also permits the integration of deductive tools and data mining resources with qualitative analysis software, generating a dialogic conversation between theoretical ideas and the qualitative data derived from the case study.

Conclusion

This article began by revisiting the relationship between surveillance and kidnapping. It establishes that kidnapping is a crime of (im)mobility and a social act where the interaction between kidnappers and kidnappees shapes a broader system of connected activities of surveillance, intimacy, control, and consent. It states that during situations of long-term kidnapping, novel forms of social interaction emerge as a result of mutual surveillance practices. It emphasises that one of the main outcomes of the implementation of a system of connected activities of surveillance during long-term captivities is the transformation of the sense of mutuality and reciprocity between kidnappers and kidnappees. After analysing how members of the FARC and Colombian politicians, police, and army personnel conducted mutual practices and activities of surveillance during their lengthy cohabitation inside jungle kidnapping camps, it is clear that the senses of mutuality, reciprocity, and intimacy were crucial to creating an unconventional surveillance regime inside jungle kidnapping camps in Colombia.

The three main activities of mutual surveillance between kidnappers and kidnappees during communal eating (i.e., getting inside information, punishment or reward, and welcoming new members) and the social interactions during the writing or recording of proofs of life are expressions of social structures of surveillance defined by proximity, mutuality, and reciprocity during long-term kidnapping situations. This article, therefore, is an open call to encourage the understanding of surveillance as a social process to fully comprehend kidnapping situations where practices and activities of surveillance are at the centre of the social dynamic. In the case of post-conflict Colombia, there remains a need to completely recognise how long-term kidnapping situations affected the development of the armed conflict in order to provide truth, justice, and reparation to the victims and survivors. In other words, analysing kidnapping in Colombia through the surveillance studies lens can bring a more complex and robust approach to understanding what happened in Colombia during more than six decades of armed conflict.

References

Alexander, David, and Susan Klein. 2009. Kidnapping and Hostage-Taking: A Review of Effects, Coping and Resilience. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 102 (1): 16–21.

Aparicio, Juan, and Michael Jetter. 2022. Captivating News: Media Attention and FARC Kidnappings. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 202: 69–81.

Bailliet, Cecilia. 2010. Towards Holistic Transnational Protection: An Overview of International Public Law Approaches to Kidnapping. *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 38 (4): 581–622.

Bonfanti, Matteo. 2014. From Sniffer Dogs to Emerging Sniffer Devices for Airport Security: An Opportunity to Rethink Privacy Implications? *Science and Engineering Ethics* 20 (3): 791–807.

Boss, Pauline, and Carla Dahl. 2014. Family Therapy for the Unresolved Grief of Ambiguous Loss. In *Bereavement Care for Families*, edited by David Kissane and Francine Parnes, 117–182. New York: Routledge.

British Psychological Society. 2021. *Research Ethical Guidelines and Parameters*. Manchester, UK: British Psychological Society.

British Sociological Association. 2017. *Research Ethical Guidelines*. London: British Sociological Association.

Caballero, Cesar. 2013. *Hay cerca de 200 mil víctimas directas del secuestro. Verdad Abierta*, June 19. https://verdadabierta.com/qmenos-de-39058-secuestros-no-hubo-en-el-paisq/ [accessed May 12, 2022].

Carter, Michele, and Celene Fuller. 2016. Symbols, Meaning, and Action: The Past, Present, and Future of Symbolic Interactionism. *Current Sociology* 64 (6): 931–961.

Centre for Research and Popular Education, The. 2019. *Database Of Historical Newspaper Archives (1970–2019).* Bogotá, CO: The Center for Research and Popular Education.

CINEP-CERAC. 2021. *Décimo informe de verificación de la implementación del Acuerdo Final de Paz en Colombia*. Bogotá, CO: CINEP-CERAC.

Colombia's National Centre for Historical Memory. 2013. *A Truth Sequestered: Forty Years of Kidnapping Statistics (1970–2010)*. Bogotá, CO: National Press.

Comisión de la Verdad. 2022. *Hasta la guerra tiene límites. Violaciones de los derechos humanos, infracciones al derecho internacional humanitario y responsabilidades colectivas.* Bogotá, CO: Comisión de la Verdad.

Cunningham, Andrew. 2017. Kidnapping and the Limits of Acceptance. *International Journal of Humanitarian Action* 2 (4): 134–178.

Eley, Louise, and Ben Rampton. 2020. Everyday Surveillance, Goffman, and Unfocused Interaction. *Surveillance & Society* 18 (2): 199–215.

Gallego, Gloria. 2023. *Fue como un naufragio: Análisis y testimonios del secuestro en Colombia (Justicia y conflicto)*. Bogotá, CO: Siglo Editorial.

Gilbert Danielle. 2022. The Logic of Kidnapping in Civil War: Evidence from Colombia. *American Political Science Review* 116 (4): 1226–1241.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Haggerty, Kevin, Kirstie Ball, and David Lyon, eds. 2012. *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*. London: Routledge.

Holyoak, Keith, and Robert Morrison, Robert. 2005. *The Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Human Rights Watch. 2022. *World Report*. New York: HRW Press.

Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz. 2021. *La JEP hace pública la estrategia de priorización dentro del Caso 03, conocido como el de falsos positivos*. Bogota, CO: JEP Press.

———. 2022. *Toma de rehenes, graves privaciones de la libertad y otros crímenes concurrentes cometidos por las Farc-EP*. Bogotá, CO: JEP Press.

Lamont, Michèle, and Mabel Berezin. 2016. Mutuality, Mobilization, and Messaging for Health Promotion: Toward Collective Cultural Change. *Social Science and Medicine* 165: 1–29.

Lilly, Robert, and Michael Puckett. 1997. Social Control and Dogs: A Sociohistorical Analysis. *Crime & Delinquency* 43 (2): 123–147.

Mäkinen, Liisa. 2017. *Ludic Surveillance Examining Mundane Surveillance Practices at the Interface of Control and Play*. Helsinki, FI: Valtiotieteellinen tiedekunta.

Maras, Marie-Helen, and Jana Arsovska. 2023. Understanding the Intersection Between Technology and Kidnapping: A Typology of Virtual Kidnapping. *International Criminology* 3: 162–176.

Martens, Marleen. 2015. Communal Dining. In *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*, edited by Raja Rubina and Rüpke Jörg, 167–180. London: John Wiley & Sons.

Melamed David, Simpson Brent, and Abernathy Jered. 2020. The Robustness of Reciprocity: Experimental Evidence That Each Form of Reciprocity Is Robust to the Presence of Other Forms of Reciprocity. *Journal of Science Advances* 6 (23): 1–7.

Military Forces of Colombia, The. 2021. *Colombian Army Kidnapping Statistics Database (1996–2021).* Bogotá, CO: Colombia.

Monahan, Torin, and David Murakami Wood, Eds. 2018. *Surveillance Studies: A Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Moreno, María, and Paco Brito. 2022. Consent: Signing On to Desire? *Critical Times* 5 (2): 434–443.

National Centre of Historical Memory of Colombia, The. 2013. *Enough Already: Memories of War and Dignity*. Bogotá, CO: Colombian National Press.

———. 2018. *Sujetos victimizados y daños causados: Balance de la contribución del CNMH al esclarecimiento histórico*. Bogotá, CO: Colombian National Press.

———. 2019. *Recuerdos de Selva*. Bogotá, CO: Colombian National Press.

———. 2022. *Observatorio de Memoria y Conflicto*. Bogotá, CO: Colombian National Press.

National Committee of Reparation and Reconciliation, The. 2009. *Memorias en Tiempos de Guerra. Repertorios de Iniciativas*. Bogotá, CO: CNRR Press.

National Police of Colombia, The. 2022. *Police Kidnapping statistics database (1998–2022).* Bogotá, CO: The National Police of Columbia.

Noor-Mohamed, Mohd Kassim. 2013. The Definitional Ambiguities of Kidnapping and Abduction, and Its Categorisation: The Case for a More Inclusive Typology. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* 53: 83–100.

———. 2014. The Definitional Ambiguities of Kidnapping and Abduction, and its Categorisation: The Case for a More Inclusive Typology. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* 53: 83–100.

NTN24. 2016. Así eran los campos de concentración que las FARC utilizaron para los secuestrados. NTN24, August 25. YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03uRqvNC4V0 [accessed October 24, 2022].

Office of the Attorney General of Colombia, The. 2022. *The Attorney General's Office Kidnapping Statistics Database (1996–2022).* Bogotá, CO: The Office of the Attorney General of Colombia.

País Libre. 2017. *Por un país libre. 25 años.* Bogotá, CO: País Libre.

Phillips, Everard. 2009. The Business of Kidnap for Ransom. In *The Faces of Terrorism: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by David Canter, 196–221. London: John Wiley & Sons.

Rubio, Mauricio. 2005. *Del rapto a la pesca milagrosa: breve historia del secuestro en Colombia*. Bogotá, CO: Universidad Externado de Colombia.

San Martin, Alvaro, Joanna Schug, and William Maddux. 2019. Relational Mobility and Cultural Differences in Analytic and Holistic Thinking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 116 (4): 495–518.

Shortland, Anja. 2019. *Kidnap: Inside the Ransom Business*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Slack, Jeremy. 2019. *Deported to Death: How Drug Violence Is Changing Migration on the US–Mexico Border*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Synnott, John, David Canter, Donna Youngs, and Maria Ioannou. 2016. Variations in the Journey from Crime: Examples from Tiger Kidnapping. *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling* 13: 239–252.

Talavera, Luis, and Javier Béjar. 2001. Generality-Based Conceptual Clustering with Probabilistic Concepts. *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence* 23 (2): 196–206.

Trottier, Daniel. 2012. *Social Media as Surveillance: Rethinking Visibility in a Converging World*. London: Routledge.

Tzanelli, Rodanthi. 2006. Capitalizing on Value: Towards a Sociological Understanding of Kidnapping. *Sociology* 40 (5): 929–947.

Vogt, Wendy. 2016. Stuck in the Middle With You: The Intimate Labours of Mobility and Smuggling along Mexico's Migrant Route. *Geopolitics* 21(2): 366–386.

———. 2018. *Lives in Transit: Violence and Intimacy on the Migrant Journey*. Oakland, CA: California University Press.

Zimmermann, Hans-Jürgen. 2001. *Fuzzy Set Theory—And Its Applications*. Norwell, MA: Kluwer.

Zuboff, Shoshana. 2019. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London: Profile Books.