

Chapter 11

Colombian women in transnational organized crime

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25062/9786287602502.11>

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Abstract: The gender approach in strategic studies in security and defense is an advance in the multidisciplinary vision that the sector must address to understand the threat. The participation of women in transnational organized crime has been limited to subordinate positions or that of victims, which makes the design of public policy in Colombia focused on prevention. The study of the phenomenon of *women criminals* must be made more complex to understand the roles of women in shaping one of the main threats facing the continent: transnational organized crime.

Keywords: transnational organized crime, gender approach, criminal woman, public policy.

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APA citation: Monroy V., V. A. (2023). Colombian women in transnational organized crime. In S. Uribe-Caceres & D. López Niño (Eds.), *Theoretical Approach to Notions of War and Strategic Leadership* (pp. 223-240). Sello Editorial ESDEG.
<https://doi.org/10.25062/9786287602502.11>

THEORETICAL APPROACH TO THE NOTIONS OF WAR AND STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

ISBN (print): 978-628-7602-49-6

ISBN (online): 978-628-7602-50-2

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25062/9786287602502>

Security and Defense Collection

Sello Editorial ESDEG

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Bogotá D.C., Colombia

2023



Introduction

In the context of globalization and economic development in today's world, the dynamics of women, in general, have changed. Women have managed to open spaces that were exclusively for men; criminal organizations are no exception. In this sense, understanding the *criminal woman* phenomenon allows us to understand the roles that these women have developed or exercised in transnational criminal organizations in the context of Colombia, in order to evaluate whether the strategies to face such organizations have adopted a gender approach.

Economic conditions have favored, in some cases, the equality of gender roles, from the point of view of greater access to the labor market. However, it can also be evidenced that economic pressures are aggravating some of women's spaces, compared to the need to have a source of income. Among the factors that can be identified as generating pressure on the social status of women to opt for illegal activities as a means of subsistence can be found. Households headed by women, segmentation of the labor market, segregation of women in low-paying jobs and growing inequality in the distribution of income between men and women (Steffensmeier, 1989, p. 263). Some of these factors can be configured as conducive to the increase in "traditional crimes of female consumption: such as theft, theft of services, welfare fraud (receiving subsidies from the State), among others" (p. 264). Therefore, there is no clear evidence that the increase in gender equality is directly related to the increase in levels of economic development. To consider the fact of the increase in female crime, variables that consider female status must be considered, such as, for example, the level of education and participation in the labor force. Women do not necessarily benefit from economic development: on the contrary, such development can even increase their marginalization.

In the case of Colombia, economic development is a parameter of analysis to determine the affectation of criminal women. However, the increase in criminal organizations in the national territory and socioeconomic conditions also determine the opportunities to commit crimes. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the context in which criminal organizations operate, in order to determine criminal opportunities and, above all, how they have affected the roles played by criminal women.

The participation of women in criminal activities in the country is not an isolated event: Colombia has a background that cannot be ignored. The leadership exercised by Griselda Blanco, who is recognized as one of the pioneers in the formation of drug cartels in Colombia, is a case that will be addressed in this document.

Gender Approach in Public Policy

In order to claim the need to include the gender approach in the strategies to face transnational organized crime, it is necessary to review the conceptualization under which countries define *public policy against criminal organizations*. That is, the processes, empowerment, and identity of criminal women.

For example, on the UN Women website it can be seen that the interventions are focused on the attention of women as victims; that is, on the prevention and resolution of conflicts, so the objective is to empower women in the leadership of these processes. In reference to the empowerment of women, there is a recognition of women who have managed to position themselves in different fields, such as music or politics. Obviously, the rise of criminal women within criminal organizations is not worthy of praise, as it would be an apology for crime, but it should be an approach for the design and formulation of public policy in this regard.

In reference to the gender approach in the design and formulation of public policy, in September 2021 the Ministry of Justice and Law of Colombia and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Colombia (UNODC), developed the Exchange of National and International Experiences on Women and Drug Trafficking, which was configured as a meeting to reflect on the situation of women with respect to the production, trafficking and consumption of drugs. Although the focus was exclusively for one of the crimes involving criminal organizations, it is worth recognizing that first effort to understand the way in which women participate in the activities of the drug trafficking chain.

With this first effort, it is possible to show progress in the socioeconomic characterization of women deprived of liberty for drug-related crimes. The objective of Wilson Ruiz Orejuela, Minister of Justice and Law at the time, was, as he stated:

[...] we plan to address the drug problem from a gender perspective. We also reviewed the lessons learned and public policy initiatives that allow us to strengthen the capacities of Colombia and other nations. We identify a particular role of women in the field of illicit crops, therefore the substitution program, and in general social investment aimed at transforming the territories affected by illicit crops, have specific actions for rural women. (diariojuridico.com, 2021)

For the minister, the dynamic has changed; according to his speech,

[...] it is common to hear that drug trafficking is a men's affair. However, nothing is so far from reality: the drug trafficking chain not only involves women in carrying out several of the processes of drug production, processing and distribution around the world, but it is also women who are the direct victims of this illegal economy. One of the most outstanding evidences is that about 35% of women who have been deprived of their liberty in the world are convicted of drug-related crimes. (United Nations, September 2021, para. 10)

This important initiative is an advance in the recognition of the problem of criminal women, but within the framework of the research it is also essential to review public policy in Colombia, determine if today an effective application of the gender approach can be identified in strategies to fight organized crime, so the national development plans (PND) of the previous government (2018-2022) and the current one (2022-2026) were reviewed.

Within the revision of the PND "Pact for Equity" (2018-2022), of the government of President Iván Duque, in the component "Dismantling organized crime and guaranteeing citizen security" the strategies are aimed exclusively at strengthening the capacities of the Public Force to face this type of organizations.

However, once the analysis of the document has been carried out, a component that could indirectly include the gender approach can be evidenced: *advocacy*. As mentioned in the document, incidence is a factor that allows articulating the actions that the State can implement in the prevention of crime, since it corresponds to *criminal recurrence*. That is, the number of cases that occur during a specific period, and the probability that a person from a certain population may be affected. Incidence can be a useful indicator to identify the motivations that lead

women to join a criminal organization. According to data reported by the National Penitentiary Institute (INPEC) for the end of 2021, criminal recidivism is one of the major problems that afflict the penal system in Colombia and that generate the main burden for the authorities of the government system. During the year, 56,820 cases of recidivism were recorded. Among the list of crimes with the most recidivism are theft, with 12,229 cases, and the manufacture, trafficking and carrying of firearms or ammunition, with 8,047 cases.

The second crime on the list is drug trafficking with 7,062 repeat offenders and homicide with 6,443 cases. The figures reported by INPEC correspond to the total number of offenders who serve both intramural and home sentences or who are in the review stage. The report differentiates between men and women, from which it can be concluded that men are more likely, not only to commit the crime, but to reoffend. Thus, 53,350 of the repeat offenders (94%) are men, while 3,481 (6%) are women (Caracol News, December 7, 2021). In this sense, the contribution in reference to the gender approach may be limited to the presentation of figures separated by gender.

For the current NDP "Colombia world power of life" (2022-2026), in its conception of multicrime, transnational organized crime is considered as a problem that must be overcome to protect life and institutional control for the construction of a society without violence. However, as in the previous plan, the approach to face is aimed at strengthening the operational capacities of the institutionality of the operational level of the security and defense strategy. Likewise, like the previous government, it considers prevention a factor, but in order to specifically determine if there is a gender focus in the formulation of public policy on security and defense, within the framework of the investigation it is necessary to wait for the document of the Ministry of Defense, to evaluate the frameworks of action of the latter, which has not yet been published.

Criminal woman in Colombia

The interest in investigating this phenomenon stems from three situations that have been occurring in the country. First, the increase in women in prison. Secondly, the greater participation of women in criminal organizations. Third, the configuration of transnational organized crime as a threat. According to the article "Women and prison in Colombia: challenges for criminal policy from a gender perspective" by the Observatory of Justice and Criminal Policy of the Javeriana University, in

the period between 1991 and 2018, the number of women in prison per 100,000 inhabitants increased more than threefold, from 9.9 in 1991 to 31.5 in June 2018. In figures published by INPEC, from 1,500 women in 1991, it reached 7,944 in June 2018, which denotes an increase of 429% (Sánchez, 2018).

Although the participation of women in criminal organizations is still low compared to the participation of men, this is a phenomenon that is not only evident in Colombia. For example, in Mexico Jorge Balderas (2021), a sociologist and researcher at the Autonomous University of Ciudad Juárez, affirms that, gradually, women have left secondary roles; before, women were companions and partners, or mothers and relatives, of those who participate in organized crime. They now play other roles, such as instigators of revenge, messengers of clandestine business on the streets or interlocutors with detained subjects, which increases their participation in other dynamics of drug trafficking. Women have also gained spaces for scientific development, with the implementation of technological devices, which allows a greater participation of them in production processes in general. Likewise, women, not being directly associated with the criminal structure, can, from the perspective of organized crime, camouflage themselves better. A woman in the criminal sphere passes as a mother or a housewife, and generates less suspicion (Balderas, 2021).

In the case of Colombia, other factors may be evident. The criminal woman began to use *narco-aesthetics* as a way to exhibit power and success. Then, women began to use these supposedly feminine aesthetic criteria, derived from *narco-culture*, to have the opportunity for social advancement, to reach important positions within criminal organizations. “Consequently, over the years, the image of the ‘show’ woman that accompanies the male drug trafficker has evolved towards that of the ‘bosses’.” (Insight Crime, 2020, pp. 10-12). This evolution of the criminal woman within the criminal organization responds to the fact that her motivation to be a criminal is greater than the costs she can assume for the violation of the law, which responds to the learning process of the criminal culture.

Consequently, in order to understand the roles of criminal women in Colombia, it is important, first, to make it more complex how to identify who the Colombian criminal woman is. The article “Description of female criminality in Colombia”, by the Crime Observatory of the Directorate of Criminal Investigation and Interpol of the National Police (Dijin) (2012), turned out to be one of the most complete documents for an initial characterization that allows understanding the context of criminal women in Colombia. Although the figures correspond to 2012, they are

taken as a baseline to advance the investigation process and be taken up again in the application phase of data collection tools.

The document can stand out

[...] as the criminal woman varies her participation in criminal activities both in space (different municipalities of Colombia) and in time and in the type of criminal activity. In the comparison they made of the databases of the Penitentiary Centers and the National Police, 57% of the population of incarcerated women is between 21 and 35 years old, which suggests that they are relatively young people, who on many occasions have started their criminal careers at an early age. On the other hand, about 70% of this population lived, before entering prisons, in socioeconomic strata 1 and 2. In addition, most had access to the health service, through the Identification System of Potential Beneficiaries of Social Programs (Sisbén). (Norza et al., 2012, p. 347)

Giving continuity to the data of the article of the Dijin Observatory (2012), it can be inferred that one of the causes corresponds to economic conditions; however, this type of phenomena is multicausal and other factors must be considered. This population has low levels of education or early school leavers.

92% of the population interviewed said they had attended some school degree, only 13% had studied a technical degree, a trade course, an undergraduate or a professional postgraduate degree. Another risk factor that is recorded, thanks to the information provided by convicted and imprisoned women, is that of belonging to or coming from an unstructured home. More than 53% of the women who participated stated that they came from a home where there was evidence of mistreatment and abuse. This characteristic has a considerable impact on people's behaviors and, therefore, may be, in a certain way, associated with the beginning of a criminal career, although not necessarily.

In the case of adult women, the Observatory was able to identify other common characteristics that can be considered as risk factors; 75% stated that at some point in their lives they worked in a legal activity (even if it was informal). The abandonment of legal activities may be due to insufficient income to support third parties, as well as the lack of opportunities to get a stable job, 84% identified themselves as female heads of household. More than half of women in prisons have started their criminal career before the age of 25. 13% of the population surveyed during the development of the study said they had ever been held in a juvenile correctional facility, and 67% said they had reoffended in the commission of crimes, after having been in prison before. (pp. 348-349)

Once these data have been reviewed, a preliminary profile of the criminal woman in Colombia could be made. Young women between the ages of 21 and 35 who begin their criminal career at an early age, from socioeconomic strata 1 and 2, belonging to the subsidized level, with very low levels of schooling and with a rising percentage of recidivism levels.

Organized crime in Colombia

The importance of understanding the impact of the roles of criminal women in criminal organizations in the Security and Defense Strategy in Colombia lies in the fact that transnational criminal organizations, according to the latest biennial report of the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GITOC), which evaluates these aspects in the 193 member countries of the United Nations, Colombia ranks as the second country in the world - after the Democratic Republic of the Congo - with the largest number of criminal organizations and markets (López, 2022). Likewise, the General Gutiérrez Mellado University Institute recognizes how violence associated with crime affects individuals who inhabit the American continent, and is thus one of the “most dangerous transnational threats of the post-Cold War” (Sampó, 2017, p. 26).

To begin with, it is important to define the concept of organized crime. The Palermo Convention of 2000, recognized as ‘the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime’, constitutes a historic milestone of consensus on this modern criminality that was strengthened thanks to the processes of globalization. However, there is a precedent in which the United Nations dealt with this phenomenon and formally recognized its existence in 1975, in the United Nations in the V Convention in 1975 for the Prevention of Crime, called “Changes in the Forms and Dimension of Transnational and National Crime”. They also highlighted the importance of criminality as a company, pointing out three levels of organization: *organized crime*, *corporate crime* (in English, *white-collar crime*) and *corruption*. This makes it possible to establish that organized crime is a threat to developing countries. (Rodríguez, 2016, pp. 68-70).

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000) characterized a gang or criminal group under the following criteria. They are not necessarily armed; they are structured in a business, military, or associative way; they have a unified direction or command. They use violence, intimidation, bribery, corruption, or other methods. They exercise permanent or transitory control over

areas of territory. They seek the expansion of the territory under their dominion, power, and strength. They assume different names and activities. They hide their illegal financial capacity and seek to increase their influence over public powers and society (Angarita, 2016, cited by Álvarez, 2017. p. 601).

These criminal organizations have the advantage of three fundamental elements. One of them is the large number of profits obtained from transnational criminal operations. Another is the ability of these organizations to recruit new talent and reorganize their structures in spaces that were previously reserved for state agencies. Another is its ability to operate on lines traditionally considered exclusive to States, as in the case of diplomacy. Transnational organized crime, according to Stayridis, has developed such capabilities that allow it to operate like the State. So much so, that, due to its capacity for development and reengineering, these new evil multinationals now directly rival many States and even surpass some. (Álvarez, 2017, pp. 608-609).

Among the activities or related crimes of criminal organizations are drug trafficking, kidnapping, trafficking and trafficking in persons, illegal exploitation of minerals, trafficking in arms and technology - also, that of human organs and nuclear material -, selective murders, extortion, intimidation, torture and money laundering. All this allows diversifying the risk of the business and increasing profits; drug trafficking is the main source of income for these structures. It is important to emphasize that the effects of the criminal activities of these criminal groups not only translate into acts of violence, but also affect the environment. The corruption of institutions, both private and state, also generates a deterioration of society and also forges public health problems (Rojas, 2008). Criminal structures seek to monopolize the areas of influence of state agents, regardless of ideology or political orientation. To achieve this, they use extortion and violence as fundamental instruments, and this characteristic is the one that represents the greatest danger for the societies of the region (Rojas, 2018, cited by Suárez, 2021).

Combating organized crime is one of the main challenges that the Colombian State has been facing; with Permanent Directive No. 015 of 2016, of the Ministry of Defense, the characterization of criminal groups in Colombia was rethought. On the one hand, organized criminal groups (GDO in Spanish), which are groups of three or more people dedicated to the commission of crimes whose predominant purpose is the pursuit of profit, through a structure that remains over time. On the other hand, there are organized armed groups (GAO in Spanish), or collectives with a higher level of armed capacity and organizational structure. The relevance of this

classification is that GAO can be fought even by the Armed Forces and not only with the police force (Rincón, 2018, pp. 28-29).

Drug trafficking in Colombia, unfortunately, has allowed organized crime to be configured by drug trafficking gangs, active guerrillas, and dissident groups from the last peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Conflicts to control the business, in addition to other profitable illegal activities - such as illegal mining, smuggling or extortion - are increasingly violent. With the demobilization of the FARC, there were power vacuums in the territories that reconfigured the balance of power, a scenario that was exploited by criminal organizations such as the National Liberation Army (ELN), which achieved greater territorial and criminal control, followed by the growth of the Urabeños, who are considered their greatest rivals in several regions (Insight Crime, 2021). In this scenario, it is convenient to analyze the positions of power that women currently occupy, what their functions are and how they identify with the organization to which they belong.

The current government (2022-2026) has initiated a negotiation process with the ELN, which, within the framework of the classification of Permanent Directive No. 015 of 2016, of the Ministry of Defense, is considered GAO, which will imply a process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, in case of reaching the signing of a ceasefire agreement. Faced with the experience of other peace processes advanced in Colombia, for example, with the FARC, group demobilizations require special attention, so that dissidents or other groups are not generated that enter to occupy spaces left by these groups due to the financial income they generated.

A woman in a world of criminals

The criminal woman must assume either a male or female role to position herself within the organization. Organized crime is exercised through organizations with a strong burden of gender implications, in which masculinity is a projection of power. Therefore, the presence of women in criminal organizations is generally associated with subordinate positions (Sodupe, pp. 119-200). In the case of Colombia, many of the criminal organizations have women in subordinate positions who have been climbing positions. However, history has a background that is decisive for Colombia's positioning as a country that produced and exported narcotics in the 1980s.

This antecedent has its own name and is that of a woman: Griselda Blanco. Recognized as the queen of cocaine, she was born in Cartagena in 1943 and has great importance in the criminal world because she was a pioneer in the design and operation of drug trafficking routes from Colombia to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. These routes were used by the Medellín Cartel, and Pablo Escobar Gaviria recognized her as his teacher. He is also responsible for smuggling using mules, so since the 1970s he has been on the list of the most wanted and wealthy drug traffickers. It is estimated that he trafficked a ton and a half of cocaine every month, amassing a fortune of more than 500 million dollars at the time (Tregunna, 2014a).

In 1985 she was arrested in California and sentenced to fifteen years in prison, without bail. From prison he continued with his criminal activities. After paying his prison sentence, he returned to Colombia and died in Medellín on September 12, 2012, victim of an attack with hitmen (Tregunna, 2014b).

Today she is remembered as a ruthless woman who murdered both her opponents and her husbands to keep their property. She was one of the most important partners in the United States of the Medellín Cartel. She operated in Miami, from where she took care of the transit of the cocaine sent by Pablo Escobar. Since the 1970s, she appeared on the radar of the DEA, an organization that was looking for her because of the large amounts of narcotics she trafficked. It is still unknown who killed her, but no one is surprised, given the countless deaths she caused.

It is contradictory to call a person who has excelled in the criminal world a leader; however, "the word leadership, like many terms in social sciences, is polysemic and diffuse, sometimes even kaleidoscopic" (Delgado, 2005, cited by Andrade, 2013, p. 60). Leadership, then, can be defined (Kotter, 1990) as "an interpersonal process that involves attempts to influence other individuals to achieve a certain vision", through the formation of a cooperative network of people motivated and committed to realize the vision, and thus transform their reality. So, can we talk about a leadership of Griselda Blanco aka 'The Black Widow'?

Reviewing each of the elements of the definition of leadership, Griselda advanced an interpersonal process that influenced other individuals -specifically, Pablo Escobar—, which allowed them to constitute one of the most recognized criminal enterprises to date and fulfill the vision they had of their organization. As mentioned in the characterization of transnational organized crime, these structures function as a company; therefore, they achieve objectives and achieve goals. Griselda Blanco gained recognition as the first lady of illegal marijuana and drug trafficking

in the United States in the early 1970s, because she had the ability to understand that cocaine would be the product of the future. The difference between the sale price of the drug in the United States and the price of its purchase in Colombia and South America was tremendously attractive. Therefore, the vision of his criminal enterprise was focused on achieving transport from one country to another, and this was what Graciela Blanco effectively dedicated herself to when creating the modality of mules (Cruz, 2008).

The criminal woman must position herself within the positions of power of the criminal structure assuming a male or female role. Organized crime is exercised through organizations with a strong burden of gender implications, in which masculinity is a projection of power. Therefore, the presence of women in criminal organizations is generally associated with subordinate positions (Sodupe, pp. 119-200), so the case of Griselda turns out to be an exception, because in many of the criminal organizations the roles that women play are focused on the operational level, and in very few cases, at the managerial levels.

The power projection that Griselda Blanco used to position herself within the criminal organization was linked to trait theory and skill theory (Pariente, 2009; McCall & Lombardo, 1983; Kouzes & Posner, 2003; Katz, 1974). In the case of trait theory, according to which the person has a particular personality that predisposes him to become a leader, it is worth mentioning that Graciela was in the United States during the boom in marijuana trafficking in the seventies, and thanks to his personal characteristics he was able to enter and position himself within the criminal sector.

She started her empire with a relatively small operation, using other women with secret compartments sewn into their underwear to transport drugs. In order to thrive and expand his business, he moved from Columbia to New York and then to Miami, becoming one of the most violent and powerful drug traffickers in Miami's history. She played an important role in establishing a series of smuggling routes and distribution networks that were later taken over by the Medellín cartel. (Tregunna, 2014a)

As proposed by the theory of skills (Platonov, 1963), Griselda had the opportunity to learn behavioral patterns in her exercise as a leader, and to implement an authoritarian style leadership model, through the violent methods by which she was widely recognized.

Griselda Blanco, as a criminal woman, can be framed in the *transactional leadership*, defined by James MacGregor Burns (1978, cited by Pariente, 2006), as the one that establishes a kind of “exchange” between the leader and the members of the group. This figure is the one who guides or motivates his followers, through reward and punishment, towards the established goals, clarifying the roles and tasks necessary to achieve them (Cuadrado et al., 2008). Leadership refers, then, to the relationship of exchange between the leader and his followers in order for their interests to coincide (Mendoza et al., 2007), which can take the form of reward, active and passive administration by exception, which is closely associated with the administrative and work management aspects (Leithwood, 2010). This type of transactional leader strives to recognize and empower the members of the organization and is oriented to transform the beliefs, attitudes and feelings of his followers, since he not only manages the structures, but also influences the culture, with a view to changing it (Andrade, 2013, pp. 60-62).

In this sense, Griselda Blanco, also known as ‘The Queen of Cocaine’, had a Machiavellian mind, which allowed her to hold power against a predominantly male organization. The culture of illegality does not respond to principles or values, so he had to find a way to have the respect of his subordinates and peers within the criminal world, so he administered his own punishments, and some of them involved the death penalty. He ordered killings without discrimination; many of the men who interacted with her stated how difficult it was to understand or control her. Her organization was a family business, so three of her children were involved in the cocaine trade from an early age (Tregunna, 2014b).

In her role as a pioneer of a criminal organization, Griselda Blanco used her status as a woman and the stereotypes assigned to her by society - the idea that women respond to the stereotype of passive, inferior beings, conditioned by their biology, which conditions an “alleged female inferiority” (Sánchez, 2004 p. 243)— as a strategy to hide their own crimes. For society, it is contradictory that a woman in her role as a mother can commit murders. Griselda was adept at balancing her femininity with the masculine traits needed to thrive as America’s cocaine queen. She challenged the male and gender power structure (Shelden, 2001) and dominated their section of the cocaine trade. As a woman, she assumed her role as a mother, and being protective remained very close to Michael and Dixon, her two surviving children, until her death. In organized crime, a woman can go unnoticed, due to the stereotypes built around the figure of women. In the course of Operation Banshee,

which was aimed at capturing Blanco, the case agents found it difficult to “convince their superiors that she was a big deal.” (Tregunna, 2014).

Finally, it is important to clarify that the objective of this writing is not to highlight the criminal life of Griselda Blanco. However, it cannot be hidden that she played a decisive role in establishing the legacy and strengthening of a criminal organization that led drug trafficking in the world. Cocaine gave her wealth, notoriety, and power, but in return it took away two of her children and 20 years of her freedom and eventually led to her death. This history does not only belong to Griselda Blanco: the social and economic situations and the presence of criminal organizations in different parts of the national territory lead to Griselda’s history being repeated; hence the importance of the study of the phenomenon of women criminals.

Conclusions

The challenge of the security and defense sector to include other ways of approaching the problem of international organized crime, which means epistemological ruptures and paradigm shifts in the analysis of female crime in criminal organizations, cannot be ignored. The objective under which this research will continue is to understand the phenomenon of criminal women, which in the future could serve to dismantle and build categories of analysis and mobilize postulates, dogmas and prejudices. In order to use a new narrative to name and recognize the world in feminine; to make visible the situation of women who commit crimes in connection with social acts of power and economic violation (Salazar, 2012, p. 228).

The Colombian government’s strategy to confront organized crime, focused on strengthening the capabilities of the Public Force, has made it possible to exert significant pressure on those involved in this type of activity. In no way can the achievements achieved be ignored or underestimated. For example, capturing and discharging several leaders of criminal organizations such as El Clan del Golfo, and others who have been extradited, such as the drug trafficker alias Otoniel. However, we are facing a culture of illegality that is highly rooted in society, and which has the capacity to adapt to the military and police strategies that confront it, as proposed by Álvarez (2018). These criminal structures are not hierarchical, but have been atomized and specialized to generate links with other criminal organizations, such as the Sinaloa Cartel in Mexico.

From the point of view of public policy, the definition of the problem must be strengthened: it is not enough to continue strengthening the Public Force, since

organized crime must also be faced as a multi-causal phenomenon; not only can the symptoms of the problem be addressed, but its causes must also be addressed. Unified Action is an important commitment that allows addressing the causes and prevention, but it must be strengthened with new approaches, which allow a better dimension of the criminal phenomenon as a company with high financial returns and that feeds on corruption and vulnerable populations.

According to Jorge Mantilla, of the Ideas for Peace Foundation (Zuleta, August 31, 2022),

[...] the expansion of crime and illegal economies in Colombia is also due to the fact that for many years the country concentrated on bringing the peace agreement with the FARC to a happy conclusion and on the fight against drugs, this caused a growing phenomenon of diversification of illegal economies to be left aside, where not only coca but other economies such as illegal mining, but mainly extortion, were expanding and consolidating.

Therefore, the panorama of the Colombian State is very challenging, in the sense that the configuration of the threat has financial resources to strengthen its structure with personnel and technology and uses corruption as a means to delegitimize the State.

In the context described the probability of more women like Griselda Blanco entering criminal organizations is increasingly high. Journalist Mariana van Zeller, from the documentary *Mercado Illegal*, from National Geographic, made a chapter called "Queens of Cocaine" (2021), in which she interviews women who operate in criminal organizations in Brazil and Colombia. In Rio de Janeiro, she entered the favelas and spoke with women who work for factions of Comando Vermelho, highlighting how women increasingly occupy important positions within the structure. She also met with a Los Caparros section commander in Colombian Bajo Cauca. Comparing the profile of the women interviewed with that presented in the development of this document - young women, between 21 and 35 years old who begin their criminal career at an early age, from socioeconomic strata 1 and 2, belonging to the subsidized level and with very low levels of schooling and a significant percentage of recidivism levels -, it can be concluded that there are coincidences, because the threat of transnational crime is a dynamic that affects the region.

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