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“Rupture” and the State: The “Radical Narrative” of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, Colombia*

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Abstract: The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó in Urabá is one of the most emblematic groups of victims of the Colombian conflict. Trapped between the guerrilla, the paramilitaries and the army they declared themselves ‘neutral’ to the conflict, but violations continued, and they declared themselves in ‘rupture’ with the Colombian state. This article traces their ideas of ‘neutrality’ and ‘rupture’ ethnographically, showing how their genealogy constitutes what I call the ‘radical narrative’, an interpretative framework according to which the Community perceives every action of the state. It positions this analysis within anthropological debates which see the state as produced via state-society encounters with material and imaginative dimensions, in this case, direct violence and bureaucratic inefficiency. It concludes that communities’ perceptions of the state must be taken seriously in any trust-building attempt.

Keywords: Thesaurus: Neutrality; state. Author’s keywords: Peace Community; narratives; victims; anthropology of the state; Urabá.

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“Ruptura” y el Estado: la “narrativa radical” de la Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó, Colombia

Resumen: La Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó en Urabá es uno de los grupos más emblemáticos de víctimas del conflicto colombiano. Atrapados entre guerrilla, paramilitares y el Ejército, se declararon “neutrales” al conflicto, pero las violaciones continuaron, por lo que se declararon en “ruptura” con el Estado colombiano. Este artículo rastrea etnográficamente sus ideas de “neutralidad” y “ruptura”, mostrando cómo su genealogía constituye lo que llamo “narrativa radical”, un marco interpretativo según el cual la Comunidad percibe cada acción del Estado. Mi análisis se ubica dentro de los debates antropológicos que entienden al Estado como un producto resultado de los encuentros Estado-sociedad, con dimensiones materiales e imaginarias, que en este caso incluyen la violencia estatal directa y la ineficiencia burocrática. Concluye que las percepciones de las comunidades sobre el Estado deben tomarse en cuenta en cualquier intento de construcción de confianza.

Palabras clave: Thesaurus: neutralidad; Estado. Palabras clave de la autora: Comunidad de Paz; narrativas; víctimas; antropología del Estado; Urabá.

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“Ruptura” e o Estado: a “narrativa radical” da Comunidade de Paz de San José de Apartadó, Colômbia

Resumo: a Comunidade de Paz de San José de Apartadó em Urabá é um dos grupos mais simbólicos de vítimas do conflito colombiano. Encurralados entre guerrilha, paramilitares e o exército, declaram-se “neutrais” ao conflito, mas as violações continuavam e, então, declararam-se em “ruptura” com o Estado colombiano. Este artigo rastreia etnograficamente suas ideias de “neutralidade” e “ruptura”, demonstrando como sua genealogia constitui o que chamo “narrativa radical”, um referencial interpretativo segundo o qual a Comunidade percebe cada ação do Estado. Esta análise se delimita dentro dos debates antropológicos do Estado que vê Estado como resultado de encontros Estados-sociedade com dimensões materiais e imaginárias; nesse caso, violência estatal direta e ineficiência burocrática. Conclui-se que as percepções de comunidades do Estado devem ser consideradas em qualquer tentativa de construção da confiança.

Palavras-chave: Thesaurus: Estado, neutralidade. Palavras-chave da autora: Comunidade de Paz; antropologia do estado; narrativas; Urubá; vítimas.

The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó is one of the most emblematic groups of victims of the Colombian armed conflict.¹ It was formed in 1997 by *campesino* farmers² living in the war-torn North-West region of Urabá who found themselves trapped between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Colombian army, and right-wing paramilitary groups, all of whom involved the civilian population in their war. In San José de Apartadó, some five hundred *campesinos* decided to declare themselves 'neutral' to the conflict, to protect themselves and resist forced displacement. This conception of neutrality is based on a creative interpretation of International Humanitarian Law's (IHL) principle of distinction between combatants and civilians, which stipulates that conflict actors should not target civilians. They built demarcated settlements with signs requesting that neither the guerrilla, the paramilitaries, nor the state armed forces enter these areas, to prevent their living spaces becoming military targets. This demand for respect in the midst of conflict has been made by several rural communities in Colombia who have championed non-violence and impartiality as protection mechanisms (Sanford 2005; Alther 2006; Hernández Delgado 2011; Burnyeat 2013; Mouly, Idler and Garrido 2015), usually accompanied by processes of internal organisation and agendas for autonomous living. The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó is famous, partly because they have been subject to brutal violence, mostly at the hands of the state and the paramilitaries,³ and their public repudiation of this in frequent communiqués⁴ has exposed them to violent reprisals; and partly because of their radical stance of non-participation with the Colombian state, which they call 'rupture' (*ruptura*).

1 Many scholars and activists who sympathise with those who have suffered the effects of war criticise the use of the term 'victim' because they consider, like Gómez Correal, that "the hegemonic use of the category supposes the existence of passive and apolitical humans" (2015, 2n). Gómez Correal opts for "victimized subjects"; some Colombians propose the term "survivor", because they feel it foregrounds the subjects' agency. In some cases, this may be justified, but in this case, the category of 'victim' is mobilised by the Peace Community itself, to make demands for justice. I am not suggesting that the members of the Peace Community are *only* victims –they are not passive sufferers of history, but active creators of it. By using the term 'victim' I am recognizing that they self-identify as such and in doing so make profound moral and normative claims. As with many other examples of positive appropriation of this term and the subjects' appeals to its associations in legal and political spheres (e.g. Castillo, Jimeno and Varela 2015), I believe it is important to use emic terms.

2 I have written elsewhere: "*Campesinos* may be workers on the farms of others, or may own their land [...]. The term *campesino* can be translated as peasant or rural farmer, but the author dislikes these options, firstly because they sound potentially derogatory, and secondly because *campesino* is a whole cultural category in Colombia and other parts of Latin America that is not accurately conveyed by these translations" (Burnyeat 2013, 437n). I therefore maintain the original Spanish.

3 The guerrilla also violated the Community's human rights, and these were also denounced. However, in the Community's perspective, as well as analysts such as Javier Giraldo, CINEP and the documentation of international NGOs such as Peace Brigades International and Amnesty International, the large majority, over 80% of abuses, have been at the hands of paramilitaries and/or state forces.

4 See <http://cdpsanjose.org>

When they founded their organisation in 1997, the Community⁵ held meetings with state institutions, but the relationship deteriorated, influenced by direct State violence, and indirect bureaucratic indifference or hypocrisy. In 2005, following a massacre by soldiers and paramilitaries of eight of their members, the Community publicly declared themselves to be in ‘rupture’ with the state. They posited four conditions for resuming dialogue: a retraction of stigmatising comments made by ex-President Álvaro Uribe in 2004 and 2005; a “Commission for the Evaluation of Justice”; the removal of a police station in San José de Apartadó; and the recognition of their ‘humanitarian zones.’ This article tracks the historical genealogies of these four points.

The related positions of ‘neutrality’ and ‘rupture’ have provoked repudiation from parts of the Colombian state, notably the army and ex-President Uribe. Even some supposedly sympathetic actors such as diplomats have viewed the ‘rupture’ as *radical* and *closed*; a refusal to participate (Aparicio 2012, 264-265). On the other end of the political spectrum, the Community has captured the interest of human rights organisations and academics, who have usually focussed on their ‘neutrality’ and related actions and discourses as case studies to illuminate broader concepts: the ideas of ‘civil resistance’ (Pardo 2007), ‘rightful resistance’ (Naucke and Halbmayer 2016), memory politics (Courtheyn 2016), strategies of non-violence (Masullo 2015), and the socio-legal implications of their ‘rupture’ (Osorio and Perdomo 2011; Anrup and Español 2011).

I hold that their position of ‘rupture’ should be seen, not as a cipher for anything else, but for itself, in the Community’s own terms, in order to *understand* it, in the sense proposed by Bourdieu: “to take their point of view, that is, to understand that if they were in their shoes they would doubtless be and think just like them” (1999, 626). This article traces the Community’s idea of ‘rupture’ ethnographically, and, appropriating the term used to criticise them, shows how the genealogy of the ‘rupture’ constitutes an interpretative framework based on an ethical rejection of the state’s legitimacy, which I call the ‘radical narrative’, according to which the Community perceives every action of the State, and which is a topic of everyday conversation among its members.

This article first outlines anthropological debates about the state to argue that the Community’s social experience of the state, produced via state-society encounters with material and imaginative dimensions, should be analysed as a social reality in itself. Next, it gives an abridged chronological account of the Community’s formation in the context of the Colombian conflict, and the historical development of ‘neutrality’ and ‘rupture’ as emic categories. Finally, it concludes that the Community’s interpretation of the state must be taken seriously in any trust-building attempt.

The methodology for this research involved a mix of classic and activist anthropological methods; I carried out eleven field visits of between two and twenty

5 The idea of ‘community’ is at the core of their collective identity. For this reason, I use the term ‘Community’ with capital C, rather than an acronym such as PCSJA, because it is how they refer to themselves.

days each, travelling between the eleven settlements of the Community, where I engaged in participant observation, and held dozens of in-depth interviews and focus groups. I received Community members on their visits to Bogotá and London, made a feature-length documentary called *Chocolate of Peace*, with co-director Pablo Mejía Trujillo,⁶ and worked with British barrister Kirsty Brimelow QC in a process of mediation between the Community and the government. My formal fieldwork was informed by a relationship which spanned five years (I initially worked with the Community for two years as a field-officer for NGO Peace Brigades International). The 'deep hanging out' and the strong friendships I developed with Community members were complemented by interviews with people who have accompanied the Community, and research in the previously-unstudied personal archives of Father Javier Giraldo, a Jesuit priest who supports the Community and compiled multiple folders of documents such as official minutes of meetings between the Community and State entities, correspondence between Community and state, legal documents and press.⁷

The 'Radical Narrative': Documenting Perceptions of the State

On the morning of 23 March 2015, the Community were preparing for their yearly anniversary, marking eighteen years since their foundation. They had worked hard for the event, cutting the grass and building new wooden bunk beds to accommodate guests, including the ambassadors of France and Germany. Sitting in their thatched-roof kiosk where the commemoration was to be held that afternoon, I watched two men bring a huge white flag into the kiosk, painted with green capital letters, and hang it carefully from the walls. It read:

WE HAVE SUFFERED ALL KINDS OF AGGRESSIONS AT THE HANDS OF
THE COLOMBIAN STATE.

It gave me an odd feeling. I thought: you have survived for eighteen years, staying in your territory against all odds, building a support network with international visibility, fighting for autonomy, building peace from the bottom up... and *that is the identity phrase that you choose for your commemoration?* Its inherent negativity would strike many of the Community's critics. This commemorative phrase holds a ritualistic reaffirmation of a collective identity and a world view, a need to reaffirm the idea of the perpetrator state, one of their founding beliefs, in order to continue being the Peace Community.

The Community's 'radical narrative' sustains the idea that 'the state' has a unilateral plan to exterminate them. This narrative portrays an antagonist state with three motivations: (i) the state wants to eliminate all social organisations; (ii) the Community denounces human rights violations which are largely direct or indirect

6 <http://chocolatedepaz.com>

7 These date from 1994 to 2013. References to these clarify sources and appear as JGA (Javier Giraldo Archive), folder year/pages.

responsibility of the state, and the Santos government (2010-2018) wants to clean up its image; (iii) the state, in alliance with multinational companies and paramilitaries, has economic interests in the Community's land. This narrative presents a homogenous and demonised vision of the state, which converges, in a simplistic way, with the paramilitaries and multinational companies; a view which flattens the complexity of histories of perpetration.

In focussing on the Community's *interpretation* of the State, and linking it to their collective identity, I am not suggesting that the persecution they have suffered is imaginary. Many scholars have documented the convergence of political, military and economic interests which have specifically targeted the Community (Uribe 2004; Aparicio 2012; Cuartas 2014), and there is extensive 'grey literature' which documents human rights violations.⁸ I am underlining the cultural construction of the narrative, and dissecting its elements, to argue for the importance of taking a community's perception of the state seriously, recognising that perceptions are socially constructed, out of the very real horrors of massacres and displacement, but are also subjectively forged. My solidarity is with the Community, but I am also critical of their 'radical narrative' insofar as it simplifies the state and simplistically converges it with the 'paramilitary project' and 'economic interests'.

22 ■ In state-centric theories, 'the state' is often seen as a clearly-bounded institution that is distinct from society, a unitary actor, which anthropologists can 'disaggregate', problematizing this common imagination –exemplified by the Community's 'radical narrative'– of a reified, homogenous totality (Sharma and Gupta 2006, 8). Anthropological approaches see the state as culturally constituted, both materially –how the state manifests itself in people's lives– and imaginatively –how their understandings of it are shaped by their locations and their embodied encounters with state officials and processes (Sharma and Gupta 2006, 11). The imaginary of the unified institution is not to be discarded, but engaged as a social reality in itself. Abrams (1988) distinguishes between the 'state-system' –the system of institutional practice– and the 'state-idea' –the reification of this system. Mitchell (2006, 169) criticises Abrams' separation of the two, because you cannot analyse the way in which power operates without taking both into account: he argues that the imagining of the state –the 'state-idea'– and its material reality –the 'state-system'– should be taken as "two aspects of the same process" (2006, 170).

The 'state-idea' assumes a clear boundary between the state and its 'other', society, but Mitchell writes that it is important to "examine the political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between State and society is produced" (2006, 170). He asks how this dualism is produced as a social reality, and what its practical effects are (2006, 176). Anthropology has frequently engaged with this by observing everyday encounters between state officials and society.

8 Giraldo (2010); *Derechos de petición* by Javier Giraldo (<http://www.javiergiraldo.org/>); communiqués by the Peace Community; communiqués by international NGOs such as Peace Brigades International, Amnesty International, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Operazione Colomba.

Much ethnographic work on such encounters has been done at the local level. Das and Poole foreground ethnographies in state 'margins' – areas impenetrable to the idealised Weberian rational-bureaucratic administration – mapping the "effects and presence of 'the state' in local life" (2004, 5), e.g. encounters between citizens and state officials at a military checkpoint. They claim that such 'margins' – which are not necessarily geographical – are "sites of disorder, where the state has been unable to impose its order" (2004, 6) and "are a necessary entailment of the state" (2004, 4), echoing the school of thought that casts the illegal and the liminal as necessary to the production of the legal. Durkheim wrote that "the production of state authority [...] is dependent on the production of an unlawful underside of the state" (Durkheim 1993, cited by Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 11), while Blom Hansen and Stepputat hold that anthropological studies of *de facto* non-State sovereignty reveal the "two sides of state making: the law and the violence on which it rests" (2006, 16).

This article foregrounds the production of the state in the 'margins' of San José de Apartadó, one of the many areas of Colombia typically seen by academics, legal and illegal conflict actors, state bureaucrats and civilians alike as characterised by a 'failure' or an 'absence' of the state (Serje 2006; Richani 2007; Ramírez 2015). It privileges the social experience of the Community in state-society encounters: state violence, threats from soldiers on the ground, stigmatisation in the press by government officials and meetings with bureaucrats in San José and in Bogotá, whose promises did not materialise and led the Community to feel that 'the state' was hypocritical, because such promises did not stop the presence of the state-on-the-ground, the army, from continuing to commit human rights violations. It is a one-sided account, and does not engage the subjective experience of state officials in these state-society encounters, which involve a "mirroring dynamic" in which those embodying the state also imagine the state in such interactions with society (Aretxaga 2003, 399). The genealogy of the 'rupture' shows how this 'radical narrative' is (re-)produced in state-society encounters with inextricable material and imaginative dimensions.

Origins

Since independence in 1810, Colombia has experienced successive conflicts. Four civil wars in the nineteenth century were followed by '*La Violencia*' (1948-1958), when the two dominant parties, the Conservatives and Liberals, battled for power. Subsequently, left-wing insurgent guerrilla groups formed in the 1960s, fighting the armed forces, and, later, right-wing paramilitary groups formed in the 1980s (Palacios 2006). The 'current' internal armed conflict has also gone through multiple stages. Materially and imaginatively, the social experience that different Colombians have of 'the state' is inextricably connected with these cycles of violence.

The history of the paramilitary counterinsurgency project is inseparable from the emergence of drug-trafficking in Colombia. By the 1980s a mosaic of actors and various drug cartels comprised a newly-rich "narco-bourgeoisie" (Palacios 2006, 203-206). All of society has been involved in the transnational drug trade in one way

or another: the guerrilla, paramilitaries, the state, politicians and civil society (Garay Salamanca *et al.* 2012). In the 1980s, drug cartels joined forces with civilian counterinsurgency groups; regional-level power blocs with diverse public and private interests merged into a national structure in the late 1990s: the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) (Romero and Valencia 2007). A demobilisation agreement, negotiated between 2003-6 by Uribe's government (2002-2010), was heavily criticised, as armed groups (including fighters who never demobilised, fighters who demobilised but returned, and new members drawn from organised crime) continue to operate in the same regions, exerting armed pressure on populations for social, territorial and political control, carrying out selective assassinations and forced displacement, and backed by drug-trafficking (CNMH 2015, 39).

The 'state-idea' in Colombia is bound up with this paramilitary project. Taussig writes, "The paras are part of the state. But at the same time, they are separate and even opposed to it" (2003, 23). Civico sees paramilitarism as functioning as "an extension of the state's sovereignty" (2016, 23) and proposes the term 'intertwinement' for the paramilitary/state relationship, reflecting "a convergence and synergy of interests between organized crime and other economic and political patrons that engender [...] support, sympathies and impunity" (2016, 144). The economic interests driving these perverse alliances are not limited to drug-trafficking, but include mining, agriculture, arms-dealing, and land-grabbing. The question of continuities between pre- and post-demobilization is a crucial element in perceptions of the state.

The region of Urabá is one of the epicentres of the Colombian conflict. Steiner and Martín characterise Urabá as a "zone of borders and settlers", factors which continue to influence the configuration of the armed conflict (CINEP 1995, 50). Following the arrival of the Spanish in the sixteenth century, an imaginary of Urabá was created of a wild land to be tamed and its natural resources exploited, and this imaginary has persisted across centuries (Cuartas 2014). In the late-nineteenth century, settlers were encouraged to come to work for foreign logging companies (CINEP 1995, 14). During *La Violencia*, the image of Urabá as a wild and dangerous land was promoted by Antioquia (Roldán 2002, 217), a department which saw the economic benefits of the Urabá Gulf with access to the Caribbean Sea. In 1955 a road was inaugurated which connected Urabá with Medellín, giving Antioquia control over the resources of Urabá (Roldán 2002, 219).

Urabá was mostly a Liberal region, and after the 1948 assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, Liberal guerrillas in the region attacked Conservatives. The State militarised Urabá, especially to protect business investors. The Liberal-Conservative violence in Urabá was not *only* partisan but "increasingly obeyed economic motivations" (Roldán 2002, 244). In this context, the United Fruit Company arrived and began to cover the region in banana plantations, encouraging more settlers. The Communist Party came to Urabá in the 1960s and recruited the banana workers, helping them unionise (Díez Gómez 2009). The FARC and EPL (People's Liberation Army) guerrilla groups permeated the banana workers' sector and developed a *de facto*

sovereignty over swathes of Urabá, distributing lands, resolving disputes, regulating resources and imposing minimum wages (Valenzuela 2009, 12-13).

As the banana industry grew, some *campesinos* migrated eastwards from the banana zone of the Urabá lowlands to the wild Abibe mountain range. Other *campesinos* from municipalities further South in the mountains (Dabeiba, Peque, Urama) were displaced in *La Violencia* and fled north. Both groups founded the town of San José de Apartadó on the lower Abibe slopes in 1964 (Aparicio 2012, 714). For a while, the mountains were safe from the growing tensions in the banana plantations. B., who arrived as a little girl, told me "It was wonderful, very peaceful. There were many animals you could eat. [...] If Urabá hadn't been so damaged by the violence, we would be living in paradise" (interview January 2015). But the violence between the guerrillas and the state intensified across the country.

President Belisario Betancur (1982-1986) held negotiations with FARC, and the Patriotic Union (UP) party was formed in 1985 as a political solution to the conflict. The UP included FARC members, Communist party members, and civilians who did not sympathise with the armed struggle but believed in the party's left-wing project. With time, the UP distanced itself from the FARC, but the original connection meant that the party was stigmatised, and discourses circulated in political space justifying what many have denominated a 'genocide'. During the late-1980s and early-1990s, five thousand members of the UP were killed, including two presidential candidates (Gómez-Suárez 2015).

The UP was strong in Urabá. In San José de Apartadó, support for it was almost unanimous (Aparicio 2012, 183). According to Gloria Cuartas (interview March 2015), mayor of Apartadó in 1994-1997, the party had a development project in Urabá with three cornerstones: economy, education and healthcare. Agricultural cooperatives were established as the economic motor for community development, and the pilot cooperative was Balsamar, a cacao cooperative in San José, funded by Dutch aid money. J.E. recalls the UP's project as "geared towards development for the *campesinos*. [...] It was us, the *campesinos*, planning the development that we wanted" (interview January 2015). Narratives about organisational process, autonomy, and the hope of a 'viable' left-wing project left a legacy in the collective identity of the *campesinos* of San José de Apartadó.

The business sector was concerned about the spread of guerrilla influence. In the late 80s, an alliance of banana businessmen, cattle farmers, drug cartels and the army launched 'Plan Return' for the business sector to regain control and prevent the spread of communism in Urabá (Valenzuela 2009, 14). The violence echoed the national expansion of the paramilitary counter-insurgency project, but had local dynamics responding to economic interests, which not only targeted *guerrilleros* but was specifically aimed at certain community leaders and organisations that represented economic and political alternatives. San José de Apartadó was a target because it was stigmatised as FARC territory; because of the Balsamar cooperative and the original FARC-UP link; because Balsamar represented an alternative to capitalism expansion;

and because the region was strategic in military terms. (Uribe 2004, 89-93). Joint military-paramilitary operations began in the early 1990s, ostensibly to ‘cleanse’ the territory of the guerrilla.

N. told me that in 1996, six directors of Balsamar were assassinated and hung publicly from butcher’s hooks in San José (interview January 2015). The Governor of Antioquia at the time was Álvaro Uribe, who had General Rito Alejo del Río made commander of the Seventeenth Brigade of the army, with jurisdiction in Urabá (Madariaga 2006, 27). Del Río was known as the “pacifier” of Urabá. A chain of illegal actions unfolded in which the paramilitaries and the army worked together, using methods of terror.⁹ Violence was brutal, dramatic and public. During 1996, many Balsamar and UP leaders in San José were assassinated. F. remembered sadly, “They killed all the members [of Balsamar]. What happened was that they catalogued them as UP and that was the motive. But they were just people working” (focus group April 2014). During this period, their social experience of the state was of direct, intentional violence –this legacy continues to resonate with the *campesinos* of San José.

Neutrality: “How are we going to live in the midst of the conflict without being part of it?” (B. interview January 2015)

The idea of ‘neutrality’ has multiple origins, and different communities have appropriated it differently. According to Valenzuela (2007), the first neutral community in Colombia was the Association of *Campesino* Workers of Carare (ATCC) in Santander, who declared themselves neutral to the conflict in 1987. In Urabá, the indigenous communities were the first to talk about neutrality, making declarations about not being part of the war between 1994-1996.¹⁰ In 1995, an independent Commission, sent to investigate the situation of increasing violence, recommended creating “zones that are neutral to the conflict, where inhabitants who are not part of the armed conflict and who are affected by combat can be protected” (CINEP 1995, 45). The Catholic Church, the mayor, and Colombian NGOs Interchurch Justice and Peace Commission (CIJP) and Centre for Popular Research and Education (CINEP), began to meet with communities from different parts of Urabá and discuss the option of neutrality as a protection mechanism.

Out of these meetings, various community peace initiatives were born, including four “peace communities”. There has been some academic confusion on this issue: some scholars cite 59 peace communities along the Atrato River in Urabá (e.g. Sanford 2005, 258). However, triangulating multiple sources reveals three –San Francisco de Asís, Natividad de María and Nuestra Señora del Carmen,¹¹ in which 57 distinct

9 General Del Río’s second-in-command, Alfonso Velásquez, was a whistle-blower in the army who denounced Del Río’s collaboration with paramilitaries. See Burnyeat (forthcoming 2018).

10 Compilation of several communities’ declarations of neutrality, JGA, 1995-7/78-84.

11 A multi-institutional meeting in 2003 among at-risk communities compiled documents and minutes of the workshop, and accounts for 57 settlements in the Lower Atrato that formed three Peace Communities: San Francisco de Asís was formed in 1997, Natividad de María in 1998, and Nuestra Señora del Carmen in 1999 (UNDP 2003, 20-21).

settlements were grouped into three umbrella organisations, clarifying this semantic point.¹² Several NGOs and academics have spoken about 'peace communities' in cases of communities declaring themselves to be neutral; regardless of whether they self-identify as "peace communities" or whether they use another comparable, but different, term. At some point in the late-1990s, the Atrato 'peace communities' stopped using that name, though community peace initiatives have continued under different forms, such as Humanitarian Zones (Burnyeat 2013).

San José de Apartadó is the *only* community in Colombia still calling itself a 'Peace Community', and was the first. I argue elsewhere that the reason they persisted is due to their strong organisational process, with roots going back to the Balsamar cooperative and the UP, and a cultural change in which 'neutrality' as a temporary protection option became a philosophy and a way of life (Burnyeat forthcoming 2018).

On 23 March 1997, a public declaration was made in the presence of Colombian and international organisations, officially founding the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. This declaration stated their demand that armed actors respect the civilian population, and their commitment not to participate directly or indirectly in the conflict: not to bear arms or store munitions; not to give logistical or other kinds of support to the actors in the conflict; not to resort to the armed actors to solve their problems; and their commitment to stand up against injustice and impunity.

B. explained the everyday experience of becoming 'neutral':

A guerrilla fighter passes by and asks you for water, and you give him water. A soldier passes by and asks for water and you give him water. We would always give water or food; and those roles had to change. Even though we knew that they were the sons of *campesinos*, we had to change our custom, and say no to all the armed actors (interview January 2015).

On the ground, neutrality was not an abstract idea: it involved analysing a deeply-rooted logic of quotidian life –the *campesino* hospitality of giving food and water to whoever needs it– and changing it to survive. However, this brought new problems. G. said, "if we said no to the guerrilla, the guerrilla said we were on the side of the paramilitaries. If we said no to the paras, they said we were on the side of the guerrilla" (interview January 2015). It became an ethical struggle to demand their right as civilians not to be involved, because, "those were our principles [...] even if we had to give our lives for it" (B. interview January 2015). The persecution of San José due to its associations with the UP and Balsamar began to be directed specifically against the Community itself, as they denounced human rights violations in public communiqués. 'Neutrality', to them, did not mean being silent –it meant championing their position and rejecting any attempt by the conflict actors to involve them in their confrontation.

12 The other two accounted for by Sanford probably include San José de Apartadó and/or other community peace initiatives like Community of Autonomy, Life and Dignity (CAVIDA) on the Atrato, which has never called itself a peace community, though there are similarities.

Another person was also talking about neutrality and looking towards Urabá: Álvaro Uribe. Then Governor of Antioquia, Uribe proposed creating neutral municipalities by decree, using “a conception of neutrality which promoted non-cooperation with illegal armed actors, and cooperation with the armed forces of the state” (Valenzuela 2009, 15). Uribe attended a meeting in Apartadó in 1996 with various communities who were considering becoming ‘neutral communities’, including San José, and “proposed they all adopt his concept and program of ‘active neutrality’, which consisted of a rupture with the guerrillas, mediated by an alliance between the civilian population and the army”. Apparently, the “forceful reaction of all the participants made the Governor leave the meeting with a concentrated hatred” (Giraldo 2007, 53). Given this contamination of the concept of neutrality, the name was changed to ‘Peace Community’.

The idea of ‘neutrality’ caused friction among state institutions. San José was already stigmatised in public discourse because of its perceived associations with the UP and Balsamar: a counter-narrative began to circulate, saying ‘The Peace Community are *guerrilleros*’. For the Community, ‘neutrality’ meant asking armed actors not to enter their territory, including the state forces, and this provoked another counter-narrative, a notion that because the Community did not want the army to enter their spaces, they wanted an ‘independent republic.’¹³ The army saw the request to not enter their territory as a threat to the core tenet of statehood: sovereignty. In 2000, the Ministries of Defence and the Interior responded to a call from the High Command of the Military Forces to clarify the “official position” about “peace communities” –specifically, whether the army could enter them or not– by saying that with the exception of the demilitarised zone in San Vicente del Caguán during the failed peace process of 1998-2002 (granted to the FARC as a condition for negotiating and establishing that region as the seat of the peace talks), “there is no forbidden territory for the Armed Forces.”¹⁴ These counter-narratives continue to circulate today, as I have witnessed in mediation scenarios. The Community’s defensiveness to counter-narratives such as this contributed to the hardening of their position.

The Genealogy of the ‘Rupture’

After the foundation of the Peace Community in 1997, CIJP facilitated various institutional relationships. The NGO’s work included publishing communiqués on the human rights situation, which they sent to government institutions and to their

13 The term ‘independent republic’ was first used at the beginning of the armed conflict by Conservative senator Álvaro Gómez Hurtado, referring to the existence of autonomous territories controlled by the FARC. Gómez took the term from one originally used by the Spanish military dictator Primo de Rivera to refer to Cataluña in the Spanish Civil War. Gómez used it in the context of what was called ‘Operation Sovereignty’, a military offensive in 1964 to try to regain control of these areas (Molano 2016, 13). Ever since, the term has been recycled in different stages of the Colombian conflict to pejoratively refer to areas of the country controlled by FARC, where the state is unable to enter.

14 Letter from the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defence to the High Command of the Military Forces, date unclear on copy, possibly November 2000, JGA, 2000/518.

international network. This form of documenting events is a strategy the Community continues to use, although CIJP stopped its accompaniment to the Community in 2002. CIJP arranged meetings between Community members and state authorities which initially led to relationships with multiple entities.

The first relationship to break down was with the military, because when the Community denounced violations by soldiers, they were summoned to military installations to present their testimonies, which they feared would expose them to reprisals because they saw perpetrators and prosecutors as part of the same institution. The Community ended its relations with military authorities in 2000.

On 8 July 2000, paramilitaries stormed the Community's settlement in La Unión, killed six *campesinos*, and ordered the inhabitants to abandon their homes. According to CIJP, the army was complicit in this attack.¹⁵ The violence of this encounter with state and para-state armed forces was subsequently compounded by the treatment they received from bureaucratic state agencies: according to B., officials loaded two of the corpses into a helicopter but once they were in the air, threw them out because they could not stand the smell, which profoundly offended their relatives (field-notes December 2014).

After this massacre, the Community called on the Vice-Presidency (then in charge of human rights) to create an Investigation Commission into the abuses they had suffered, claiming that "all actions of exemplary justice against perpetrators would lead to the creation of preventive measures."¹⁶ They saw justice as a prerequisite for protection. This Commission made some visits, took fifty testimonies, but quickly began to disappoint the Community, since it made promises it did not keep and questioned agreements made in previous visits, so the Community felt that things were going backwards. Increasingly they suspected that the Commission's inefficiency was a deliberate strategy.

Herzfeld (1993) sees the bureaucratic world as a machine for the "social production of indifference". Gupta claims "indifference" is too uniform a concept, claiming that "bureaucratic action repeatedly and systematically produces arbitrary outcomes in its provision of care" (2012, 6). Both de-construct the notion of intent –popular discourse often portrays cynical, corrupt bureaucrats who act for hidden personal interests; or a state that secretly commands bureaucrats not to act. The Community's social experience in state-society encounters gave them good reason to mistrust the state, because they saw that the soldiers who permitted the massacre belonged to the same structure as the officials who broke their promises –the 'aggregation' of disparate institutions into the reified 'state-idea'. I do not dispute the possibility of corrupt officials on their case, but my archive review revealed frequent changeovers of officials, state documents which misconstrue the historical context of San José and the

15 CIJP communiqué, 8 July 2015, JGA 2000/300-304.

16 Community, "Un Caminar en Dignidad: Documento entregado al Señor Vicepresidente de la República de Colombia, en reunión del día 23 September 2002", JGA 2002/268-275.

Community's narratives, and other factors which point to bureaucratic inefficiency *as well as* potential corruption.

While central authorities condemned abuses and promised to help the Community, the army continued to collaborate with paramilitaries in new violations, adding to the Community's perception that civilian authorities' promises were 'lies'. After two years of worsening relations with this Investigation Commission, and assassinations of witnesses who gave testimony, the Community decided to 'break' (*romper*) with the justice system, on the grounds that it was corrupt. A public communiqué in November 2003 declared a 'rupture' which was "a conscientious objection which opposes the structural injustice". In practice, this meant not defending themselves in judicial proceedings, having legal representation or testifying in court. They would simply publish communiqués, for "history" and "humanity" to judge.¹⁷ They continued to appeal to the international community and international tribunals, a common discourse among human rights organisations in Colombia, which casts the international as superior to and more trustworthy than national courts and authorities (see Tate 2007).

Meetings with central authorities continued in one scenario: negotiations about the protection measures ordered by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR). The Inter-American System followed the Community's risk situation from its foundation in 1997, thanks to CIJP's advocacy. Multiple resolutions ordered the Colombian State to adopt protective measures.¹⁸ In 2003, the scenarios began to get confused: the issues discussed in the Investigation Commission and the scenarios of discussion of the IACHR measures overlapped, a situation compounded by the fact that both scenarios included the same institutions, and the lack of continuity of officials.

A polarisation of narratives developed around the concept of 'protection'. The Community emphasised exemplary justice as a mechanism for preventing new violations. The state saw protection as technical –the deployment of the Armed Forces, and concrete measures like the allocation of mobile phones and bullet-proof vests. This

17 Community, "No tenemos otra opción más que ser coherentes: Constancia pública de rompimiento de Justicia de la Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó", 19 November 2003, JGA 2003/98-103.

18 The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights requested the adoption of precautionary measures in favour of the members of the Peace Community on 17 December 1997 (1997 measures: <http://www.cidh.org/medidas/1997.sp.htm>); the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordered the Colombian State to adopt interim measures for the members of the Peace Community in the President of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' Resolution of 9 October 2000 (http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/medidas/apartado_se_01.pdf); the Inter-American Court of Human Rights Resolution of 18 June 20002 (http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/medidas/apartado_se_03.pdf); of 18 November 2004 (http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/medidas/apartado_se_04.pdf); of 15 March 2005 (http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/medidas/apartado_se_05.pdf); of 2 February 2006 (http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/medidas/apartado_se_06.pdf); of 17 December 2007 (http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/medidas/apartado_se_07.pdf); of 6 February 2008 (http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/medidas/apartado_se_08.pdf), and of 30 August 2010 (http://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/medidas/apartado_se_09.pdf). The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights also requested the adoption of precautionary measures for the *campesino* Buenaventura Hoyos Hernández, inhabitant of San José, not a member of the Community but a civilian on whose behalf the Community and Javier Giraldo advocated when he was forcibly disappeared (Resolution 4/2013, Precautionary measure 301-13, 4 October 2013, <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/MC301-13Resolucion%204-13esp.pdf>). [All accessed 25 July 2015]

convinced the Community that the state lacked the political will to prosecute the perpetrators. The state institutions proposed building a police station in San José to protect the Community. G. explained, "the history we had was that the military and the paramilitaries went around together, so it was difficult for us to accept the Armed Forces within our settlements. So we proposed that [...] the Armed Forces should be midway on the road [between San José and Apartadó]" (public event, London, July 2015).

In these meetings, the Community also proposed the creation of humanitarian zones, by which they meant concrete buildings in non-Peace Community settlements where civilians could take refuge during armed combat.¹⁹ Finally, they demanded an evaluation of the failed Investigation Commission. They no longer believed in the justice system, but they wanted to 'prove' the structural impunity. They proposed a review of "why the Investigation Commission did not work", to analyse "whether it is true that the Community has not collaborated in this search for justice" and "demonstrate why justice has not been done."²⁰ They felt criticised for being 'radical', and their narrative became defensive. Meanwhile, said G., the state was tracking the whereabouts of their leaders, tapping their cell phones and investigating the Community's bank accounts (public event, London, July 2015). The Community was one of many targets of the wire-tapping (*chuzadas*) done by the Administrative Department of Security (DAS)²¹, a major political scandal. The contrast between the cordial treatment they received in meetings in Bogotá, and the reality on the ground, increased their perception that the state was hypocritical.

This last remaining scenario for a state-Community dialogue about the protective measures proposed by the IACHR ended after the 2005 massacre, a cornerstone event in the Community's collective memory. Luis Eduardo Guerra, a Community leader, said in January 2005:

[O]ur project is to continue resisting and defending our rights. We don't know until when, because what we have learned from all we've lived through is that today we are talking, tomorrow we could be dead. [...] Our resistance is against the state, let us be clear, but an unarmed resistance, a civil resistance. By even defending our Constitution. By saying to the state: "It is you who are violating the Constitution", what we are doing is legitimising and not attacking the state.²²

19 This proposal for 'humanitarian zones' is different from the current use of the term in other places in Colombia, for example along the Atrato river, where Humanitarian Zones are entire settlements demarcated with fencing and signs. See Burnyeat 2013.

20 Community, "Propuesta para la conformación de la comisión de evaluación", 27 February 2004, JGA 2004/15-18.

21 "En 2014 empezaron rastreos del DAS" (*El Espectador*, 11 June 2009). <http://www.elespectador.com/impreso/articuloimpreso145453-2004-empezaron-rastreos-del-das>

22 Luis Eduardo Guerra's last interview, 15 January 2005, with Coordinación Valenciana de Solidaridad con Colombia, an NGO platform, and Valencian parliamentarians Ramón Cardona and Isaura Navarro. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnCD3ksF0ZQ>, accessed 27 July 2015.

This quote reveals the heart of the ‘radical narrative’: the ethical repudiation of what they perceive as the illegitimacy of the state. It was a death foretold: “Tomorrow we could be dead”. On 21 February, Guerra, his partner Bellanira Areiza and son Deiner Andrés Guerra, were murdered in the hamlet of Mulatos by a mixed troop of soldiers and paramilitaries, who then went on to the adjacent hamlet of La Resbalosa and killed Alfonso Bolívar, his wife Sandra Milena Muñoz, their six year old daughter Natalia Andrea Tuberquia, their eighteen-month-old son Santiago Tuberquia, and farmhand Alejandro Pérez.

The Community organised a delegation of members who walked through the mountains to Mulatos for seven hours to find the bodies. They telephoned the Vice-Presidency, and a judicial commission was sent to examine and remove the corpses. In La Resbalosa, the Community found five bodies in communal graves, “completely dismembered, the head and limbs separated from the body; each body part also chopped into two or three pieces.”²³ These were removed by helicopter, but the corpses of the other three found near the Mulatos River –Luis Eduardo, Bellanira and Deiner (the child’s head severed from his body)– were not collected by the judicial commission, despite multiple promises, and the Community carried them down the mountains themselves before they decomposed in the tropical heat.²⁴ Again, broken promises and inefficiency exacerbated the state-society encounter of intentional violence.

32 ■ The 2005 massacre had national echoes, as the Community publicly denounced the army’s responsibility.²⁵ This unleashed a national debate about the legitimacy of the Community, and the legitimacy of the state. Uribe, who had criticised the Community’s position of neutrality when he was Governor and was now President, publicly slandered the Community in 2004, calling for “the finishing off that FARC channel through San José de Apartadó.”²⁶ After the massacre, he declared: “In this community of San José there are good people, but some of their leaders, patrons and defenders are seriously accused by people who have lived there of collaborating with the FARC and wanting to use the community to protect that terrorist organisation.”²⁷

The government’s initial version was that Guerra was a *guerrillero* killed by the FARC because he wanted to demobilise.²⁸ The army claimed there were no troops in that area during the events, and therefore could not have been involved (an argument later refuted by judicial proceedings which proved that the army had

23 Community communiqué, 1 March 2005, “El Camino del Terror” JGA 2005A/20-23.

24 Community communiqué, 1 March 2005, “El Camino del Terror”, JGA 2005A/20-23.

25 Community communiqué, 24 March 2005, JGA 2005A/10-11.

26 Transcription of Uribe’s speech, 27 May 2004, JGA 2005C/202-206.

27 Letter from the Presidential program for human rights and IHL to Javier Giraldo, 28 June 2005, JGA 2005C/193-201.

28 This argument is found for example in the army manual, “Comunidades de Paz”, Ministry of Defence; JGA 2005A/251-73 (see below).

participated²⁹). Then Vice-President Francisco Santos said that the Community's accusations against the army were "a bald-faced lie". Cynical headlines circulated like "Only God saw how they were killed", "Denouncement, the only clue in the massacre" (Anrup and Español 2011, 160). Fernando Londoño, Minister of the Interior 2002-2004 and right-wing journalist, wrote:

Why can the Community not accept the state, but they can the Farc? And why are they allowed to slander the army with impunity? And why is a portion of sovereign national land allocated to them, and authorised to be immune to the army's authority? San José de Apartadó is a nerve centre of the political war against Colombia. With others of its kind, we would be lost.³⁰

The army's counter-narrative became more combative after the massacre. A Defence Ministry manual about peace communities, intended for troops, included subtitles like "Perverse Neutrality: Cultivating Violence and Poverty in the Peace Communities" and "Massacre in San José: Unfounded Accusations", claiming the Community was in permanent contact with the FARC, that the FARC was using the Community as a refuge for criminal activities, and that the Community's "neutrality" was used to "justify the absence of the state, leading to an increase in the activities of terrorist organisations."³¹

The state's official position under Uribe was that there was no internal armed conflict, which would validate the application of IHL, but rather a 'terrorist threat'.³² The idea of 'neutrality' became more visible in the aftermath of the massacre, provoking a concern among state officials about the tension between international and domestic law, and the applicability of IHL in the Colombian context. The army manual said that speaking of neutrality in the context of fighting between "a terrorist organisation and a legitimately-constituted democratic state" meant "rejecting the democratic system", and:

Although IHL urges the state to minimise harm to the civilian population, Colombia has acquired an even greater commitment, which is to respect, enforce respect of and protect the civilian population from the constant threat and violent action of the terrorist organisations.

At stake here was not what a few *campesinos* in a remote corner of the country said, but implications for the state's legitimacy, sovereignty and monopoly of force

29 "Ejército participó en masacre de San José de Apartadó" (*El Tiempo*, 16 August 2016). <http://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/cortes/masacre-de-san-jose-de-apartado-37338>

30 Fernando Londoño Hoyos, "San José de Apartadó" (*El Tiempo*, 14 March 2005). <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1692825>

31 "Comunidades de Paz", Ministry of Defence; undated, probably 2005. It is reasonable to believe that it was due to public attention on the massacre that the Ministry of Defence decided to train soldiers to maintain an official position. I have personally witnessed how these counter-narratives continued to circulate in the military up to the time I did my research. JGA 2005A/251-273.

32 "A prueba, neutralidad de ocho comunidades de paz en el Urabá" (*El Tiempo*, 9 March 2005). <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1626851>

over national territory, and a discursive battle over how to categorise the violence in the country. A memorandum was sent to ambassadors and diplomats, instructing them to “align” their language, telling them to avoid the terms “armed conflict”, “non-state actors”, “peace community”, “observation of the humanitarian situation”, or “humanitarian region or camp”, because these “cause ambiguity” and “legitimise the illegal armed groups”, leading to confusions, “such as those caused with the peace community of San José de Apartadó”.³³ These counter-narratives undoubtedly increased the Community’s perception that the state was against them.

Uribe used the claim that the FARC had perpetrated the massacre, and the ‘independent republic’ counter-narrative, to justify building a police station in the middle of the town of San José, going against the previous negotiations with the Community about its location. He said, “We cannot permit in this country the existence of places where the state is not allowed to be present.”³⁴ The Community, refusing to live alongside the police, abandoned the town and built a new settlement nearby, San Josecito, sticking to their principles of not living alongside armed actors.

After the police station was installed, the Community announced the full ‘rupture’: “Now we will keep silent with the state entities.”³⁵ It was not an abstract rupture, but specifically related to the dialogue about IACHR protection measures. They announced the four conditions for resuming discussions with the government: a retraction by the President of the stigmatising comments; respect for the ‘humanitarian zones’; the relocation of the police station; and a Commission for Evaluating the Justice System. Seen in historical context, the formulation of these four points now has clear internal logic. The rupture became more abstract: with ‘the state-idea’. It crystallised into an ethical principle: non-participation, not interacting with any institution until the four points are fulfilled.

In 2010, Juan Manuel Santos replaced Uribe, and the official discourse about human rights started to change. In 2011, the new government expressed its desire to resume its dialogue with the Community,³⁶ but refused to discuss the four points.³⁷ The Community perceived Santos as being the same as Uribe, but with a “prettier” human rights discourse – a conception common among the left: Santos had been Uribe’s Defence Minister, Uribe endorsed him in the 2010 elections, and he comes from a family of establishment statesmen. Santos began to distance himself from Uribe’s government by officially recognising the existence of an internal armed conflict in Colombia, which meant IHL was applicable, and began peace negotiations with the FARC in 2012. It took time before sectors of the left began to engage pragmatically with the govern-

33 Bibiana Mercado Rivera, “Gobierno busca alinear lenguaje diplomático” (*El Tiempo*, 13 June 2005). <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1688352>

34 “Si llega la policía habrá un desplazamiento en San José” (*El Colombiano*, 9 March 2005), JGA 2005B/44.

35 Community communiqué, 1 April 2005, ‘Hemos empezado a desplazarnos ante la presencia de la policía’, JGA 2005A/82.

36 Reply from the Presidency to Javier Giraldo’s *derecho de petición*, 26 January 2011, JGA 2011/58.

37 Community communiqué, 14 June 2011. <http://cdpsanjose.org/?q=node/198> [accessed 1 June 2014].

ment's peace policies, though remaining critical, but some of the more hard-line left, including the Peace Community, felt the changes were "cosmetic".

The Constitutional Court ordered the state to implement the four points in Ruling T-1025/2007, reiterated in Order 164/2012. One order was for an "official presentation of the retraction [...] and the definition of a procedure to prevent future stigmatisations" such as "the establishment of a single communications channel which reduces risks of stigmatisation and contributes to the reconstruction of trust."³⁸

In an event at the Presidential Palace on 10 December 2013, International Human Rights Day, Santos apologised to the Community for Uribe's stigmatisations. He said, in the first person, "I ask for forgiveness". He recognised the Community's "brave struggle" to "achieve peace for the country". Various interests undoubtedly converged for Santos, including the upcoming 2014 presidential elections, in which Santos sought re-election. But the Community was not informed of nor invited to the ceremony. They replied with a communiqué, saying they "valued positively the terms of the presidential gesture", but considered that it only *partly* complied with the judicial Order, in that it failed to deal with the second part ordering the state to "define a procedure to prevent future stigmatisations". They reiterated their perception that they were victims of "systematic extermination", sarcastically asking, "will these simple words of apology be sufficient to stop the systematic crimes against humanity [...] without being accompanied by real and efficient measures that clarify, correct, sanction and make reparations?"³⁹

The Community's perception that Santos' government sought to change its discourse without changing its behaviour was self-reinforcing. The apology was received with scepticism and did not manage to change their mistrust. This was exacerbated by the local army commander's repeated stigmatisation of them on local radio, and hostile encounters with soldiers, heightening the Community's sense of the hypocrisy of the central government in the face of their everyday reality.⁴⁰

During the five years I worked with the Community, their communiqués were full of denouncements of hostile treatment by soldiers; threats that the paramilitaries were "going to exterminate that son-of-a-bitch Peace Community in alliance with the army"; and damages done to their crops by soldiers. This ongoing behaviour (re-)confirms their perception of the state as perpetrator. They interpret all the army's behaviour as further proof of the state's extermination campaign. G. thought the army was hypocritical, because "they are supposed to be there to provide security to the civilian population", but their presence has caused many deaths, both in crossfire and in selective assassinations by them and paramilitaries (field-notes May 2015). A. claimed the apology was completely useless, because the army continued

38 <http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/autos/2012/A164-12.htm> [accessed 1 June 2014].

39 Community communiqué, 16 December 2013. <http://cdpsanjose.org/?q=node/290> [accessed 16 December 2013].

40 E.g. Community communiqué, 27 October 2014. <http://www.cdpsanjose.org/node/61> [accessed 5 January 2017].

to violate human rights: “What good is it for Santos to apologise if the State continues to do the same?” (field-notes May 2015)

Within these polarised narratives is a dichotomy between history and the future, and between Santos’ differentiation from his predecessor in terms of state links with paramilitarism. After the demobilisation of the AUC, official state discourse labelled the groups that continued in paramilitary-type activity as “criminal bands” or “bacrim”, which provoked the criticism of human rights collectives who claimed this language masked the fact that the demobilisation process was a farce. It would be too simplistic to say that in all areas of the country, all of the “bacrim” are exactly the same as the structures of the AUC and that the connection with the army is as systematic as before, but this is the dominant current of thought in the Community’s narrative, partly due to the use of the term on the ground in Urabá, where the emic category “paramilitaries” consciously does not differentiate between the pre-2005 AUC and the current armed structures.

Conclusion

The Community’s ‘radical narrative’ has emerged over time, via state-society encounters with both state violence and *seemingly* benign but inefficient bureaucracy, situations which pre-date its foundation in 1997. Its narrative has been influenced by the political and cultural antecedents of the UP and Balsamar, and the *leitmotifs* of autonomy and organisation. It has grown through interaction with sympathetic outsiders, like human rights organisations, which have contributed to the Community crystallising certain features of its narrative, such as an appeal to international human rights discourse. It has hardened via interaction with counter-narratives, notably from Uribe and the army. It interprets ‘the state’ as a homogenous actor, converging with the paramilitary project and certain economic interests.⁴¹

My intention is not to analyse the government’s motives, nor assess the truth of one or another version of events, but to explain the Community’s interpretation of the state’s actions. This ‘radical narrative’ is a culturally- and historically-constituted interpretative scheme, a framework according to which the Community perceives all actions of the state. Therefore, every action of the state they observe and every para/military violation of their rights on the ground re-confirms this interpretation, and at the same time, reaffirms their collective identity.

The idea that the Community’s agenda with the state is strictly limited to the four points is not completely true. Many of its members go to hospitals in Apartadó, some settlements receive state electricity, and the Community is registered in the Chamber of Commerce as a non-profit organisation. These services would not be possible without the state. I have heard criticisms that this weakens their

41 This article has not dealt with multinationals, though it has referred to the economic dimension of the conflict in Urabá. Elsewhere, I argue that the ‘radical narrative’ is inextricable from an ‘organic narrative’ which articulates the Community’s vision of their economic solidarity and organic farming in contrast with the ‘bad’ multinationals in Colombia which violate human rights (Burnyeat forthcoming 2018).

political stance of 'rupture' or shows inner contradictions. However, given the *sui generis* signification of 'rupture' employed by the Community, I do not agree. They do not live in a fully autonomous 'independent republic', though they do use some self-sustainable farming methods. Their 'rupture' is about repudiating a system they believe to be corrupt, a conscientious objection; just as their 'neutrality' is a refusal to allow the spatializing practices of the conflict actors to turn their lands into a geography of war. This article has dissected the meanings the Community gives to these two terms, not the implications of the Community as a case study for the two concepts. The aim of my ethnographic endeavour has been to understand the Community in its own terms –not to argue in favour or against the 'radical narrative', but to comprehend their internal logic construction.

This article illustrates the failures that occur when public officials fail to take into account historically-formed perceptions of the state –President Santos' grandiose gesture had little effect on the Community's state-idea, and actions by troops on the ground are construed as never-ending proof of a shadowy extermination campaign. Well-meaning officials unknowingly contribute to the reproduction of the 'radical narrative' when they fail to apply a self-critical lens to the past actions of state representatives, such as the collaboration of soldiers in massacres.

As emphasised by Mitchell (2006), the state is culturally constituted both materially and imaginatively. The material effects of the state in 'marginal' areas like San José de Apartadó have been violence and an inefficient bureaucracy –intentional or otherwise. The Community's imagination of the state is a social reality in itself. Saying sorry is not enough. If actions taken by the state to redress harm and build trust are not comprehensive and context-sensitive, they will fail to alter the constant (re-) production of the state in marginal areas such as San José de Apartadó, as a material and discursive reality based on the 'radical narrative'.

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