

NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE IN CIVIL WARS AS CONTENTIOUS POLITICS
The Case of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, Colombia

By

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine, in a theoretically and empirically informed manner, the ways in which non-violent resistance originates and develops in the midst of the violent dynamics of an irregular civil war. As an initial exploratory exercise, it analyzes one of the most salient cases of non-violent resistance in the history of Colombia's civil war: the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartadó (PCA). With both descriptive and explanatory pretensions, it has two specific objectives: (i) map the most significant contentious performances through which the PCA was declared, has made claims to the different armed groups, and has sustained its non-violent resistance; and (ii) identify, both at the domestic and international level, key mechanisms and processes that helped set the PCA into motion and that have fostered its development. This analysis builds on the conceptual and theoretical framework of contentious politics and follows a mechanism-process approach to contention. Additionally, it is informed by the emergent research program on the micro-dynamics of civil wars in its understandings of the dynamics of violence and the actors' individual and collective behavior. Even though the findings of this study are still preliminary and bounded to a single case, they provide useful tools to move towards a sub-national case-oriented comparative analysis through which robustness can be tested and internal and external validity assessed. What we discovered here about the PCA signals potential recurrences as well as sources of variation and, thus, can serve as a steppingstone to learn more about non-violent collective action in violent contexts and progress on the exercise of theorizing resistance in civil wars.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES, MAPS AND TABLES	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
CHAPTER 1. Introduction	1
Research Design	3
Case studies as an approach to research.....	3
Mechanisms as an approach to explanation.....	4
Scope and limitations: moving towards a comparative frame.....	5
Data collection techniques.....	5
Theoretical framework.....	6
CHAPTER 2. State of the Art: Non-violent Collective Action and the Choice for Resistance	8
Collective Action in Non-Violent Settings	9
Collective Action in (Civil) War Settings	12
Violent Collective Action in Civil War Contexts.....	13
Non-violent Collective Action in Civil Wars Context.....	14
Locating and Defining Resistance in Civil Wars	16
CHAPTER 3. The Local Dynamics of a National Conflict and the Creation of the PCA	20
The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó	26
CHAPTER 4. Analyzing Contention: Towards a Mechanism-process Approach.....	33
Streams and Episodes of Contention.....	34
Describing Contention.....	35
Political Actors, Actors to the conflict, and Political Identities	35
Performances and Repertoires	37
Explaining Contention	43
Violence-mediated Mechanisms.....	43
Violence-conditioned mechanisms.....	45
CHAPTER 5. Contention Beyond Borders	50
The logic of protection	51
The logic of claim making.....	55
Domestic contention and “outside patronage”	59
CHAPTER 6. Conclusions.....	61
About the framework of contentious politics	62
Contributions and Opportunities.....	62
Limitations.....	64
Limitations of this study and avenues for further research	65
Reference List.....	68

LIST OF FIGURES, MAPS AND TABLES

Figure 1. Contexts and Types of Collective Action

Figure 2. Portfolio of Civilian Behavior

Figure 3. Civilian Deaths by Perpetrator, Apartadó 1989 - 2010

Figure 4. Violent Events by Perpetrator, Apartadó 1989 – 2010

Map 1. Urabá in National, Regional and World Context

Map 2. Peace Community of San José de Apartadó and Humanitarian Zones

Table 1. PCA's Transnational Network

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACCU	<i>Campesino</i> Self-defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (<i>Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá</i>)
AUC	United Self-defense Forces of Colombia (<i>Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia</i>)
CINEP	Center for Research and Popular Education (<i>Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular</i>)
CSN	Colombia Support Network
EPL	Popular Liberation Army (<i>Ejército Popular de Liberación</i>)
EPyL	Hope, Peace and Liberty (<i>Esperanza, Paz y Libertad</i>)
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (<i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia</i>)
FOR	Fellowship of Reconciliation
PBI	Peace Brigades International
PCA	Peace Community of San José de Apartadó (<i>Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó</i>)
UP	Patriotic Union (<i>Unión Patriótica</i>)
WOLA	Washington Office of Latin America

CHAPTER 1. Introduction

Different scholars studying contentious politics have stressed the importance of carefully analyzing the context in which collective action takes place.¹ From different theoretical perspectives they have shown that the singularities of social, political, and/or cultural contexts have a decisive impact on the emergence, trajectories, and outcomes of groups engaging in contentious collective action. Starting with the cycle of protest of the 1960s, the core of the theoretical and empirical corpus of contentious politics, in the form of social movements, focused almost exclusively on the context of liberal democracies in the West. It was only after the late 1990s that scholars began to look beyond Western democracies and reform movements in a systematic way, incorporating into their studies other regions of the world and different forms of contention.

In light of this geographically and thematically expanded scope, Colombia appears as a rich environment to study different forms of collective contentious action. Following many years of bipartisan violence between *Liberales* and *Conservadores* (a period known as *La Violencia*, roughly from 1948 to 1958), the country has been since the late 1960s in the midst of a civil war waged by guerrilla movements in the left, paramilitary armies in the right –both fueled by resources from the drug economy—, and the forces of the state. In this context very few social processes, if any, can be integrally analyzed without taking the dynamics of violence into account. The three grand themes of contentious politics and social movement research –political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings— (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996), can hardly be understood without analyzing the dynamic interactions between violent and non-violent expressions of contention. Moreover, without

¹ See, for example, Gamson and Meyer (1996), Oberschall (1996), Rutch (1996), McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (1997, 2001), Meyer (2004), and della Porta and Diani (2006).

examining the ways they are related to and even conditioned by violence, the exercise of identifying mechanisms and processes to help explain streams and episodes of contention (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001; Tilly and Tarrow, 2007) would be futile.

In Colombia, between 1988 and 2010, 22,438 civilians were killed in one-sided attacks and 1,379 more in clashes between the parties in conflict (CCDB-CERAC V11.3, 2012). Despite of the high risks involved and the many obstacles these levels of violence impose to civilian collective action, many civilians have engaged in non-violent collective action in order to resist the dynamics of violence. The experience examined in this study, that of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó (henceforth, PCA) in northwestern Colombia, is a case in point. After their collective self-proclamation as a Peace Community in 1997, which supposed a radical refusal to cooperate with any armed group and to participate in any form in the hostilities, about 190 of its members have been killed or disappeared by the armed groups.²

The study of non-violent expressions of contentious collective action in civil war contexts, compared to violent expressions, is still a widely underexplored and undertheorized field. Scholars of both social movement and civil war research have largely proceeded in ‘cordial indifference’ to each other’s findings and, as an outcome, very few studies have examined non-violent interactions in the midst of profoundly violent contexts.³ In doing so, they have failed to address civil wars as the complex fields of contention that they are.

Research objectives

² Although this number varies across sources, this is what the PCA itself has declared and denounced.

³ In addition to the collaborative and individual work by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, who have repeatedly called our attention to this lack of dialogue (e.g. Tarrow and Tilly, 2007:439; McAdam and Tarrow, 2011), there are other explicit exceptions: for example, Goldstone’s (1998) work on social movements and revolutions; and, more relevant to this study, Wood’s (2003:246-256) detailed discussion of her findings in El Salvador with social movements and revolution theories; Brockett’s (2005) analysis of social and political movements in Central America’s civil wars; and Weinstein’s (2006:46) analysis of the organization of rebellion in dialogue with the “resource mobilization school”.

This study aspires to shed some light on this blind spot in our understanding of civil wars and non-violent contentious collective action. It aims to begin examining, in a theoretically and empirically informed manner, *how non-violent resistance originates and develops in the middle of the violent dynamics of a civil war*. To do so, as an initial exploratory exercise, it analyzes one of the most salient cases of non-violent resistance in the history of Colombia's civil war: the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartadó. With both descriptive and explanatory pretensions, the specific objective is twofold:

- a. Map the most salient contentious performances through which the PCA was declared, has made claims to the different armed groups, and has sustained its non-violent resistance over time;
- b. Identify key mechanisms and processes that helped set the PCA into motion and that have fostered its development both at the domestic and international level.

Research Design

Case studies as an approach to research

In order to strive for specific features of the PCA, understand how and why it emerged when it did and learn more about its development, a context-sensitive case study – rightly identified with “thick” descriptions and “holistic” analysis of particular events (Yin, 1989; Snow and Trom, 2002; Gerring, 2007)–, recommends itself. Although there are rich descriptive accounts of experiences of non-violent resistance in civil wars, the way the subject is addressed here is different. By analyzing it as a form of contentious politics, this study aims to start specifying potential mechanisms that make possible the emergence of non-violent resistance in civil wars and that contribute to its development and sustainability over time. As Gerring (2007: 103-104) asserts, “Case studies, if well constructed, may allow one to peer into the box of causality to locate intermediate factors lying between some structural cause

and its purported effect”; therefore “[...] any attempt to deal with this question of casual mechanisms is heavily reliant on evidence drawn from case studies.”

Mechanisms as an approach to explanation

Mechanism-based accounts are now well recognized as an approach to explanation in the social sciences. Resembling Hume’s image of a billiard ball crossing the table and hitting the second ball, different scholars have shown that casual arguments do not only depend on measuring casual effects and the strength of correlations between variables, but also on the identification of pathways between inputs and outputs.⁴ In the field of social movements and contentious politics, the search for social mechanisms has recently captured the attention of some of its most prominent scholars.⁵

Following McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly (2001:25), mechanisms are here understood as “[...] delimited sorts of events that change relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations.”⁶ Recognizing the importance of the context and the relational nature of resistance, the present study has a special interest in searching for relational mechanisms –connections between individuals, groups, and networks– and environmental mechanisms –externally generated and applied to the setting/context. In addition, it draws a distinction between those mechanisms that are only mediated by violence and, therefore, can be found in other non-violent settings, and those that are conditioned by violence and, therefore, may be more specific to the context under examination.

⁴ See, among others: Stinchcombe (1991); Dessler (1991); Bunge, (1997); Elster (1998); Hedström and Swedberg (1998); Mahoney (2001); George and Bennet (2005).

⁵ For discussions on a mechanisms-and-processes approach to contentious politics, see: McAdam (2009); McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001); McAdam and Tarrow (2011); and Tilly (2000, 2001, 2004, 2007). For applications of this approach to concrete studies, see: McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: mainly part III); McAdam and Tarrow (2010); Tarrow and McAdam (2005); Tarrow (2005, 2011: chap. 9); Tilly and Tarrow (2007); Tilly (2003, 2008). Also see the two special issues of the journal *Mobilization* devoted to this topic: 2003, 8(1) and 2011 16(1).

⁶ By “events” the authors are referring to the mechanisms that drive “occurrences” rather than the “occurrences” themselves (McAdam and Tarrow, 2011:4).

Scope and limitations: moving towards a comparative frame

Although the concrete findings of this monograph are bounded to the PCA, its conceptual and theoretical pretensions go beyond this single case.

The mechanisms identified as operating in the PCA can only be provisional and potential. In order to be robust tools for explaining salient features of resistance in civil wars and serve as theoretical foundations, mechanisms need to be identified and specified across different settings and its conceptual roots and empirical veracity need to be established by going beyond one single case. However, the study of the PCA is advanced here for the purpose of providing tools for understanding a larger class of cases of resistance through a future sub-national comparative case-oriented analysis that will allow for a more nuanced assessment of the robustness and applicability of the findings of this study (Ragin, 1992, 2004; Snyder, 2001; Snow and Trom, 2002; della Porta, 2002, 2008a; Gerring, 2007). Seen from this perspective, understanding in a more systematic fashion the case of the PCA has the ultimate aim of gaining descriptive, analytic, and empirical leverage in non-violent resistance as one large subgroup of resistance in civil wars. The PCA constitutes a positive case as it “has” the outcome of interest (i.e. resistance, and more concretely, non-violent resistance); a representative one, as it reasonably symbolizes the larger set of cases of non-violent resistance with which it can be associated; and, finally, a revelatory one, as it can be used as a springboard for gaining insight into this larger set and identifying potential sources of variation.

Data collection techniques

This study rests on multiple sources of empirical evidence, both qualitative and quantitative. In order to account for the micro-dynamics of violence at the local level, data on violent events for the period between 1988 and 2010 was processed. Based on a rigorous triangulation of several local and national sources, these data is collected by the Conflict

Analysis Resource Center (CERAC), a Bogotá-based research institute devoted to the measurement of the spatial distribution of violence in Colombia's civil war.⁷ In order to reconstruct the history of the PCA, primary and secondary documents and archives (mainly online) were analyzed. These documents include scholarly literature, journalistic accounts, and texts and videos produced by the PCA and its national and international support network. Finally, in order to learn more about the PCA in general, but mainly to study its transnational dimension, 11 unstructured and semi-structured conversational interviews were held with officers and volunteers of different international NGOs working in close cooperation with the PCA.⁸

Theoretical framework

This monograph builds on the conceptual, theoretical and methodological tools developed for the analysis of contentious politics by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) in *Dynamics of Contention* and later refined by Tilly and Tarrow (2007) in *Contentious Politics*. Both the descriptive and explanatory accounts are inserted within the flexible framework of a mechanism-process approach to the analysis of contention. In addition, in an effort to trace mechanisms that operate in the PCA's establishment of networks beyond borders, this study builds on the conceptual and theoretical tools developed in the subfield of transnational contention and global activism. The contributions by Margaret Keck, Doug McAdam, Donatella della Porta, Thomas Risse, Kathryn Sikkink, and Sidney Tarrow are key in this respect. Finally, the way in which civil war, its violence, and its actors' behavior are

⁷ The author has been affiliated to CERAC since 2009 and, thus, has full access to data and could tailor it, to some extent, for the needs of this study. These data disaggregates violence by actor, temporal period, and type of violence. However, the smallest unit of analysis of the dataset (municipalities) is larger in size than the area where the PCA emerged and is currently located (*corregimientos*), therefore, it might have problems of overaggregation.

⁸ In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality the names of the interviewees and of the organizations they are part of are not revealed. When the number of the interview is followed in the footnotes by a letter "a", the interviewee is an officer of an international NGO; and with a "b", a volunteer for an international NGO who spent at least one year in the PCA. Translations from Spanish into English, when needed, were made by the author.

understood and approached, as well as the special attention paid to civilian agency, draws heavily on the theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions by Stathis Kalyvas and other scholars at Yale University, such as Ana Arjona and Elisabeth Wood. Nevertheless, at least at this stage, this study has neither the pretension of testing their theories, nor that of fully incorporating them to the study of non-violent resistance in the PCA.

That being said, this monograph is structured as follows: In the next chapter, I present non-violent resistance as a puzzle and discuss and specify the place of the present study within the literature on collective action from social movement and civil war perspectives. I close this chapter by locating and defining resistance within and in relation to a broader portfolio of civilian agency in civil wars. In chapter 3, I outline the history of the PCA and put it in dialogue with the regional and local dynamics of Colombia's civil war and embed it within a longer stream of contention that begins with the arrival of left-wing guerrilla groups to the region. Relying on the major descriptive and explanatory concepts for the study of contentious politics, in chapter 4, I proceed to the concrete analysis of the PCA by mapping performances and specifying mechanisms. In chapter 5, I explore in close detail one particular process –upward scale shift– and discuss the transnational dimension of this episode of contention. Finally, in a last chapter I conclude by summarizing the main findings and identifying some limitations of both this study and the conceptual and theoretical framework of contentious politics for the study of non-violent resistance in civil wars.

CHAPTER 2. State of the Art: Non-violent Collective Action and the Choice for Resistance

Although this study goes beyond rationalist approaches, the still dominant framework of the “collective action problem” put forward by Mancur Olson in *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965) helps to show how puzzling the sort of contentious collective action advanced by the PCA in the midst of Colombia’s civil war is. To put it simply: the various risks underlying the PCA’s resistance are extremely high as it is life what is at stake; the public goods to be obtained are subjected to high levels of uncertainty, long term horizons in some cases, and depend on arduous constant collective work; and, at least at an initial stage, selective incentives, if any, were very limited as to stimulate mobilization.

The violent settings in which we have seen contentious collective action taking place include authoritarian regimes, revolutions, international military interventions, and interstate and intrastate conflicts, among others. Collective action in these different settings may share similar mechanisms and processes that, in many cases, may lead to substantially different outcomes. Nonetheless, in order to stimulate and enable systematic comparison across different expressions of contention and examine transitions between each other, we first need to identify and understand their specificities and describe and explain its special properties. Consequently, this study focuses exclusively on irregular civil wars, which, wadded to different causes and deployed to serve a wide range of goals, are the most salient expressions of violent conflict after the quasi-disappearance of interstate wars in the post-World War era (Kalyvas and Balcells, 2011).⁹

⁹ Following Kalyvas (2005, 2006, 2007) and Kalyvas and Balcells (2010), a stylized account of irregular war includes multiple basic elements: confrontation between incumbents –that field military troops and control urban and accessible terrain— and insurgents –that hide and rely on harassment and surprise; fragmentation of geographical space as insurgents aim to conquer and preserve territories; actors’ military asymmetry in terms of power and willingness to engage in frontal combat; dearth of large-scale military set confrontations; absence of

In order to locate the study of the PCA within the broader field of contentious collective action research and to position it within the theoretical, conceptual and empirical literature that from different perspectives and in different contexts has dealt with this broad issue, I built a 2x2 matrix by cross-tabulating *type of context* (non-violent / violent) and *type of collective action* (non-violent / violent).¹⁰ The blue box in Figure 1 designates the locus of this analysis: one form of non-violent contentious collective action in the violent context of an irregular civil war.

Figure 1. Contexts and Types of Collective Action

		COLLECTIVE ACTION	
		Non-violent	Violent
CONTEXT	Non-violent	N.V - N.V Soc. <u>Mov.</u> Res.	N.V. - V. Soc. <u>Mov.</u> Res.
	Violent	V. - N.V	V. - V. Intra-state conflicts Ethnic conflicts Civil wars New wars

Collective Action in Non-Violent Settings

The social movement, as widely understood and studied in the field of contentious politics, emerged in the particular historical and social context of Western Europe and North America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Tarrow and Tilly, 2007: 437). As a consequence, for many years (roughly from the 1970s to the early 1990s) scholars in the field

clear frontlines. Although this is an ideal type, one can safely argue that the Colombian civil war has been fought predominantly as an irregular war.

¹⁰ These ideal types help to organize the vast amount of literature this study builds on and departs from. However, we are to expect variation within cases that fall into the same box, transitions from one box to another, as well as difficult-to-classify cases that are in the borderline of each box.

privileged the largely non-violent democracies of North America and Western Europe and the so-called left-libertarian and reform movements (McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, 2001; della Porta, 2002; della Porta and Diani, 2006; Tarrow, 2011). This largely non-violent context is favorable for campaigning, associating, protesting, manifesting, and making claims in the public space and, thus, channels and contains contention. It facilitates those claims that follow the forms of electoral politics and legislative representation and tolerates those that fall within the rules of association, assembly, and speech. As an outcome, the contentious performances and repertoires developed and used in these contexts tend to be chiefly non-violent.

However, these contexts are not immune to collective violence. Contained forms of contentious collective action numerically predominate in non-violent contexts and the logics of numbers (i.e. demonstrating the numerical strength) and of bearing witnesses (i.e. demonstrating a strong commitment to an objective deemed vital for humanity's future) predominate as normative and strategic choices in the social movements of Western Europe and the United States (Tarrow, 2011: 98-118; della Porta and Diani, 2006: 170-178). However, collective actors know that disruptive forms are, as Tarrow (2011) states, the weapon that gives weak actors leverage against powerful ones and therefore have incentives to move in this direction. Although disruption does not imply violence, disruptive performances are more prone to escalate into violence and thus, the logic of damage, as the Black Block in Seattle revealed, becomes likely to happen in democratic contexts. In addition, although in today's democratic settings the strategies of social control of protest tend to be negotiated, state repression still is a key detonator of violence, as the events during the Genoa Social Forum in 2001 and the *Indignats* in Barcelona in May 2011 showed.

As a consequence, in the late 1980s a body of research located violence as an emergent process in the dynamics of contention in Western Europe and the United States. Scholars in

this line stressed the important place violence has within the internal dynamics and repertoires of social movement organizations and emphasized the role that state repression has on triggering violence during campaigns and cycles of protest (della Porta, 2008b; Steinhoff and Zwerman, 2008).

Several empirical cases in the two upper boxes of Figure 1, as well as transitions from one to another (mainly from non-violent to violent), have been extensively documented by scholars in the field of social movements and contentious politics.¹¹ Based on their findings and following Tarrow and Tilly's (2007) recap, one can argue that collective violence in non-violent democratic settings arises principally under three circumstances: (i) when activists struggle with police and other professional guardians of public order; (ii) when activists of a given persuasion and competing or hostile activists confront each other; and (iii) when groups committed to direct action use or break away from non-violent movement gatherings such as demonstrations and public meetings to outbid former comrades. However, the salience of collective violence in these settings tends to be low in frequency, intensity, and coordination and, therefore, levels of damage to persons and property tend also to be low (Tilly, 2003; Tilly, 2008; Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: chapter 6; Tarrow, 2011: chapter 2).

¹¹ Illustrative examples include

In the N.V – N.V box: Rucht (1992) and Kriese et.al (1995) on new social movements in Western Europe; Snow (1993) on the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement in the US; and McAdam's (1998) on the 1964 Mississippi "Freedom Summer" campaign.

In the N.V. – V box: della Porta and Tarrow (1986) on the Red Brigades and the cycle of protest in Italy; White (1989) on the transition from non-violent protest to guerilla war in the development of the IRA; Tarrow (1989) on protest movements in Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s; and della Porta (1995) on political violence in Italy and Germany.

Transitions from NV to V: White (1989) on the IRA; Wood (2003) on El Salvador; Sambanis (2005) on self-determination movements, and Brockett (2005) on El Salvador and Guatemala.

On the policing of protest and state repression of social movements: della Porta and Rieter's (1998); Zwerman, Steinhoff, and della Porta (2000); Earl (2003); della Porta and Fillieule (2004); Davenport, Johnson, and Mueller (eds.) (2005); della Porta, Peterson, and Reiter (eds.) (2006); Soule and Davenport's (2009).

Collective Action in (Civil) War Settings

In this section we move away from violence in peace to violence in (civil) war, something that has received noticeable less attention in social movement and contentious politics literature.¹²

The social, political, and cultural setting of war is fundamentally different from the one that gave birth to the bulk of social movements. The differences between violence in peace and violence in war are, as Kalyvas (2006:22-23) argues, both of degree and kind: the total number of deaths in demonstrations and campaigns where violence erupts are negligible compared with those reported in civil wars; and, to be sure, war structures choices and selects actors in ways that can hardly be seen in cycles of protest. Moreover, while civil wars are intimately related to the breakdown of the state's monopoly of violence and the fragmentation of sovereignty, the claim making of social movements, generally, represents a challenge to a given authority within a state that, to a large extent, monopolizes violence.

Yet, without overlooking crucial differences, I argue that the contentious politics framework is appropriate and offers great opportunities for a better understanding of the collective interactions, violent and non-violent, generated in a civil war context.¹³ However, to seize these opportunities we cannot ignore the fact that war makes what is at stake incomparably higher and, in general, entails far less consent and far more constraints to coordinated and collective action (Wood, 2003:1-20; Kalyvas, 2005:89-92; Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007:180-

¹² The work by Brockett (2005) constitutes perhaps the clearest exception. Other valuable efforts of incorporating violent contexts in the study of contentious politics are McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001:Part III); Tilly (2003); and Tilly and Tarrow (2007:chapters 7 and 8). The last special issue of the journal *Mobilization* devoted to political violence [2012, 16(1)] also makes important contributions to the study of collective action in violent contexts.

¹³ Many students of social movement and contentious politics share this position. For example, Bosi and Giugni (2012) are explicit in making a call for the inclusion of political violence within the broader field of contentious politics. Actually, this is one of the five lessons for future research on political violence as contentious politics that Goodwin (2012) draws from the articles included in the special issue on political violence of the journal *Mobilization* [2012, 17(1)].

187). The primacy of violence mediating almost every single individual and collective interaction defines, thus, the two lower boxes of Figure 1.

Violent Collective Action in Civil War Contexts: the bottom right quadrant

The primacy of violence in civil war contexts alters the application of the collective action problem *à la* Olson. As Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) and Wood (2003) have argued, the centrality of violence shifts the attention from an (almost) exclusive focus on the public goods provided, the free-riding problem, and the selective incentives, to one that emphasizes (mainly) the costs associated with engaging in collective action, violent or non-violent.

In the bottom right box of Figure 1 we have a situation in which a violent context is caused by, and in tandem triggers, violent expressions of collective action. On the one hand, we have the main armed actors waging the war (“violence at the top”); and, on the other, we have actors that at the local level take advantage of the general context of war and use violence to settle conflicts that very often have nothing to do with the causes of war and/or the goals of the armed actors (“violence at the bottom”).¹⁴ While engaging in forms of collective violence, both face problems associated with collective action such as group organization and coordination, access to mobilizing resources, recruitment, etc. Historical, theoretical, and empirical studies have dealt extensively with these issues, although there is a noticeable greater emphasis on the first type of actors and the challenges they face.¹⁵

¹⁴ Although these actors tend to be individuals acting individually, there is also evidence of collective actors with some levels of coordination settling local and private conflicts. This observation is consistent with Kalyvas’ (2003: 479) claim that “[...] civil wars can be understood as processes that provide a medium for a variety of grievances to be realized within the greater conflict, particularly through violence.”

¹⁵ Some of these works include: Sansom (1970) on the political economy of insurgency in Vietnam; Mason and Krane (1989) on death squads and state-sanctioned terror; Wickham-Crowley (1992) on insurgencies and revolutions in Latin America; Horton (1998) on armed peasants in Nicaragua; Beckett (2001) on insurgencies and counter-insurgencies since the 1700s; Wood (2003) on insurgent participation in El Salvador; Gutierrez (2004, 2008) on (the lack of) material selective incentives in armed groups in Colombia; Cubides (2005) on armed organizations in the Colombian war; Weinstein (2006) on forms of insurgencies in Uganda, Mozambique, and Peru; and Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) on insurgent participation and non-participation, among others.

Non-violent Collective Action in Civil Wars Context: the bottom left quadrant

Non-violent collective action in violent contexts, let alone in civil wars, has captured far less attention.¹⁶ When social movement and contentious politics scholars have expanded their scope to violent contexts, their emphasis has tended to be mainly on violent interactions, especially those involving the armed groups waging the war.¹⁷ In civil wars research the situation is not very different. Although some scholars of the field have moved away from large-N cross-national studies focusing largely on macro-level aspects of civil wars such as onset, duration, and termination¹⁸, the growing number of studies examining micro-level dynamics, as Mampilly (2007, 2011) and Arjona (*forthcoming*, 46-55) underline, have paid scant attention to non-violent activities and non-violent behaviors by armed groups.¹⁹ In addition, when attention shifts to civilians, these are commonly (a) regarded only as passive and malleable victims of armed groups' violence, rule and/or indoctrination; and/or (b) analyzed as potential armed group's participants, collaborators, and/or supporters.²⁰

In the particular case of Colombia, only until recently an emerging literature has departed from these two tendencies. On the one hand, several studies of a (mainly) descriptive nature have enabled a very rich and detailed knowledge of different experiences of non-violent collective action in the country, contributing to the institutional and historical memory of the communities engaged in these actions and making them more visible in the country and abroad. They have provided useful elements for further studies, signaling, for example,

¹⁶ Illustrative attempts to describe and explain non-violent collective action violent and/or non-democratic contexts include the work by Schock (2005) on unarmed insurrections; Brockett (2005) on violence and political movements in Central America; Carroll (2011) on social and political movements in Colombia; and Nepstad (2011) on non-violent revolutions.

¹⁷ A visible exception to this tendency is the work by Schock (2005) on unarmed insurrections in South Africa, the Philippines, Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar, and China.

¹⁸ Some of the most salient examples of this literature are Elbadawi and Sambanis (2002), Fearon and Laitin (2003), and Collier and Hoeffler (2004). More recently, scholars such as Zukerman (2012), have started studying macro-level aspect at the subnational level.

¹⁹ Important recent exceptions are Arjona's (2008a, 2008b, 2009, *forthcoming*), Weinstein (2007), Mampilly (2007, 2011), and Metelits (2010) work on "social orders", "rebel governance" and "state-like activities" by armed groups.

potential sources of variation and defining features useful for concept building.²¹ However, due to the lack of clear theoretical frameworks, it is still difficult to integrate this body of work in a more general analysis that can lead to theory generation.

On the other hand, during the last decade, some scattered studies have started to examine civilian agency in the country's civil war engaging in theoretical debates with social movement and collective action literature.²² García's (2005) attempt to build a middle range theory of collective action in what he calls an "emergency society" and Gonzales Gil's (2006) theoretical critique to the main theories of collective action and social movements are two illustrative and insightful contributions in this direction. However, these works pay scant attention to variations of violence across time and space and do not really engage with the search for mechanisms and processes that underlie the emergence, development, and outcomes of non-violent contentious collective action.

Finally, although it establishes virtually no dialogue with social movements and contentious politics literature, a salient exception to all the aforementioned drawbacks is the work by Arjona (2008a, 2008b, 2009, *forthcoming*) on social orders in civil wars. In her study, the examination of non-violent resistance is embedded in an interactive analysis of individual and collective behavior of civilians and armed groups at the local level and, with both theory

²¹ Some of the most valuable examples of this literature include the work by Hernandez (1999 –with Salazar, 2004, 2008); Gonzáles Piñeros (2006), Villarreal and Ríos (2006 –eds.), Uribe (2004), Rojas (2007), and the group of researchers of the Grupo de Memoria Histórica (2011a, b).

²² The primary lenses with which collective action and social mobilization were analyzed in Colombia were Marxism and, later on, social constructivism. Although these studies did not ignore the civil war context while studying mobilization, its treatment was marginal and the main focus was, respectively, on land and indigenous/identity struggles. For comprehensive reviews of this literature see: Caicedo (1997); Escobar, Álvarez, and Dagnino (2001); and Archila and Pardo (2001).

generating and theory-testing aims, explicitly seeks to specify the mechanism behind these interactions.²³

Locating and Defining Resistance in Civil Wars²⁴

The centrality and instrumentality of civilians

Before turning to empirics, I define and locate the concept of resistance in relation to and within the array of possible responses civilians have when facing armed actors' violence and attempts to establish local orders.

The study of the micro-dynamics of civil wars has shown that violence (even when it is indiscriminate), rather than being gratuitous, senseless or wanton, follows its own logic (Kalyvas, 1999, 2006; Weinstein, 2006). In addition, it has revealed that armed actors, rather than promoting chaos or disorder, have strong strategic incentives to achieve territorial control (Kalyvas, 2006; Arjona, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, *forthcoming*). In both processes civilians appear to be highly instrumental.

Violence results from the convergence of the armed actors' attempts to deter defection and the civilian's decision whether to provide them or not with information. The type of violence (i.e. indiscriminate and/or selective) exercised by armed groups in war zones depends, to a large extent, on their ability to access fine-grained information. As information is asymmetrically distributed at the local level (inhabitants of local areas usually know the area and the people better than armed groups), the most effective way armed groups have to collect it is to solicit it from civilians. Therefore, civilian agency appears as central to the dynamics of violence (Kalyvas, 2006: 146-209).

²³ It is worth to note that other young researchers, such as Gomez (2008, *unpublished*), Vargas (2010, *unpublished*), and Ortega (2012, *unpublished*) have recently worked on non-violent contentious collective action in Colombia paying more attention to theoretical and conceptual aspects.

²⁴ Besides the cited works, this section is based on the seminar "Questions of Resistance and Collaboration" at the Central European University conducted by Professor Tamas Meszerics. I am grateful to him and to the other participants for lively and insightful discussions.

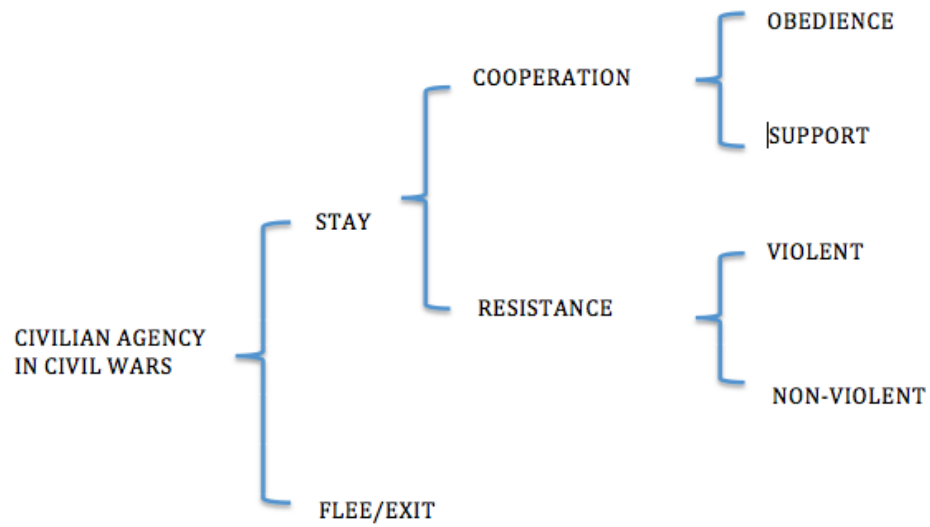
Likewise, to wage and potentially win the war, armed actors need to both secure territorial control and maximize the benefits they can extract from the areas under their control. To meet both goals, warring groups do not only rely on violent activities; they often embark on creating social orders in local areas and engage in activities that resemble those of a state. The obstacles and opportunities armed actors find in local areas to their attempts to create these orders are largely dependent on the ways civilians react to them: they can facilitate things by cooperating or complicate them by not cooperating. Variation in the degree to which armed actors meet their goals is, to a large extent, the outcome of the interaction between armed groups and civilians (Kalyvas, 2006: 111-145; Arjona, 2008a, 2008b, 2009 *forthcoming*).

In sum, the different ways in which civilians respond when war arrives to their territory can condition the behavior of these groups and affect the balance of the war by increasing the prospects of survival of combatants, rising their levels of security in certain areas, and enhancing the likelihood of achieving their strategic aims at the local level. Therefore, civilian instrumentality in the micro-dynamics of war justifies the study of civilian agency and their different possible responses.

Civilian Agency

In a nutshell, civilians have two choices when facing armed groups in their territories: to flee or to stay. If they choose the latter, two new courses of action are opened: they can cooperate or resist.

Figure 2. Portfolio of Civilian Behavior



Based on Wood, 2003; Kalyvas, 2006; Uribe, 2006; Weinstein, 2006 and, mainly, Arjona, *forthcoming*²⁵

Cooperation can take many forms. Different scholars, such as Beckett (2001), Wood (2003: 17, 122-159), Kalyvas (2006: 87-145) and Weinstein (2006), among others, have examined the range of civilian conducts that may count as cooperation. This includes supplying food, shelter, and clothing²⁶; allowing combatants to hide; providing information about the enemy and its supporters; refusing to inform or deliberately misinforming the enemy; denouncing defectors; serving as mail carriers; moving ordnance; helping combatants to wage attacks; and serving in part-time militias. As in figure 2, these conducts can be divided into two types: obedience and support. Regardless of any underlying motivation, both benefit armed groups

²⁵ Other authors have studied the portfolio of civilian behavior or roles in violent contexts different to irregular civil war with similar findings. This is the case of Petersen (2001: 8-15) who, studying resistance and rebellion in Eastern Europe with a particular focus on forms of direct support, proposed a typology that goes from resistance (-3) to enlistment (+3).

²⁶ In her study of civilian supporters of insurgencies in El Salvador, Wood (2003:16-17) does not consider conducts such as supplying food and water to combatants as expressions of support as, according to many of her interviewees, this was part of the “necessary contributions” civilians had to give to combatants of either side in order to stay in contested areas. To distinguish between what she calls *civilian supporters* and *civilian non-participants*, she relies on some of the other behaviors listed, with a special emphasis on the provision of intelligence (information) and supplies other than food and water.

in a direct way. The former entails any civilian action that is a response to an order or rule of the armed group; while the latter entails those course of actions civilians take without any explicit or implicit order (Arjona, *forthcoming*: 38; 103-104).

The opposite of cooperation is resistance.²⁷ In general terms, resistance entails different instances of civilian opposition and defiance to armed groups' violence and/or rule (or attempts to rule). It includes a wide range of conducts that may affect negatively, in direct or indirect ways, the armed groups' strategies. Some of these conducts are refusing to comply with the orders and rules of armed groups, denying any type of support such as the provision of survival or strategic goods to armed groups, and declaring delimited spaces as "sanctuaries" or "peace zones".²⁸ This opposition can be unarmed or armed and can be both individual and collective²⁹ (Arjona, *forthcoming*: 38, 104; Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2011a: Chapter 5; Uribe, 2006; Hernández, 2008).

This being said, the basic working definition of resistance I use in this paper is the following: autonomous civilian-based organized and sustained contentious collective action aimed at shielding civilians from armed group's violence and influence on civilian affairs.³⁰ Furthermore, the type of resistance this study looks at is non-violent, which is understood in its most fundamental sense: violence in any expression is rejected as a means to achieve ends and, thus, collective action sustaining resistance is absolutely unarmed.

²⁷ Some studies, such as Kalyvas and Kocher's (2007), seem to reduce non-participation to free riding or other non-collective behaviors. However, when civilians opt not to participate, their portfolio of behaviors, individual and collective, includes other options different to free riding.

²⁸ For a detailed discussion on "sanctuaries" and "peace zones" in civil wars and other contexts, see Hancock and Mitchell (2007).

²⁹ Additional sources of variation may include the nature of the strategies employed to oppose armed groups (e.g. bargaining, overt confrontation, civil disobedience, radical neutrality); the scope of the protection yield by the community resisting (e.g. civilians, civilians and state officials, every inhabitant of the area, 'members' only); the behavioral relationship with the different warring groups (e.g. resisting all armed group; resisting only illegal armed groups), the mobilization structures and resources the community relies on (e.g. existence of already established associations); and the scale of the networks established once resistance is in place (e.g. local, national, transnational), among others.

³⁰ I am grateful to Andres Vargas, at Yale University, for the discussions and draft sharing during the last months. These exchanges gave form to this working definition.

CHAPTER 3. The Local Dynamics of a National Conflict and the Creation of the PCA

The PCA is located in the *corregimiento* (hamlet) of San José in the municipality of Apartadó, department of Antioquia, in Northwest Colombia (see Map 1). It is part of the Urabá region, more concretely, of the Banana Axis³¹, an area of great value for both the country's commercial relations and the strategies of illegal armed groups. Urabá is located near the Panama Canal, between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, serving as a continental corridor between South and Central America. East from San José, the *Serranía de Abibe* (Abibe Mountains) constitutes another corridor connecting the departments of Córdoba, Chocó, and Antioquia. As a consequence, this area has functioned as a pathway for smuggling arms and drugs, as well as a rearguard zone for left-wing guerrillas (García, 1996; Restrepo, 2006). Armed groups rapidly learnt that whoever controls the territory of San José gains a military advantage to control the region and a big portion of the country's Northwest (Uribe, 2004).

³¹ Five sub-regions comprise the Urabá region. The municipality of Apartadó, along with the municipalities of Turbo, Chigoró, Carepa and Mutatá, comprise the "Banana Axis", one of these sub-regions.

Map 1. Urabá in National, Regional and World Context



Source: Carroll (2011:52). Reproduced with explicit permission of the author.

Urabá was sparsely populated between the 1920s and the early 1950s by *campesinos* (peasants)³² coming from different regions of the country attracted by the availability of land. During the late 1950s and 1960s the population of the region increased abruptly, especially in the Banana Axis, as a result of the emergence of the agro-export banana industry, the construction of new roads connecting the area with important urban centers, and the large number of people fleeing from *La Violencia* (Bejarano, et.al 1999).³³ The rapid growth of the

³² As Wood (2003: fn 2) notes in her study of rural El Salvador, the Spanish word *campesinos* is not accurately translated by the English word peasants. Most of the *campesinos* in Colombia, as in El Salvador, are not owners of smallholdings but aspire to be. Therefore, I opt to use the Spanish word in italics.

³³ Between 1951 and 1964 the population increased by a factor of five, from 15,700 to 77,000. (Carroll, 2011:59). For a detailed account of the colonization process of Urabá and its intersections with the dynamics of regional violence, see Bejarano (1988).

banana sector attracted a large number of workers and led to a fast economic development and integration of the region. However, these transformations were not regulated by the state, who never protected labor's interests and rights. As a consequence, the 1960s opened a period of social and labor conflicts between banana plantation owners, large cattle ranchers, workers, rural squatters, and *campesino* settlers (Uribe, 2004, Carroll, 2011).

In this socially agitated context, besides the emergence of civic and *campesino* associations and the organization of trade unions by the Communist Party, Left-wing guerrilla groups came into the picture in the late 1960s and early 1970s, permeating and radicalizing other social and political movements (Bejarano, 1988; Ramirez, 1993; Romero, 2003; Restrepo, 2011; Carroll, 2011). The Popular Liberation Army (EPL) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) managed not only to operate in the region and achieve military capacity, but also to establish strong links with trade unions and gain important social and political support.³⁴ In their areas of influence, insurgencies were able to establish local orders and influence a wide range of civilian affairs (Uribe, 2004). The late 1980s and the first half of the 1990s witnessed an intensification of insurgent activity and an escalation of the conflict, with high levels of violence and numerous confrontations between guerrilla groups and between them and the National Army. In addition, local cleavages between banana plantation owners, large cattle ranchers with strong ties with drug traffickers, civic and *campesino* associations, trade unions, and rural squatters, amounted to this escalation of the conflict.

Under these conditions Urabá experienced the violent takeover of right-wing paramilitary armies that, after some years, meant the end of the territorial control of the left. The

³⁴ For example, the FARC, focusing mainly on settlers in the Banana Axis and South Uraba, had strong links with SINTRABANANO, a trade union of banana workers; while the EPL, operating mainly in the North, had strong links with SINTAGRO, a trade union of agrarian workers (Bejarano et.al, 1999; Carroll, 2011)

paramilitary incursion in the region began in the late 1980s through the North. Fidel and Carlos Castaño, two of the main leaders of what later became the largest paramilitary federation in the country, the United Self-defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), commanded the main paramilitary group that operated in the region, the Campesino Self-defense Forces of Córdoba and Urabá (ACCU). These paramilitary armies, in alliance with banana plantation owners, drug traffickers, large cattle ranchers, and sectors of the national army (specially the XVII Brigade), sought to contain and neutralize the advance of guerrilla groups and any other organized expression of the political left, defend and expand landowners' private property and economic interests, become a regional power, and establish public order (Suarez, 2001, 2007; Valenzuela, 2009, 2010). To meet these goals, one key strategy was mass forced displacement of *campesinos*, a process that came to be called the “agrarian-counter reform” (Romero, 2003). In the words of Jairo Castillo (aka Pitirri), a former paramilitary leader serving as a key protected witness, “It was a conspiracy. There were the ones doing the killing, others who would follow behind buying up the land, and the third wave, who would legalize the new ownership of the land.”³⁵

Apartadó was far from immune to these regional dynamics. During the 1970s and 1980s, while the EPL and the FARC intensively fought for the control of the area³⁶, the military repressed both guerrilla groups and political dissidents (Giraldo, 2000; Suarez, 2001, 2007). In 1988, putting an end to a historical dominance of the Liberal Party, the Patriotic Union (UP), a legal political party that emerged from a peace negotiation between President Betancur's government and the FARC in 1985, won the first popular elections for mayor in

³⁵ Testimony presented by Iván Cepeda, Colombian human rights defender and Director of the National Movement for Victims of State Crimes (MOVICE), in August 2010 during a congressional debate on political control over land, paramilitaries and forced displacement.

³⁶ The EPL had control over the west of the municipality of Apartadó, while the FARC had it over the hamlet of San José and established the Front V in the Abby Mountains (Suarez, 2001, 2007). In 1984, following FARC's new military strategy, this front split up in three fronts (XVIII, XXXIV, and LXVII), all active in different parts of the area (Restrepo, 2006).

Apartadó and became the strongest political force in the sub-region.³⁷ Its active presence gave political leverage to the FARC (Valenzuela, 2010), who managed to establish an almost full control in some areas of the region. As one interviewee noted, “before the arrival of the paramilitaries and with the demobilization of the EPL³⁸, the FARC carried out several state-like activities, such as providing protection, building roads, and supplying goods. Many San José inhabitants obeyed, actively collaborated, and even joined the FARC during this period.”³⁹ At least until 1993, the FARC achieved this with low levels of violence against civilians, as Figure 3 shows for the municipality of Apartadó.

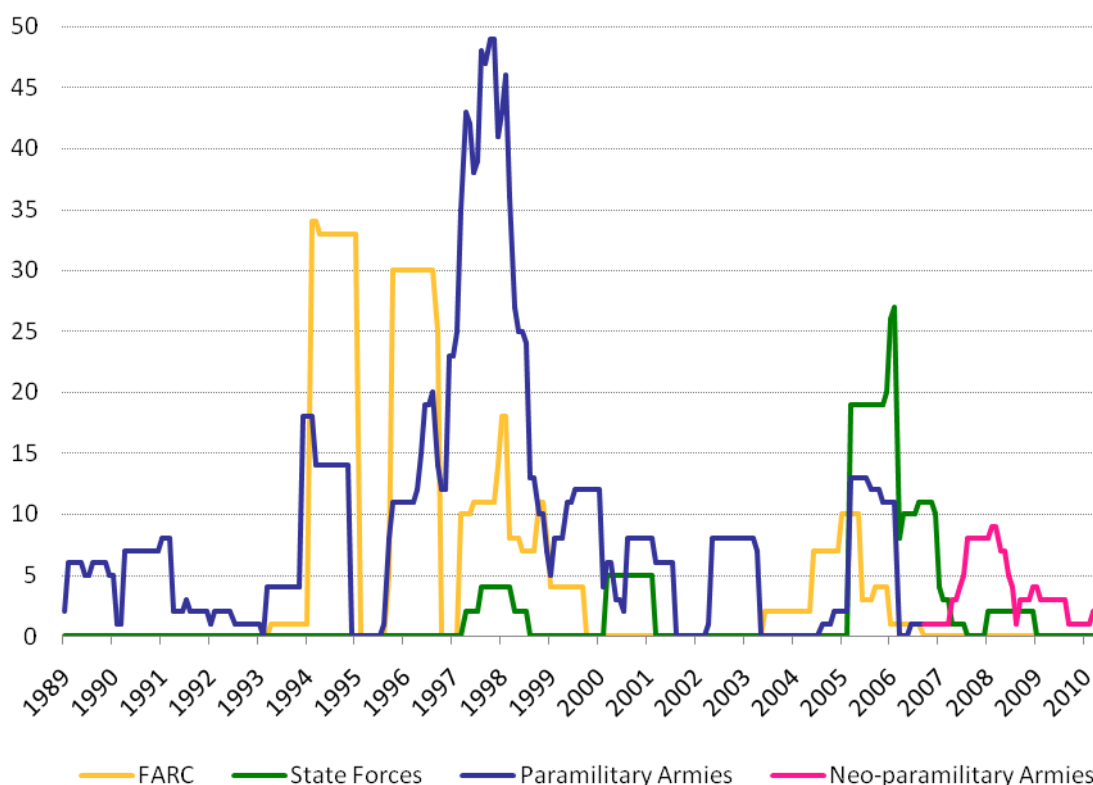
The paramilitary armies managed to push FARC to the geographical margins of the region and to submit Apartadó to their authority only during the second half of the 1990s (Uribe, 2004). The challenge to FARC’s control, as Figure 3 reveals, led to a sharp increase in the levels of civilian victimization starting in 1993 and reaching its peak level in 1997. Although both FARC and paramilitaries are responsible for this increase, by the end of 1996 paramilitaries were the main perpetrators of civilian deaths taking place in the municipality.

³⁷ Virtually all of the members of this party were assassinated by 1998 (IACHR –OAS, 1997, No. 26).

³⁸ Most of the members of the EPL, after being severely weakened by paramilitary attacks against their peasant base in Córdoba and Urabá, demobilized in 1991 through a peace process with the administration of César Gaviria and formed the *Esperanza, Paz y Libertad* (EPyL), a political party that claimed to defend the interests of the workers and trade unions, especially in the Urabá region.

³⁹ Interview 6a.

Figure 3. Civilian Deaths by Perpetrator, Apartadó 1989 - 2010⁴⁰



Source: CERAC. “Colombian Armed Conflict” data set V.11.3. Data subject to revisions and updates.

Besides lethal violence, forced displacements rose dramatically during these years. As data collected by Valenzuela (2010:23) shows, 1996 and 1997 were the years that reported more cases of forced displacement: only in June 1996, 811 people from 27 different settlements of the *corregimiento* of San José left their lands. This pressing situation, after massive protest by *campesinos* in the area, led to the creation of a verification commission composed of governmental authorities, representatives of local *campesino* associations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The report released by the Commission conveyed that only between May and August 1996, 22 extrajudicial killings, 27 arbitrary

⁴⁰ Through a process of negotiation that started in July 2003 in Santa Fe de Ralito, a town in the Department of Córdoba, AUC leaders and the Colombian government agreed on the demobilization of every bloc of the AUC by 2005. Under this process, in 2004, the ACCU were demobilized. The process had many pitfalls and new armed groups emerged from it. Violence exercised by these groups is coded in CERAC’s data set under the name of “neo-paramilitaries”. For an elaboration of this concept, see Granada, Restrepo, and Tobón García (2009).

detentions, 8 cases of torture, one destructive indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas and two mass forced displacements were committed against civilians (Giraldo, 2010a; Sanchez-Garzo, 2010).

The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó

In 1996 several families marched from San José to Apartadó's urban center and established a temporary refuge in the town's coliseum. They were protesting against the high levels of endemic violence and repression carried out by the different armed groups, including the forces of the state. After some negotiations between the families and a government-sponsored commission, they went back home. Upon their return the leaders of the protest were assassinated. According to different interviewees, this was the key immediate antecedent for the creation of the PCA.⁴¹

Exhausted from large-scale violence and repression⁴², community leaders of San José sought the support and protection of the Catholic Church, national NGOs⁴³, and the then-mayor of Apartadó, Gloria Cuartas. Together, they discussed and analyzed carefully different alternative paths to cope with this situation and protect themselves from violence. Inspired by a proposal by Monsignor Isaías Duarte, the Bishop of Apartadó at the time (later killed in 2002), around fourteen hundred inhabitants of San José decided to stay in their lands and

⁴¹ Interview 4a, 6a and 3b.

⁴² According to official data, 480 homicides and 7 massacres (killing 44 people) took place in the municipality (data by official sources processed by Gomez, 2008).

On August 17 of 1996, unidentified armed men burst into the City Council in Apartadó and killed Bartolomé Castano, the founder of San José de Apartadó; and on September 16 of the same year, dragged the leaders of a protest against repression out of their houses and killed them (Zarate-Laun, 2012 –based on direct testimonies of inhabitants of Apartadó).

⁴³ Mainly the *Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz* (Intercongregational Commission on Justice and Peace) and Center for Research and Popular Education (CINEP)

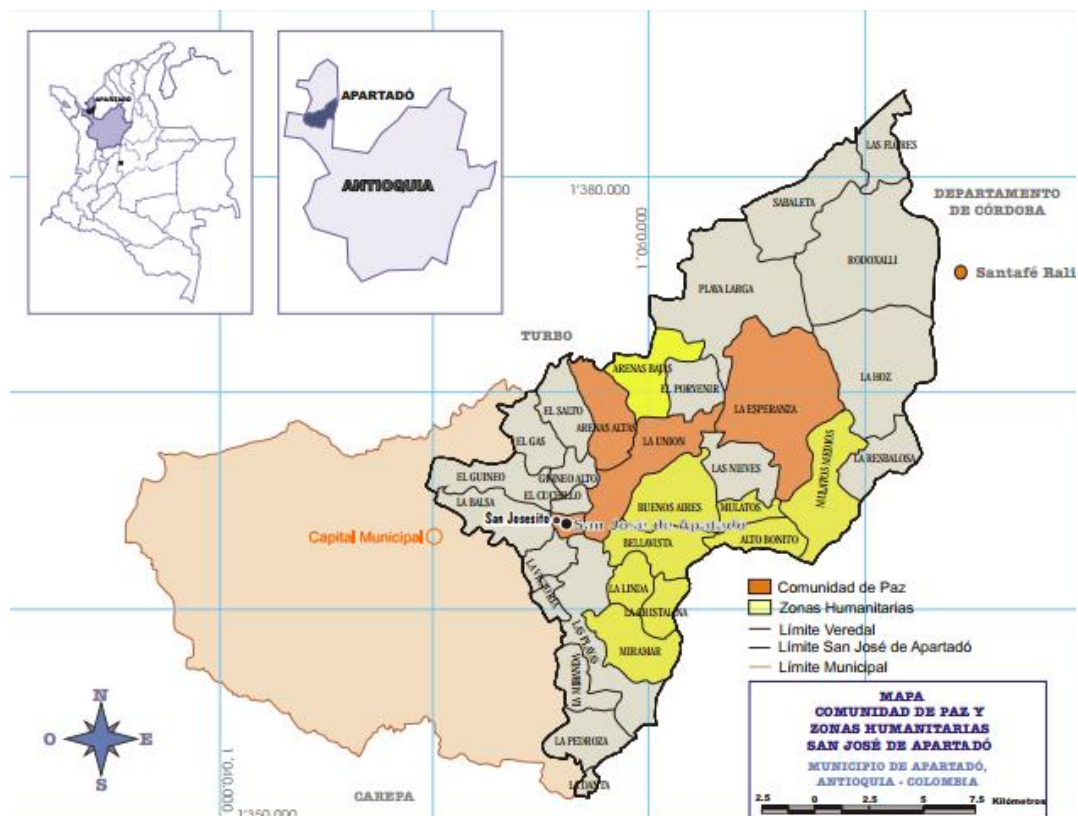
overtly oppose and resist the dynamics of war by creating, on March 23rd 1997, a Peace Community.

In doing so, they pledge not to participate in any possible way in the war and disavow any form of cooperation with all armed groups, including the national army and the police. In addition, with flags, symbols and fences, they explicitly designated physical areas where armed groups, without distinction, could not enter, stay or circulate. This choice meant the possibility (maybe the only one) to stay in their place, work their lands and live with their neighbors (Uribe, 2004). “They knew how to take care of their crops and they did it with love. They did not want to go to the city, to the slums, and do any other activity, most probably prostitution or begging. That is why it was so important for them to stay. They belong there.”⁴⁴

Not everybody in San José joined the Community. As Map 2 clearly indicates, only 17 out of the 32 settlements of San José are part of the PCA (Uribe, 2006). Nonetheless, in March 2005, “humanitarian zones” were formally and publically established in hamlets surrounding San José (1 to 4 hours walking distance from San José’s urban center) in order to prevent further displacement and serve as refuges during armed confrontations (CINEP, 2005).

⁴⁴ Interview 6a

Map 2. Peace Community of San José de Apartadó and Humanitarian Zones⁴⁵



Source: Official website of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó: <http://www.cdpsanjose.org/>

Since then, a series of principles explicitly listed in a formal Declaration have governed the Community, a formal code of conduct has regulated the behavior of its members, and an Internal Council elected by the people has carried out administrative and disciplinary functions (Art. 7, P. 1). Its members comply with the following fundamental behavior established by Article 3 of their Declaration⁴⁶:

- Not to participate, directly or indirectly, in the hostilities (Par. 1)
- Not to carry or own arms, ammunitions, and/or explosives (Par. 1, a)

⁴⁵ Legend (translation): In Gray: *corregimiento* of San José de Apartadó; Orange: PCA; Yellow: Humanitarian Zones.

⁴⁶ The Declaration, their Principles and the Internal Regulation are available, in Spanish, on the official website of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó: <http://www.cdpsanjose.org/>

- Not to provide logistic support to any of the armed groups (Par. 1, b)
- Not to turn to any of the armed groups to manage or resolve internal, personal or familiar disputes (Par. 1, c)
- Commit to participate in community work projects (Par. 1, d)
- Commit to fight against injustice and impunity (Art. 3, Par. 1, e)⁴⁷

The PCA consists, therefore, of civilian non-combatant *campesinos* who voluntarily decided to be part of it. Members can freely leave and new people (12 years or older), after manifesting voluntarily their will to be part and attending four informational workshops in the period of one month, are welcome to join. In addition to the Internal Council, the PCA is structured in working groups and committees. The former are in charge of the collective and communal production of foodstuffs and other basic goods so that everyone in the community meets their basic needs. The latter collectively organize the life activities and projects of the community members in specific areas such as health, education, work, sport, gender and culture, among others (Peace Community, 2006; Uribe, 2006). This functioning structure of the PCA has allowed it to survive over time and made it possible for its members to live by the principles of community and solidarity.

Despite of their intention to establish a “sanctuary” or “peace zone” (Mitchell, 2007; Hancock and Mitchell, 2007) in the middle of war, the different armed groups met the PCA’s stance with suspicion and hostility and have not respected their neutrality. While the states forces (and the Colombian government in general) and the paramilitaries armies started to label them as “guerrilleros”⁴⁸ or terrorists, the guerrilla groups accused them of siding with its enemies. As Figures 3 and 4 show, high levels of civilian deaths and an intensification of

⁴⁷ Additionally, the sale and consumption of alcohol is prohibited within the perimeter of the PCA.

⁴⁸ Members of a guerrilla group.

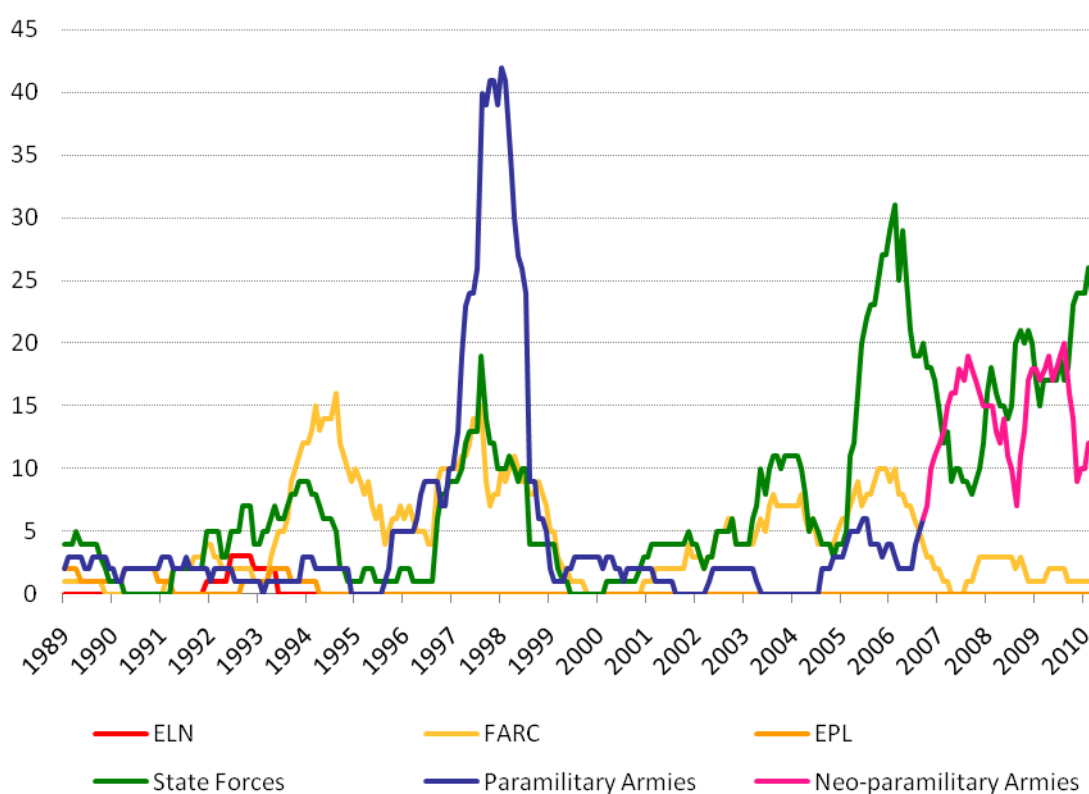
paramilitary and state forces violent activity followed up this strategy of stigmatization during the first years after the Declaration.

National and international NGOs that have supported and accompanied the PCA in very different ways have constantly reported the multiple ways in which armed groups have selectively targeted leaders and members of the PCA. Javier Giraldo (2000, 2010a), a Jesuit priest and human rights defender that has accompanied and supported the PCA since its creation, reported that 47 members of the Community were victims of lethal violence in both individual homicides and massacres by the end of 1997 alone. Amnesty International (2008) reported that more than 170 members of the community have been killed or subjected to enforced disappearance from 1997 to mid-2008; Peace Brigades International (2012) reported 210 assassinations by the time of the PCA's commemoration of the 15 years of resistance in March 2012. Moreover, the PCA has been victim of non-lethal violence almost in a daily basis: threats, sexual abuse, burning of houses, roadblocks, blockades of foodstuffs, displacements, robbery of livestock, and the destruction of crops, among others (Giraldo, 2010a).

Although unidentified armed actors have carried out many of these crimes, the members of the community have repeatedly reported that the majority of the crimes have been committed by the paramilitaries in alliance with the XVII Brigade of the National Army. Moreover, they assert that the state is directly implicated in more than 90% of the cases (PBI, 2010b: n.p; Hope for Colombia documentary). CINEP's database on political violence confirms these statements: out of the 150 homicides of PCA members reported in this database (from 1997 to October 2005), 20 were attributed to guerrilla groups and the remaining to the paramilitaries and the National Army. In addition, this is consistent with both Figure 3 and 4, which show that the state forces, the paramilitary armies, and later on the neo-paramilitaries, have been responsible not only for the majority of civilian deaths, but also for the bulk of

violent events in Apartadó in the course of the 13 years that followed the creation of the PCA. Although Figure 4 shows a sharp decline of paramilitary violent activity after the peak in 1997 – 1998, starting in 2001 we see a relatively stable increase of violent activity by the state forces in the area (strongly related with the military approach privileged by President Álvaro Uribe), reaching its highest peak in 2006, as well as a revival of paramilitary violent activity after 2007 in the form of neo-paramilitaries.

Figure 4. Violent Events by Perpetrator, Apartadó 1989 – 2010



Source: CERAC. “Colombian Armed Conflict” data set V.11.3. Data subject to revisions and updates.

For the bulk of these crimes, investigations have not been opened and perpetrators have not been brought to justice. The 2005 massacre (clearly reflected in both Figures 3 and 4), in which eight members of the PCA were killed, including a prominent community leader –Luís

Eduardo Guerra— and four children, is one of the few noticeable exceptions. In 2008 six soldiers of the National Army were charged in relation to the killings and an army captain, who later admitted his responsibility in the massacre and his links to the paramilitary armies, was arrested.

Despite violence and impunity, the community is still in place and firm in its determination to resist the dynamics of war and ensure that the 750 crimes they have denounced do not remain in impunity.⁴⁹ After the 2005 massacre and the government's decision to locate a police station in the town of San José, the PCA, rather than accepting the presence of arms and armed groups in their territory, relocated to the settlement *La Holandita*, a farmland they owned nearby and that they now call *San Josesito*. By mid-2008, as reported by Amnesty International (2008), there were some 210 families living in the PCA amounting to a total of some 1,100 people. In the last 7 years they have built a new town and have developed new crops to market. Currently they distribute “baby bananas” to Europe through Fair Trade networks and they are setting up the infrastructure to do the same with organic cacao. More importantly, they have lived by their principles and have resisted displacement by staying in their lands.

In sum, after 15 years of non-violent resistance, as Zarate-Luan (2012) states, the PCA is three things: a territory, a political decision, and a peasant farmer association. Moreover, as the PCA states in its documents, it is a way of organizing social life based on “self-governed strategies of plural participation” different to those that armed actors, including the armed forces of the state, have tried to “impose through arms and economic power”. The PCA is, in this sense, an experience of building a radically different social order in the middle of a civil war based on the principles of non-violence, collective work and solidarity.

⁴⁹ Interviews 6a and 3b

CHAPTER 4. Analyzing Contention: Towards a Mechanism-process Approach

Last chapter presented a broad historical outline of the creation and development of the PCA in dialogue with the local/regional dynamics of civil war and its violence in San José de Apartadó and the Urabá region. Drawing on this, this section moves to an analysis of contention following a three-step strategy based on what Tilly and Tarrow (2007) consider the major descriptive and explanatory concepts in the study of contentious politics. First, I identify the longer stream of contention in which the emergence and development of the PCA is embedded and chop it up into three episodes of contention in order to focus the analysis on the period that begins with the immediate antecedents of the creation of the PCA and covers its years of existence. Second, I provide a descriptive account of the PCA in light of the following concepts: political actors, political identities, claims, and performances.⁵⁰ Third, I move to an explanatory account in which I specify (preliminary) mechanisms that facilitated the emergence and development of the PCA. In doing this, I distinguish between two groups of mechanisms. (i) *Violence-mediated mechanisms*: those that have been already identified in the contentious politics literature and that, while operating in a violent context, take novel forms; and (ii) *Violence-conditioned mechanisms*: those in which violence appears as a condition to their existence and, therefore, are more specific to civil war settings or contexts with high levels of organized violence.

⁵⁰ As repertoires are defined as clusters of performances that apply to the same pairs of claimant-object in different places and times (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:16-18), I do not explicitly build on this concept as I am drawing in a single case study. However, I hope that the discussion on performances provides clues about the potential existence and/or emergence of a repertoire of performances available for those who resist the dynamics of war.

Streams and Episodes of Contention

As conceptualized by Tilly and Tarrow (2007:203; 211-212), streams of contention are composed by connected moments of collective claim making at sites or arenas of contention. Although the broader context of Colombia's civil war is national, as the previous chapter shows and the research program on micro-dynamics of civil wars avows (Kalyvas, 2008:397-399), the armed conflict takes particular forms at the sub-national level (local and regional). In light of this, the site of contention we outlined is that of San José and Apartadó (local) in Urabá (regional) and the stream of contention goes from the arrival of the guerrilla groups in the late 1960s to present. Based on the regional/local development of the civil war in this site of contention, we can coherently break this stream into three episodes. The focus of the present analysis is the third one.

- (i) *Late 1960s – late 1980s*: guerrilla groups arrive in the region, achieve military capacity, create links with trade unions and *campesino* associations, gain social and political support, and establish a local social order by carrying out several state-like activities and influencing a wide range of civilian affairs. In general, civilians responded positively to these groups' presence and strategies, cooperated in different ways and some even joined their ranks.
- (ii) *Late 1980s – 1996*: paramilitaries, in alliance with sectors of the national army, banana plantation owners, narco traffickers, and large cattle ranchers arrive in Urabá and wage an intense war against guerrilla groups and left-wing dissidents in order to gain control of the area and bring their own order. This paramilitary project comes along with a dramatic escalation of violence, lethal and non-lethal. Confrontations between the two guerrilla groups operating in the area and between them and the paramilitaries and the armed forces explain the high levels of violence against civilians and violent activity by armed groups. In general, the

majority of civilians responded by leaving the area, while some continued supporting guerrilla groups, directly or indirectly, through the political parties associated to them (UP and EPyL). Very few *campesinos* opted to cooperate with the paramilitary armies or the state forces, which to a large degree were acting together. In San José almost nobody considered this as an option.⁵¹

(iii) *Mid-1996 to present*: the paramilitary armies took over the Urabá region, irrupted in San José, and violence against civilians dramatically increased between 1996 and 1997. As a response, *campesino* leaders in San José sought for support and protection from the Catholic Church and national NGOs and designed together an alternative way to cope with the conflict and its violence. By creating the PCA in March 1997, they refused to be displaced from their lands and opted to resist non-violently against the violence and rule of paramilitary armies and any other armed actor in the area.⁵²

Describing Contention

Political Actors, Actors to the conflict, and Political Identities

In its more elemental form, the PCA constitutes a group of people making collective contentious claims in order to protect themselves from the violent dynamics of war, defy the local rule of paramilitaries –in alliance with sectors of the National Army–, and fight against injustice and impunity. This claim making, as the strict internal structure of the PCA reveals, depends on high levels of coordination among claimants. In addition, it implies an interaction, direct and indirect, in some ways constant and in some others intermittent, with the different actors whose interests are involved, being the most salient ones the

⁵¹ Interviews 3a and 6a

⁵² This periodization draws from the data processed for this study and from detailed accounts by Uribe (2004), Romero and Martínez (2006), and Carroll (2011).

paramilitaries, the national army, the national government, and, to a lesser degree due to its weakened presence, the guerrillas.

In Tilly and Tarrow's approach to contentious politics, for an interaction to be 'political' or part of the realm of 'politics', the government needs to be somehow involved. This applies for contention in general, as for actors and identities involved in contentious interactions. Therefore, as long as the Colombian government is involved, in some instances as the target of the claims and in others as one of the objects of the claims, the PCA is a recognizable *political actor*. In addition, by publically declaring and defining themselves as a Peace Community and establishing some elements that clearly signal who they are and where they are (e.g. a name, a flag, an anthem, fences demarcating territory), the PCA acquires a *political identity* that is recognized (albeit not necessarily respected) by the other actors with whom it interacts. This produced, using the words of Rojas (2007:72), identity-transforming changes regarding the notion of being victims of the conflict and fostered a move from a victim-centered perspective towards one of resistance and resilience.

However, the specific character of the civil war context in which the PCA emerges requires moving beyond the way Tilly and Tarrow (2007) understand these concepts. The PCA emerged and developed as a political actor with a political identity in relation to all the warring armed groups operating in their area. Therefore, their political character should not be defined only as a function of its relation to the Colombian government. By declaring themselves neutral and making a geostrategic location such as San José a "zone of peace", they became an (non-violent) *actor to the conflict* and its political identity acquired a special meaning within the dynamics of the war. Although the Colombian government is the main target in the PCA's fight against impunity and injustice, the objects of their non-violent resistance are all the actors operating in the area without distinction.

Performances and Repertoires

During 15 years of non-violent resistance, the PCA have adopted and employed a mixture of disruptive, contained and routinized performances in order to make their claims and advance their project as a community of peace. They have relied on modular performances –generic forms that can be adapted to different local and social circumstances (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:13)– borrowed from repertoires already available for other actors in other contexts. However, with minor or no innovation, these performances have acquired a particular meaning in the midst of a civil war. In addition, the PCA has gone beyond claim making by carrying out a set of collective activities that although are not contentious *per se*, have been the key to make viable a project that is in itself contentious.

Disruptive performances

The most overly disruptive performance in the history of the PCA was, perhaps, the public demonstration launched in March 23rd 1997 through which they declared themselves a Peace Community. As Zarate-Laun (2012:17) observes, “This single act was one of the first public demonstrations of non-violent resistance in a country where traditionally only violent means are used to solve conflicts.” With the presence of the Catholic Church, national and international NGO’s, members of the Parliament of the Netherlands, and some members of the local government, the inhabitants of San José delivered a clear and strong message to all the armed groups involved in the war: in the words of one interviewee, “we are not playing this game of killing and killing anymore, we are not going to help any armed group and none of these groups will have presence in the demarcated area our Peace Community. *Guerrillos, paras, milicos* all the same.”⁵³

⁵³ Interview 5b

Through a bravely innovative way of coping with the dynamics of war and of seeking protection from widespread violence, the declaration of non-violent resistance and radical neutrality was disruptive in many ways. It signaled the Community's new collective identity as an actor to the conflict, it provided clear-cut evidence of its determination and, moreover, it conditioned –until today- the routine activities and behavior of the armed groups operating in the area. Since that day, the warring armed groups had to deal with the community members in a different way, without expecting or attempting to get any form of cooperation from them and without being welcome in a territory they used to have presence in and to which they assign special value.

As a consequence, the immediate reaction of the armed groups and the national government was that of suspicion and disavowal, followed by stigmatization and high levels of selective violence. “The *guerrillos* said that they were with the *paras*, and the *paras*, the National Army and the civilian sectors of the government called them *guerrillos*”.⁵⁴ If we recall the instrumentality of civilians in the strategies armed groups have in waging an irregular civil war, it becomes clearer why the armed groups were so ‘off balance’ with this disruptive declaration. For the illegal armed groups, guerrilla and paramilitary armies, non-cooperation meant, on the one hand, no access to the information they need in order to exercise selective violence and, on the other, a hard-to-overcome obstacle to influence civil affairs. Together, this implied that the armed groups were virtually incapable of establishing a social order of any type.⁵⁵ Therefore, this compromised both the capacity of armed groups to control a local territory to which they assign high strategic value and the possibility to seize resources (material and locational) from it.

Guerrillos, paras, milicos are, respectively, colloquial forms to refer to members of the guerrilla groups, paramilitary armies, and national army.

⁵⁴ Interview 3b

⁵⁵ Arjona (*forthcoming*, chapter 3) distinguishes between a social order of surveillance –which allows for preserving territorial control but offers fewer opportunities for seizing resources– and one of “rebelocracy” – which maximizes the armed group’s capacity to control territory and seize resources.

For the armed forces of the state and the national government the public declaration was equally disruptive. On the one hand, the members of the PCA put the armed forces of the state in the exact same group with the paramilitary armies and the guerrilla groups. This was a strong challenge to the government, especially if we consider that at the time of the creation of the PCA the then-governor of Antioquia, later President of Colombia for two consecutive periods, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, had the project to establish, by decree, “neutral zones” under a conception of neutrality that implied non-cooperation with illegal armed groups and cooperation with the forces of the state. On the other hand, the PCA is a social pact that leaves the state out. Therefore, the disruptive character is clearly reinforced in a constant basis in the many state-like activities that have allowed and fostered the development and sustainability of the PCA. The following statement by President Uribe Vélez in 2005 is a clear evidence of how disruptive the existence of the PCA is for the national government.

Peace communities have the right to exist in Colombia thanks to the rights accorded by our political system. But they cannot, as is practiced in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, obstruct justice, reject the armed forces, prohibit the sale of licit items, or restrict the freedom of the citizens that reside there. In this community of San José de Apartadó there are good people, but some of their leaders, sponsors, and defenders are seriously accused by people who have lived there of being auxiliaries of the FARC and of utilizing the community to protect this terrorist organization.⁵⁶

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the PCA’s commitment to non-violence also altered the natural course of the conflict in that area by trying to brake, in a radical way, the deadly cycle between violence “at the top” and violence “at the bottom” described by Kalyvas (2003, 2006) as the reason for the particularly violent character of civil wars. The PCA’s members refused not only to support the actors exercising violence “at the top”, but also to

⁵⁶ Statement by President Álvaro Uribe Vélez the 20th of March 2005 during a Security Council held in the XXVII Brigade of the Army in the Municipality of Carepa. Available on www.pbi-colombia.org

utilize the ongoing large-scale clashes to settle their existing local disputes via violence “at the bottom”.

Besides to the public demonstrations through which each three months the PCA celebrates their existence, restates its commitment to non-violent resistance, and reinforces its internal solidarity, it is worth mentioning the national and international campaign they launched in 2005 and the Grace Pilgrimage in 2010 as part of the most overtly disruptive performances. In 2005, reacting to the plans of the national government to install a police post in San José, community members carried out public protests, signed out petitions, and organized public meetings to urge the government not to put the police base within the perimeter of the Community as it violates their internal regulations and it would undermine their physical security since the area would become a military target for the FARC (Sánchez-Garzoli, 2010:5).

As for the pilgrimage, in 2010, from October 31 to November 9, the PCA had the first chance to make clear who they are in the Colombian capital. Around 70 people from the PCA, with about 60 national and international peace workers and human rights defenders, marched through the streets of Bogotá signaling their identity and their commitment. “To the huts of the poorest, to the avenues of the rich and in the palaces of the government, they brought the message: “Peace and community is possible. End violence! Support models for a new Colombia.” (Bossert, 2010:1).⁵⁷

Contained Performances

Moving to more contained performances, with the aim of making visible what is going on in San José and fighting against injustice and impunity, the members of the community have repeatedly signed petitions, addressed letters to government officials, denounced violence,

⁵⁷ A one hour documentary following step by step this “pilgrimage” is available online under the name Hope for Colombia

collected testimonies, reported abuses, and offered declarations of a wide range of human rights abuses and crimes. Through these contentious actions they have called the attention not only of the National government but also of international organizations, such as the Organization of American States and the United Nations (Zarate-Laun, 2012:16; Giraldo, 2010a).

Some of these actions, petitions and declarations for example, are among the most modular contentious performances. However, the centrality of violence invests them with a particular meaning that goes beyond the limits of a any repertoire established for any other place, time or pair of actors. Performances that the literature has identified in other contexts, such as collecting testimonies and offering public declarations, have taken deeply innovative forms in the PCA's struggle. For example, each time a member of the community is killed, they pick a stone from the river and write down the name of the victim with different colors. With these stones, they have built a public memorial to praise the memory of the beloved ones and, in addition, they have called the attention of national and international audiences. With the support of national and international NGOs and human rights defenders, through this symbolic device, they have reported and denounced abuses all around the world.⁵⁸ For instance, using this memorial as the background, the 2006 Colombo-Swiss documentary "Hasta la última piedra" (*Until the Last Stone*) by Juan José Lozano, a prominent Colombian filmmaker, has traveled the world providing evidence of the widespread human rights abuses the community has fallen victim to. In fact, screening documentaries became a common performance in the advocacy efforts by the international NGOs working with the community. Organizations such as the Washington Office of Latin America (WOLA) have helped

⁵⁸ Interviews 3a, 6a and 4b

directors such Lozano to present their documentaries to the US civil society, policymakers, and members of the Congress to raise their awareness on what is going on in Colombia.⁵⁹

Routinized Performances

Other continuous activities, such as the public meetings and working group meetings held each 8 days and the training workshops held each 15 days, constitute a set of routinized performances that has been key in the development and sustainability of the PCA's contentious collective project. If we follow Tilly and Tarrow (2007) strictly, these performances would not qualify as contentious politics as they are not episodic, do not connect at least a claimant and an object of a claim, and do not involve the government in the interaction. However, in the midst of a civil war, these actions get a particular meaning that should be regarded as contentious. To put it simply, the continuous routinized interaction among the members of the community have led to the coordinated efforts, on behalf of shared interests and identities, necessary to sustain a project that, in the middle of a civil war, becomes contentious in itself.

Finally, out from these different types of performances we can additionally identify a combination of three different kinds of collective claims.⁶⁰ In the “inaugural” public demonstration, in subsequent “anniversary” public demonstrations, as well as in the pilgrimage to Bogotá we see a set of claims that aim to declare the existence, permanency, and persistence of the PCA as a (non-violent) political actor to the conflict. The claims made through these performances fall into the category of “identity claims”. In addition, through public petitions, letters, denunciations and declarations, the PCA has constantly reminded the armed actors, the national government, and the international community, that they are a neutral actor in the conflict and that the area where they live and work is a “zone of peace”.

⁵⁹ Due to the content of the quote the id code for this interview is not revealed to ensure anonymity.

⁶⁰ For a detailed presentation and discussion on the different kinds of claims, see Tilly and Tarrow (2007:81-83)

Although the parts involved never agreed on the declaration and have never respected the PCA's sanctuary, with these performances the members of the Community are claiming that they belong to a particular category of actors that deserves particular rights and a particular treatment. They have underlined these claims, furthermore, by publically denying their alleged links with guerrilla groups and restating that they radical neutrality does not distinguish between armed groups. The claims advanced through these performances fall into the category of "standing claims". Finally, all those performances aiming to make the national government take due measures in regards to what happens in San José, such as creating commissions to investigate crimes, prosecute perpetrators, inspect the role of members of the national army and their links with the paramilitaries, etc., are claims that call the national government to act with determination and in certain ways. The claims advanced through these performances, both nationally and internationally, fall into the category of "program claims".

Explaining Contention

Violence-mediated Mechanisms

When in 1996 leaders of *campesino* associations of San José sought for support and protection from other non-armed actors with presence in the region, they produced a connection between sites that were previously not connected or weakly connected, at least in regards to this issue. *Brokerage* was the key mechanism at play in connecting *campesinos* of San José, the Catholic Church, national NGOs, and some representatives of the local government, leading to the effort of designing a new strategy to cope with the dynamics of violence in the area. In addition, *brokerage* made possible for *campesinos* to use the Catholic Church as an institutional base to give form and launch their project. As in other episodes of contention, such the abolitionist causes in the United States and England (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007:34) or the creation of similar "zones of peace" in the Philippines (Avruch and Jose,

2007), we see here another mechanism in motion: *social appropriation*. Building on the institutional base of the Church, the different actors were able to signal their intentions and share their ideas to each other, establish strong support networks and, for a period of months, work together in analyzing alternative solutions to their situation. Brokerage and social appropriation combined into the process of *coordinated action*, which help us explain the creation of the PCA in March 1997. Moreover, during the 15 years of the PCA's resistance, the coordinated action of these connected actors and these support networks have played an important role in sustaining the PCA till the point that, since its creation, one delegate from the Diocese of Apartadó and one from a national NGO, as stated by the Declaration (Art. 7), have been part of the PCA's Internal Council.

In order to explain the establishment of the PCA as a new political actor to the conflict with a new political identity, we can identify another set of mechanisms at work. With the declaration of radical neutrality, the members of the PCA increased the salience of an already existing boundary that marked an us/them distinction between combatants and non-combatants (i.e. *boundary activation*). Nevertheless, radical neutrality gave the condition of non-combatants a new meaning within the members of the community: being a non-combatant no longer meant not to be enlisted, partially or fully, in the ranks of an armed group; with the creation of the PCA, it meant not to participate and cooperate in any possible way, directly or indirectly, in the armed hostilities. This boundary activation, together with the redefinition of the "us" reflecting the new identity of the PCA, led to the creation of a new boundary –non-violent resisters/violent armed groups– that went beyond the non-combatants/combatants distinction (i.e. *boundary formation*). These two mechanisms together implied a third one, *boundary shift*, through which previous supporters and/or collaborators, in order to be part of the PCA and regardless of possible sympathies and

preferences in relation to some of the groups in conflict (cognitive partiality⁶¹), shifted from the non-combatant side of the old boundary, that allowed some conducts of cooperation with armed groups, to the new non-combatant side, based on the notion of radical neutrality. In sum, these three mechanisms together combined into the process of *actor constitution* – emergence of a new or transformed political actor who carries on collective action (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 72 – 74).

Violence-conditioned mechanisms

In addition to the mechanisms and processes listed above, which we have already seen producing similar effects in a wide range of contentious circumstances and settings (violent and non violent), we can also identify another set of mechanisms that are not only linked to the dynamics of violence, but that are in fact conditioned by violence and that characterize, in a more specific way, the context we are studying. In his study of El Salvador and Guatemala, Brockett (2005:324 – 328) concluded that violent repression generally succeeds in smothering contention but, in some instances, this repression is likely to provoke even higher levels of challenge, both violent and nonviolent, rather than deter contention. In this section I try to make sense of this second situation by specifying three mechanisms that mediate in the relationship between violence and individual and collective reactions/responses.⁶²

1. Pay-offs reassessment

“That year [1996] they [paramilitaries] were killing everybody no matter who you were or what you did [...] they killed because one was friends with the guerrillas,

⁶¹ Radical neutrality does not necessarily imply impartiality. As understood here, radical neutrality designates a behavior (non-cooperation) while impartiality indicates cognitive states (sympathy, preference, etc.). A given community, or members of a given community, may sympathize more with one of the armed actors or may have what Valenzuela calls “divided loyalties” and, at the same time, opt to not cooperate with any group as a strategy to protect themselves from violence. In other words, a community or members of a community can be “behaviorally neutral” and “cognitively partial” at the same time. See Valenzuela 2001, 2009 and 2010.

⁶² This section draws heavily on what Arjona (*forthcoming*: 112-120) describes and theorizes under the name of “behavioral effects of violence”. The second mechanism, moral activation of agency, also draws on Wood’s (2003:231-241) interpretation of high-risk collective action.

because one was in the wrong street in the wrong moment, or because one wore red that morning.”⁶³ High levels of violence, as those experienced by the inhabitants of San José during 1995 - 1997 may lead people to revise the system of pay-offs they assign to courses of action in their attempt to make a rational decision of whether to cooperate or not cooperate. People facing increasingly high levels of violence (specially if it is indiscriminate or perceived as such) may stop believing that the costs of non-cooperation are higher than those of cooperation.⁶⁴ When it seems virtually impossible to escape from violence, people may reassess the idea that the risk of victimization rises if one does organize to resist rather than cooperate. As some of the interviewees pointed out, the high levels of violence inhabitants of Apartadó were experiencing in the mid-1990s made them believe that non-cooperation and organization may be more rational than not doing anything and, therefore, stimulated collective action. “Through a deliberative process, in which the Church played an important role, they [*campesinos*] came to think that working together was going to bring them protection, they realized that it was going to be harder for them [armed groups] to kill a group of 20 or more at once, than to kill each of them individually. That is why they started to go in huge groups to the fields and work collectively.”⁶⁵

2. *Moral activation of agency*

Following Elster (1998, 1999) and Arjona (*forthcoming*), the most common emotion triggered by high levels of violence is fear and the most common reactions to fear are fleeing or freezing. However, fighting back is also a possible reaction. In the specific case of the PCA, a purely rational consideration of fighting back would have easily

⁶³ Interview 5b

⁶⁴ Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) advance a similar claim for the decision of participating or not participating in insurgencies in the midst of a civil war.

⁶⁵ Interview 3b

ruled this option out and de-activated agency: in 1996 - 1997 paramilitaries were overwhelming powerful. Nevertheless, moral considerations about what is just and unjust, about the need to do something about what is wrong, and about the urgency of partaking in their own protection and destiny, activated *campesinos* agency and led them to fight back through an innovative strategy: non-violent resistance and radical neutrality.⁶⁶ As one interviewee commented “They [*campesinos*] realized that they just could no longer stand and watch how their families and friends were being killed and mutilated in an almost daily basis and with no reason. The need to protect innocent civilians, in fact, their families, friends, and neighbors, pushed them to seek for support in the Church and start a new life.”⁶⁷

Despite the many obstacles they have faced during these 15 years, this moral activation of agency has been sustained by a related mechanism well described by what Wood (2003:234-237) calls the “pleasure in agency”⁶⁸. The members of the PCA have been experiencing the pleasure of exercising agency –a human capacity from which they had long been excluded due to the control of armed groups– in the course of collectively making their own history, a history that they perceive more just than the one that armed groups had been imposing on them for decades. “It is a fact that many members of the Community have been killed [...] but to date they have achieved things that at the beginning were unthinkable. This is what keeps them

⁶⁶ Acting on moral principles does not go in opposition to the strategic nature of their choice. After carefully analyzing the proposal by the Church and factoring different elements, they choose the course of action they considered that would shield more protection and in a more effective way.

⁶⁷ Interview 4b

⁶⁸ By “pleasure in agency” Wood (2003: 235) refers to “[...] the positive affect associated with self-determination, autonomy, self-esteem, efficacy, and pride that come from successful assertion of intention.”

committed to their cause. They feel that they are reshaping their lives based on the principles they declared in 1997. And they are actually doing it.”⁶⁹

3. *Belief formation*⁷⁰

High levels of violence, or particular forms of exercising violence (e.g. who is targeted and how is it targeted), may have an effect on the beliefs locals (potential victims) have of the perpetrators. These beliefs, in turn, may affect the ways in which the former respond to the strategies of the latter and, thus, may shape their interaction. In the first episode of the stream of contention identified earlier, we saw that guerrilla groups, in particular the FARC, managed to carry out state-like activities and achieved significant levels of support from locals. During these years, as they were not a direct military objective, the inhabitants of San José did not regard guerrilla presence and rule as a threat (Uribe, 2004:157). To be sure, guerrilla groups did exercise violence during this episode. However, as an interviewee observed, in many instances locals regarded these “scattered” violent actions as necessary to maintain order and provide protection.⁷¹ This positive belief about the perpetrator and its violence allowed guerrilla groups to establish fluid relationships with locals and exercise significant influence in their affairs. This influence, in turn, shaped and reinforced further locals’ beliefs about the group.⁷²

⁶⁹ Interview 6a

⁷⁰ This mechanism is similar to what Gomez (2008: 57 - 60) calls a “learning and adaptation dynamic”.

⁷¹ Interview 5b

⁷² Moreover, the gradual retreat of guerrilla groups from the area to deep into the Abibe Mountains as a response to the violent counterinsurgency incursion of the paramilitaries and the national army had an impact on the beliefs locals had about them. As Gomez (2008) argues, they stopped considering them as an agent able to provide protection and security.

Conversely, the high levels of indiscriminate violence and the brutal ways in which paramilitaries victimized civilians during the mid-1990s had a negative effect on the beliefs San José inhabitants formed about the paramilitaries and awoke, almost immediately, rejection. Furthermore, the escalation of violence during the years in which the paramilitaries were disputing the FARC's control in the area, impacted on the beliefs locals had of the FARC. "At the beginning they seemed not to understand what was going on, almost from one day to the other, those who protected them started to kill them. They learnt that violence only brings more violence. I think this lesson was crucial for their stand against all the armed groups, and not only against paramilitaries."⁷³ This *belief formation* mediated by the exercise of violence played a key role in the local's decision to react to paramilitary's strategy of terror and mass displacement, as well as in their choice for non-cooperation, radical neutrality and non-violence.

⁷³ Interview 2b

CHAPTER 5. Contention Beyond Borders

So far it should be clear that the actors who played a central role in the emergence of the PCA were essentially domestic (both local and national), so is the arena in which it has developed. However, in its lifespan, the PCA's contention has spread to places beyond its localized origin through a process of *upward scale-shift*: "[...] a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001:331; Tarrow and McAdam, 2005:125). To be more specific, the form of scale-shift we are dealing with is that of *externalization*. Both the PCA and its national support network have aimed to mobilize resources (material and symbolic) at the international level to be used at the domestic level, by establishing alliances with different NGOs, think tanks, advocacy groups, and religion-based organizations, among others. This section specifies some mechanisms that help us explain how this experience of localized collective action spawned broader contention in light of two broad logics: protection and claim making.

The distinction between these two related logics is quite rough, yet it was clearly reflected in the interviews with different members of international NGOs through what they call physical and political accompaniment.⁷⁴ Underlying the first one, it is the idea that having people in the field, backed by an international support network, increases the costs of victimization and, thus, helps to protect community members. Underlying the second is the idea that by informing about what happens in San José to international audiences may not only have an impact in terms of protection, but also in terms of bringing pressure to the Colombian government.

⁷⁴ Interviews 1a, 3a, 4a, 6a and 2b, 4b.

Table 1. PCA's Transnational Network

Organization	Country	Presence in San José	Type of Support (Physical/Political)
Amnesty International	International	No info.	Political
Colombia Support Network	United States (Wisconsin)	1997	Political
Fellowship for Reconciliation	United States (California)	2000	Physical and Political
Latin American Working Group	United States (Washington)	No info.	Political
Operazione Colombia	Italy	No info.	Physical
Palomas	Italy	No info.	Physical
Peace Brigades International	International	1999	Physical and Political
Rete Italiana di Solidarietà	Italy	2003	Physical and Political
Tamera	Portugal	2001	Political
Washington Office of Latin America	United States (Washington)	2005	Political

The logic of protection

As interviewees from different organizations observed, the aim of physical presence and accompaniment in San José is to elevate the costs of victimizing civilians.⁷⁵ The message is straight forward “We are watching and we are reporting to the international community”.⁷⁶ Based on this logic, different organizations, being Peace Brigades International (PBI) and the

⁷⁵ Interviews 1a, 2a, 4a, 5a and 1b, 2b, 3b, 4b

⁷⁶ Interview 4a

Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) two noticeable examples, have programs of physical accompaniment on the ground. In general, the staff from these organizations in the field and the international support network that backs them in their home countries have fostered the development and sustainability of the PCA by providing symbolic resources such as international legitimacy, recognition, and visibility. These resources, more than any other material resources such as funding for specific projects, have helped to increase the community's protection.

To help explain the ways by which each organization ended up working in San José we can specify two mechanisms that have been widely documented in the literature on contention beyond borders: *relational diffusion* and *brokerage*. From the interviews with members of six international organizations operating in San José, we learnt that some organizations built on already established lines of interaction, while others created links between previously unconnected or weakly connected sites.

In the first group, following the path of relational diffusion, we have, for example, PBI and the Colombian Support Network (CSN). The former came to San Jose in 1998 responding to a call by a national organization, the *Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz*, with which they have worked before in the country. The latter, a US-based organization operating in the area since the late 1980s, decided to focus their efforts in Apartadó following the advice CINEP, an organization they had links with from other work they did in Colombia.⁷⁷

In the second group, following a path more contingent on the linking of previously unconnected social sites, we have organizations such as FOR and TAMERA. In the case of former, the CSN served as a broker by nominating the PCA for a peace price in 1998 that was awarded by FOR.⁷⁸ As for TAMERA, a Portuguese peace research center, they knew about

⁷⁷ Due to the content of the quote the id code for this interview is not revealed to ensure anonymity.

⁷⁸ Due to the content of the quote the id code for this interview is not revealed to ensure anonymity.

the PCA through a book someone was writing about Gloria Cuartas, the mayor of Apartadó in 1997, who then served as a broker between TAMERA and the PCA.⁷⁹ From this specification it becomes clear that both mechanisms are very close and similar to each other. However the key difference stems from the fact that in the first group already established ties between international organizations and other national organizations facilitated a more direct diffusion of information, while in the second group these ties were created as a result of more contingent events that allowed information to be brokered by previously unconnected actors.

The institutional history of the other interviewed organizations operating in San José can be accurately described by either of these mechanisms. However, based on the path followed by other international organizations that came to work with San José in a later stage of its development, it can be said the most common route in the PCA's upward scale shift has been that of relational diffusion. Among the established lines of interaction that interviewees expressed that facilitated the transfer of information from one site to another, the role of PBI and CSN, and later on FOR, was identified as instrumental in bridging the PCA and other organization beyond Colombian borders.⁸⁰ In fact, the work done by PBI in San José and other areas of Colombia and the world served as a model for new organizations arriving in the area. As one interviewee expressed, "To a large extent, PBI showed us how to proceed and implement a project of accompaniment. Although our aim is to go beyond physical accompaniment and provide political support, PBI set a model to follow."⁸¹ Here we can identify an additional mechanism that helps explain the *modus operandi* of some organizations working on the ground: *emulation* –the deliberate repetition within a given setting of a way of acting observed in another setting or another actor.

⁷⁹ Due to the content of the quote the id code for this interview is not revealed to ensure anonymity.

⁸⁰ Interviews 1a, 2a, 3a, 4a, 6a and 3b

⁸¹ Due to the content of the quote the id code for this interview is not revealed to ensure anonymity.

However, the mixture of brokerage, relational diffusion, and emulation only explains part of the picture, namely, how these organizations came to know the PCA and, to a lesser extent, why they work in the way they do. An additional mechanism, that I call *value resonance* and that can be considered a specific expression of what scholars in the field have called *attribution of similarity*, help us explain another part of the picture, namely, why these international organizations decided to work with the PCA.

While attribution of similarity designates the identification of similar aspects between actors sufficient to justify and activate coordinated action (Tarrow and McAdam, 2005:128-129), value resonance digs deeper into the nature of that similarity and helps specify more in detail the reasons that made the international organizations engage in this coordinated action. One consistent finding from the interviews is that international NGOs that support and work with the PCA morally endorse non-violence and other values the PCA upholds, and admire their choice in the midst of widespread violence. Interviewee's responses clearly highlight *value resonance* as a driving factor:

We are there because we resonate with their values, it is a community whose experiment of non-violence we want support and see thrive [...] it is not only a matter of protecting human rights defenders under threat.⁸²

The reason I've worked on this community is because of the principles the community upholds, the way they organize themselves and their bravery in the midst of so much conflict. They are amazing people who think differently in a context where violence is the way problems are resolved.⁸³

We appreciate the Peace Community a lot for their work with other people and that they share all their knowledge, that they don't work only for themselves.⁸⁴

Furthermore, this resonance with non-violence confirms something that has been repeatedly stressed by scholars studying non-violent action: even when it is only a strategic choice by

⁸² Interview 4a

⁸³ Interview 3a

⁸⁴ Interview 5a

the group, non-violence is likely to gain more legitimacy at the international level and to make the group more appealing as international aid recipients (Shock, 2005; Stephan and Chenoweth, 2011).

The logic of claim making

Many actors in the PCA's international support network are willing to use leverage on their home governments and other international organisms to help sustain the PCA through supporting and carrying out activities that are not strictly related to the provision of protection. What I call the logic of claim making, in the words of a member of an US-based NGO, runs like this: "When the government in Colombia does not want to listen and act, we have to try with our own governments and with the international institutions based in our countries. Maybe they will make them listen and act".⁸⁵

The efforts by Jesuit priest Javier Giraldo, among many others, provide evidence of the extent to which the Colombian government "does not want to listen and act", and helps explain in part why the PCA and its allies seek for support in actors abroad. As one example among many others, Giraldo recounts that in March and April 1997, when violence against members of the PCA escalated sharply and when the coordinated action between paramilitaries and sectors of the national army was more apparent⁸⁶, he wrote several letters to President Samper with copies to his Ministers and advisors denouncing the killings and threats the PCA members were falling victim to and urging them to send civilian authorities to assess the situation and investigate the activities of the army's XVII brigade. Beyond confirmation of receipt, he found no response. "He [Samper] never sent someone to evaluate

⁸⁵ *Due to the content of the quote the id code for this interview is not revealed to ensure anonymity.*

⁸⁶ One fact that Giraldo cites to highlight how coordinated was the action of these groups in Aparatadó is the roadblock organized by paramilitaries through almost the entire year of 1997 starting the first week of March. The paramilitary checkpoint for this roadblock was established less than 3 minutes away from a military base (Giraldo, 2000: n.d). As mentioned before, after the 2005 massacre, these links were confirmed and members of the XVII Brigade were prosecuted.

what was going on in the field. What his subordinates [the XVII Brigade] were doing there was simply not liable to modification” (Giraldo, 2000. n.p).

Moreover, it was not only the lack of response from the national government what pushed the PCA and its allies to claim for justice abroad; it was also the lack of guarantees for those testifying to the national authorities. As Sánchez-Garzoli (2010:5-6), WOLA’s Senior Associate for the Andes, explains, the community became so disenchanted with the Colombian justice system till the point that “[...] the community council eventually decided that it was not worth risking the physical insecurity that comes with collaboration with justice institutions in Colombia.” At the moment, and since 2005, the PCA only has a fluid contact with the Colombian government through the Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office and the Inspector General’s Office (PIB, 2010b: n.p).

In order to make sense of the dynamics that underlie this second logic, rather than specifying further mechanisms I turn to another analytical device widely developed in social movement research: *political opportunity structure*.⁸⁷ The “boomerang effect” and “spiral” models, developed by Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Risse and Sikkink (1999) respectively, help to explain this logic. As the PCA and its national and international support network constantly face repression and blockage or find no response to their claims and denunciations in Colombia, they concentrate part of their efforts and activities beyond Colombian borders with the aim of bringing back (in a “boomerang effect”) pressure on the Colombian government through formal appeals by recognized international NGOs, foreign states, and international organizations. Taking advantage of a relatively more open “international opportunities structure”, the PCA’s international support network, through a series of political moves (in a “spiral” process) tries to gradually open up the “domestic opportunity structure” in Colombia.

⁸⁷ It is important to highlight that here I am not using this analytical device to account for the emergence of the PCA but to analyze the dynamic of claim making as part of their project.

“Political support or accompaniment”, one interviewee observed, “is about doing our best to influence, in our own countries, our government’s policies towards Colombia in a way that will make Colombian officials recognize what is going on in the country, seek for justice, and fight impunity.”⁸⁸ A concrete example of how political support aims to work in a “boomerang effect” fashion is a letter signed by over 25 NGOs sent in March 2005 to the then-US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, in occasion of the 2005 massacre:

In light of allegations of involvement by members of the Colombian military, it is essential that the U.S. government send a strong signal by insisting that an effective investigation be conducted by civilian authorities. The State Department must include this case in its evaluation of Colombian compliance with U.S. human rights conditions, and must refrain from certification until a credible investigation has been completed.⁸⁹

Many NGOs advocate on behalf of the PCA with US congressmen and policymakers. This advocacy efforts have taken formal forms, such as in the case of WOLA and PBI, which form part of the “Human Rights Consultation Process” selected by the US Department; and that of the CSN, which established a formal “brotherhood relationship” between the municipality of Apartadó and the County of Dane.⁹⁰ Recognizing the weight that the US has on political processes in Colombia, US-based NGOs act on behalf of the PCA not only to open up Colombia’s “domestic opportunity structure” but also to influence US foreign policy towards Colombia. Their work focuses also on advocating for a refocus of US foreign policy towards human rights respect, socio-economic justice, conflict resolution through peaceful means, and strengthening of civil society, among other topics.⁹¹ Moreover, as one interviewee commented, the urgent need to focus on influencing US foreign policy rests in the fact that,

⁸⁸ Interview 4a

⁸⁹ Final draft Letter to Honorable Condoleezza Rice provided by WOLA to the author.

⁹⁰ *Due to the content of the quote the id code for these interviews is not revealed to ensure anonymity.*

⁹¹ *Due to the content of the quote the id code for these interviews is not revealed to ensure anonymity.*

according to them, the US military intervention is making the violence worse and, therefore, they have a particular responsibility to affect their own government.⁹²

This is not to say, however, that the political accompaniment by the PCA's international support network is limited to the US; their efforts have also targeted international organisms. The formal requests for provisional measures to ensure adequate protection to members of the PCA made by the IACHR in different occasions and endorsed by the Colombian Constitutional in three different decisions (in 2003, 2004 and 2007), as well as the setting up of a special commission in 2000, with the participation of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to investigate abuses that had taken place against the PCA are a sound indications of their work at the level of international organisms (Giraldo, 2010b: n.p.).

In addition, there are organizations in Europe, such as Tamera in Portugal and Operazione Colombia and Palomas in Italy, which have presence in the PCA and also advocate on behalf of them in their home countries and before the EU.⁹³ In fact, European-based support organizations believe that complementing the advocacy work other "sister organizations" are doing in the US with efforts in Europe is key as "the approach the EU has privileged to deal with the war in Colombia and the EU project of becoming a global civil power is more conducive to grassroots peacebuilding and is way less militarized"⁹⁴.

Although it is a fact that the PCA's international support network has not been able to stop widespread human rights violations against members of the Community or to bring justice to the crimes committed, the PCA enormously values the work international NGOs have been doing on the ground and in their home countries. As interviewees commented, members of the PCA themselves truly believe that many of them would have been killed during this years

⁹² Due to the content of the quote the id code for these interviews is not revealed to ensure anonymity.

⁹³ Due to the content of the quote the id code for these interviews is not revealed to ensure anonymity.

⁹⁴ Due to the content of the quote the id code for these interviews is not revealed to ensure anonymity.

if it was not for what they call “international solidarity”.⁹⁵ Moreover, they consider that physical and political international support has been key in the development and sustainability of the PCA.

The National Government feels the pressure of the international presence here. International organizations watch each process and give us security. The political support they have given us outside Colombia has been also of great help to our community. They have given us credibility. It consolidates our work [...] as long as there is international solidarity, the Peace Community will continue” (*Testimonies* quoted by PBI, 2010a, b)

The important role of these networks beyond borders has been underlined, under the name of “outside patronage”, by Hancock and Mitchell (2007:215-217) in their work on “zones of peace” as a key factor contributing to the sustainability of sanctuaries from violence. These authors state that “the effectiveness of outside patronage in helping to maintain the existence and inviolability of sanctuaries involves at least two dimensions [1] the strength of the ties between [...] local organizers and external patrons [2] the degree of influence have on parties that might threaten the survival of the sanctuary.” In the experience of the PCA we can see very strong ties, rooted not only in an attribution of similarity but in value resonance, along with medium-high levels of influence, especially when it comes to those organizations in the US that have formal consultant status in the State Department or those NGOs that became world landmarks of human rights respect.

Domestic contention and “outside patronage”

Under the broad logics of protection and claim making, and following the specified mechanisms, the PCA has gone through what Snow and Benford (1999) and Tarrow and McAdam (2005) call a dynamic process of upward scale shift leading to a process we can call *transnational new coordination*. In these two processes we can signal at least two additional

⁹⁵ Interview 3a, 6a, 2b, 4b.

constituting mechanisms. First, in the recognition of the PCA's existence by different international NGOs and in the support provided, we are seeing *certification* reinforcing identity and legitimacy. Second, in the creation of direct, visible and active coordinated work on behalf of the PCA between distinct actors based in different sites we are seeing *network formation*.⁹⁶

As an outcome of these mechanisms and processes, the PCA counts today on a strong network of transnational physical and political support that has significantly contributed to their non-violent resistance. However, for the sake of accuracy, it would be a conceptual mistake to say that the PCA has gone through a process of transnationalization. The PCA has indeed embarked on transnational activities; however, it has not only maintained the domestic ones as the core of the agenda, but it has in fact used the transnational network only to enhance their domestic project. Following an important observation by Tarrow and McAdam (2005:146), the PCA's shift in scale to the international level, rather than implying its transformation (i.e. becoming a transnational or global movement) supposed the transposition of part of their activities and efforts in the seek for more open structures of opportunities to bring back, in a "boomerang effect", pressure to the Colombian authorities. Theoretical accounts have often missed this possibility of transnational contention under the quick believe that we are in a "world movement society" or a "global civil society".

⁹⁶ Despite of its close similarities, I deliberately opt not call this mechanism coalition formation when operating in the transnational level, as Tilly and Tarrow (2007) do. Following Sikkink (2005:165), I prefer to leave the term coalition for the different mechanism/process of formation of inside-outsider coalitions, which, from my point of view, are not taking place in the PCA's establishment of networks beyond borders.

CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

This study had two main interrelated objectives. In regards to the first one –mapping contentious performances–, we learnt that in order to provide protection to its members, develop as an almost self-sufficient community, and fight against injustice and impunity, the PCA recreated a wide variety of disruptive, contained and routinized performances. Many of them, if not all, have been already identified in different contentious episodes and are, indeed, modular performances. However, we also learnt that in the particular context in which the PCA’s contentious interactions take place –irregular civil war–, modular performances can take strikingly innovate forms. Through the case of the PCA we saw how the civil war context permeates virtually all the events and actions and alters their meaning and interpretation. Even the most routinized, continuous, and contained performances sustaining non-violent resistance (in this case in the form of radical neutrality) appear to be disruptive. Moreover, nearly all the expressions of collective coordinated action, even those that do not imply direct interaction with the armed groups or the national government, can turn to be highly contentious.

As for the second objective –identifying salient mechanisms and processes–, we saw different mechanisms in motion that have already been identified as making up similar process in distinct contentious episodes in a wide range of settings. However, with this case study we learnt that the defining feature of the context –violence– mediated somehow all the identified mechanisms. Furthermore, three of them –pay-offs reassessment, moral activation of agency, and belief formation– appeared to be more strictly conditioned by the dynamics of violence. To be sure, pay-offs can be reassessed, agency can be activated on moral grounds, and actors can form and transform their beliefs about other actors in the absence of violence.

Nevertheless, in the case of the PCA, was protracted and widespread violence what conditioned their activation.

Although these findings are still preliminary and bounded to this single case, they provide tools to continue exploring, in a theoretically and empirically informed manner, the overarching question that gave birth to this study: how non-violent resistance originates and develops in the middle of the violent dynamics of a civil war. By signaling potential recurrences and sources of variation, these findings will serve as a steppingstone to learn more about non-violent collective action in violent contexts and to progress on the exercise of theorizing resistance in civil wars.

About the framework of contentious politics

Contributions and Opportunities

One of the key arguments of this study was that, without denying the specific character of civil wars, the conceptual and theoretical framework of contentious politics was suitable and provided opportunities to the study of the multiple contentious collective interactions, violent and non-violent, that can take place in a civil war setting. The major descriptive and explanatory concepts of this framework, the mechanism-process approach to contention, as well as the findings of other empirical studies in which this framework was privileged, proved to be both appropriate and useful to analyze the contentious episode of the emergence and development of the PCA.

Compared to other studies that have dealt with the case of the PCA, this conceptual and theoretical framework revealed important advantages. First, its general methodological procedures served as a flexible guide to identify a coherent contentious episode, embedded in a longer stream of contention, which defined the focus and scope of the analysis. Second, its conceptual tools allowed combining description and explanation in an integrated analysis of

this contentious episode, specifying special properties of the PCA's history that deserve special attention. Third, the findings of previous research by scholars analyzing contention with these lenses in other contexts helped identify both recurrences and novelties between non-violent and violent settings in terms of collective actors, identities, performances, types of claims and, especially, mechanisms and processes. Furthermore, this framework provided useful tools to examine one process that has been overlooked in almost all the studies dealing with the case in question and that, as we saw, has had a crucial impact on the trajectories of the PCA: upward scale shift. I am confident that the study of this process will be key for the task of identifying, in a more systematic way, sources of variation among different experiences of resistance in civil wars that will help to address crucial questions of prevalence and sustainability.

More concretely, studying the emergence and trajectories of the PCA with the lenses of contentious politics allowed me to see beyond the most noticeable aim of the PCA: serving as a sanctuary from violence. While it is undoubtedly that the PCA's primary function is to protect its members from armed groups violence (and rule), this study leaves clear that it serves many other functions that were both established since its creation and developed during the 15 years of its development. Among these other functions the task of making claims to the Colombian government and bringing pressure back to the country in order to fight impunity has become an integral part of the PCA's *raison d'être*. Many of the descriptive, analytical, and explanatory devices developed in a field of contentious politics were of special help to make sense of this "other face" of the PCA's non-violent resistance. Incorporating these other functions in our analyses of resistance in civil wars raises in a different way the issue of studying outcomes and assessing success.

In general, further research on more cases of resistance in civil wars with a clearer theoretical framework such as the one employed here, both in comparative and single case study

designs, will facilitate the task of integrating descriptive and explanatory accounts in a more general analysis that can lead to the generation of a theory of resistance in civil wars.

Limitations

The existence of different armed actors fighting to achieve control over local territories and establish local orders to govern civilian affairs leads to a defining feature of irregular civil wars: the fragmentation of both space and sovereignty. This specific character of civil wars has at least two key interrelated implications for the analysis of collective contentious interactions in these settings. These implications indicate limitations of the framework of contentious politics as it is now and point out some aspects for reformulation.

First, if we are to improve the quality of the data with which we analyze contentious episodes in the midst of a civil war and if we aim to address the micro-foundations of civil wars while specifying mechanisms of civilian collective resistance, as students of contentious politics we need to scale down to the subnational level.⁹⁷ This explains the present study's attention to the dynamics of war in the Urabá region and the Apartadó municipality, rather than those of Colombia as a whole. Similarly, if we are to integrate the regime type analysis that has been a central component in many studies of contentious politics, we need to identify ways to assess and characterize the forms the regime takes at the local level in the midst of an irregular civil war. When sovereignty is fragmented and actors different from the state have control of parts of the country and manage to influence a wide range of civilian affairs, we should expect that the dynamics of collective action at the local level might be largely independent from the democratic/undemocratic character of the regime at the national level.

⁹⁷ Besides the already cited authors that represent the research program on the micro-dynamics of civil wars, Zukerman (2012) reveals the impact that micro-level subnational data of violence can have on research findings in her study of the organizational legacies of violence in Colombia's civil war onset.

Second, if we are to recognize and truly address the de facto control and authority different warring parties have over local territories and populations, we need to relativize the centrality of the government in our definition of what counts as contentious politics and what does not. Although a big portion of the claim making efforts of the PCA, both nationally and internationally, target the national government and its justice institutions, it is clear that its political identity, the essence of its existence, and the contentious character of its non-violent resistance is defined by its interactions with all the armed groups with no distinction. Many collective interactions in a civil war context might be both political and contentious even if they hardly bring the government in as mediator, target, or claimant.

By acting collectively, publicly and episodically in the name of identity, standing and program claims, the PCA poses a challenge to the interests of the different armed actors. A declaration of neutrality in the midst of a civil war, especially when it takes place in a highly valued territory, is in itself highly contentious. The instrumentality of civilians in an irregular civil war redefines the meaning of even the most continuous and routinized activities carried out to sustain resistance and neutrality, making them contentious and disruptive. In fact, it is this intrinsic contentious character of non-violent resistance –not necessarily the overtly disruptive performances– what explains, albeit not justifies, the high levels of stigmatization and repression that the different armed actors and the national government have carried out on the PCA since its creation.

Limitations of this study and avenues for further research

Undoubtedly, this study presents limitations that, although do not erode its main findings, do point out aspects that should be considered in future research on the topic.

Despite of an effort to engage in a much needed dialogue between the literature in contentious politics and that in the micro-dynamics of civil wars, there is still a lot to do in

order to fully incorporate the theoretical and methodological insights of the latter into an analysis of non-violent resistance as contentious politics. From a theoretical point of view, the predictions that stem from the work by different scholars studying the micro-dynamics of civil war were not brought to an empirical examination, although their work did shape the way I understand and address Colombia's civil war and its dynamics. For example, what I call violence-conditioned mechanisms can be further specified through an analysis of variation on the type of violence (i.e. selective or indiscriminate -Kalyvas), the type of armed groups (i.e. opportunistic and activist -Weinstein), the levels of territorial control by armed groups (-Kalyvas), and/or the different horizons armed groups have when they arrive to a territory (i.e. long term and short term -Arjona).

From a methodological point of view, in spite of the effort of collecting and processing data on violence for the municipality of Apartadó, these data was not exploited for purposes other than general description and contextualization. Moreover, considering the difference in size and population between the *corregimiento* (San José) and the municipality (Apartadó) levels, I might expect my data to have problems of spatial over-aggregation. I am well aware that collecting fine-grain data at multiple levels of aggregation will open rich opportunities for a deeper engagement with the case under examination and for an analysis of some of the aforementioned variations.

Finally, this study lacks a serious engagement with research findings and perspectives coming from the field of peace studies. During the research process I learnt that scholars in this field have dealt with related issues under different names such as zones of peace, sanctuaries from violence, and community and local peacebuilding, among others. This literature has paid wide attention to issues that come up in my analysis only implicitly and tangentially such as the ideological component of the PCA and the principled face of non-

violence.⁹⁸ A closer dialogue between these bodies of work will reinforce each other's findings. For example, by paying closer attention to those functions that go beyond the provision of protection we can learn, as Langdon and Rodriguez (2007) show for the *Rondas Campesinas* in Peru, that the aim of the PCA is not restricted to humanizing war or seeking negative peace (i.e. the absence of overt violence), but indeed involves a more integral conception of positive peace that can be built locally and by the people on the ground. Reviewing this literature from the perspective of contentious politics appears as a promising strategy for furthering the study of violent and nonviolent resistance in civil wars.

⁹⁸ Different authors have stressed a difference between principled non-violence and pragmatic or strategic non-violence. While the first conception is commonly grounded in religious and ethically based injunctions against violence and is characterized by a commitment to methods of non-violent action for ethical reasons, in the second one the commitment to non-violent actions responds to a perception or belief of effectiveness (Sharp, 1973; McAdam and Tarrow, 2000; Schock, 2005; Stephen and Chenoweth, 2011). In this study I deliberately tried to remain agnostic about this distinction, however the focus of the study overall paid less attention to ideological and moral aspects of non-violent resistance. Engaging with peace studies literature might help to move towards an integrated analysis of non-violence as a strategic choice and a moral commitment.

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