

**Part IV**

**PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY  
IN ACTION**

## Social Emancipation in a Context of Protracted War: The Case of the Community of Peace in San José de Apartadó

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### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present the experience of San José de Apartadó, a small village located in Colombia's Urabá region, whose inhabitants reacted to the escalation of armed conflict threatening village life by adopting a strategy of unarmed civil resistance against the war in order to defend their right to remain on their lands and in their homes, signing a public pact of non-collaboration with any armed actors, including the Colombian state.

By declaring itself a community of peace, this heterogeneous group of villagers recovered the autonomy to make its own decisions and to emancipate itself from the vertical and authoritarian powers that hovered over them. The village organized itself and gained public recognition by establishing ties with national institutions, but particularly with NGOs and foreign governments working to protect universal public goods.

This chapter is divided into four sections: the first deals with the relation between sovereignty under threat and social self-determination. The former helps explain the nature of the armed conflict in Colombia and the village in question, and how its escalation shaped the war-torn social backdrop against which the people of San José devised group actions and resistance strategies. The notion of self-determination helps us to interpret and make sense of the actions and strategies adopted by the villagers who, by rebelling against warring authoritarian powers and emancipating themselves from oppressive political orders, discovered new ways in which to produce power through innovative social compacts based on traditional participative democratic formulas.

The second section provides an overview of the social context of war in the Urabá region, discussing the significance of a protracted state of war and its role in creating *de facto* alternative orders that have sought to impose their hegemonic sovereignty over local groups and territories. San José de

Apartadó was only one of many villages faced with this situation, but thanks to its decision to adopt a community strategy for peace, its fate contrasts sharply with those of other villages in similar circumstances that succumbed to the effects of an escalating war by opting for exile.

The third section describes the process of the declaration of the community of peace and the actions and reactions of the different groups confronting each other and/or cooperating in the area, how the peace process evolved, and the advances and setbacks it has undergone during the four years of group effort.

The fourth section presents a reflection on the significance, meaning, and reach of the villagers' emancipatory discourses and protest actions, discussing how these actions and discourses may lead to new political practices and conceptions, or to establishing new connections to the nation, to citizenship, and to international cooperation.

#### THE RELATION BETWEEN THREATENED SOVEREIGNTY AND SOCIAL SELF-DETERMINATION

The relation between sovereignty under threat and social self-determination can help explain the importance and meaning of the persistent and courageous unarmed struggle being fought by the people of San José de Apartadó. Sovereignty is a canonical philosophical concept with fixed contents and substantive attributes having to do with the exclusivity, indivisibility, permanence, and totality of power. Modern states base their claims of legitimacy and hegemony on these attributes; it is sovereignty that allows state bodies to wield power, to demand the allegiance, submission, and obedience of those inhabiting their national territory, as well as to demand international recognition, their right to represent the nation as a whole and respect for their autonomy in decisions concerning internal matters (Badie, 2000: 43).

However, these substantive attributes may be jeopardized as a result of internal warring disputes, direct foreign intervention or by strategies of resistance and rebellion carried out by various unarmed social groups and actors defying public institutional power in varying degrees.

The specific nature of Colombia's armed conflict, with different types of outbreaks occurring simultaneously in its regions, the mutual involvement of military, paramilitary, delinquent, and social actors, the long duration of the war, and its moments of escalation, make it clear that the Colombian state, while having the substantive attributes of sovereignty (an ultimate, total, indivisible and exclusive power) and being internationally recognized, does not have the power or the ability to establish a nationwide public order, whether achieved by consensus or imposed by violence (Uribe de H, 1998). Furthermore, its ostensible representation of the country at the international level is challenged by processes of cooperation and protection of universal

public goods, which establish direct and unmediated relations between parts of the national territory and diverse international actors.

The nature of the Colombian armed conflict reveals the fragility of the sovereignty of the state, raises doubts about its pervasiveness throughout the national territory, and about the indivisibility of the Republic. It further raises reasonable doubts as to whether the state has the power or the ability to put an end to hostilities and violence and to create a peaceful, unarmed society, thus inverting the terms of the equation: sovereignty—declared war (Hobbes, 1980: 22–45). If sovereignty is weak or under threat within many territories and social groups, this means that supreme power is decided in the spaces of war, and it is here that the competencies, domains, prerogatives, obligations and commitments of the citizens are defined. This would be an undeclared war, fought over the sovereign power of the nation; in other words, a war for the building of a nation in an era of globalization (Uribe de H, 1999).

Undeclared war or an almost permanent state of war (Schmitt, 1997: 31) has been one of the historical axes of life in Colombia. If a state's sovereignty is endangered and unevenly present in different national regions for prolonged periods of time, one would expect society to be in a state of chaos. However, this is not the case in Colombia. Amidst the intersecting dynamics of war, new alternative *de facto* orders are constantly taking shape. These are non-institutional authorities that exert power and make sovereign decisions for long periods of time within the territories they hold, since they hold the monopoly on all arms and taxes and control the resident population. These non-institutional authorities define and control territories, claiming an exclusive and permanent power over them. They draw up new geographical borders, changing the divisions of the national territorial layout, provide order and organization for the population, demand obedience, achieve some degree of consensus, and establish embryonic forms of political representation (Alonso and Vélez, 1998).

Thus we have a legally established political order imbued with the formal attributes of national sovereignty that coexists with regional *de facto* political orders, sustained by the force of arms, that likewise claim legitimacy and exclusive power. The result is an increasingly acute and open conflict over nation building. This is an apparently archaic war, already fought in the west during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and one that supposedly has no place in an era of globalization.

Against this backdrop of a dispute waged by armed actors that include counter-institutional (guerrillas), para-institutional (paramilitary) and institutional groups (the army), all claiming sovereign power, civilian populations, pushed to the limit by the avatars of war, are developing peaceful, emancipatory strategies in defiance of all. These populations are devising their own forms of social self-determination while discovering other modes of producing power

and gaining national and international visibility as they reinvent participatory democratic practices through socio-economic and political-ethical pacts, thus taking an alternative stance in the fight for sovereignty.

Self-determination has to do with a given social group's ability to emancipate itself from hegemonic, or purportedly hegemonic powers, which they perceive as being oppressive, discriminatory and unjust, limiting the freedom of their collective life, debasing their dignity, violating their rights or endangering their lives, their property or their collective goods (Arendt, 1974: 233-319). From this standpoint, self-determination implies freely taking responsibility for their own future as a people and as a social group, with no outside interference; it means making their own decisions about rules of sociability and political order, according to the general will or the will of the majority; it means devising the administrative and management structures required to put the chosen political order in place, as well as preserving what the group has defined as its cultural and historical heritage.

Self-determination as conceived by the traditional social sciences (Miller, 1997: 149) seemed to lead inevitably to political independence, to the founding of a distinct sovereign state that represented a collectivity in both domestic and international contexts. However, the emergence in the public sphere of new social actors who make specific claims (concerning the recognition of differences in gender, ethnicity, culture, or age) and who denounce, among other things, inequality in social development or social status, has led to a redefinition of the contents of political self-determination within transversal and highly complex domains, where those contents would no longer have the foundation of a modern state as their teleological end. On the contrary, these struggles for individual and group recognition may be bringing about a new political matrix, not state-centered but de-centered, with multiple nodal points providing differentiated meanings and directions to social tensions and conflicts (Cavarozzi, 1993).

For these reasons, struggles for self-determination can develop in multiple social spheres, and be set against differentiated forms of power (Santos, 2000). These struggles can be waged by a wide variety of subjects who, depending on the cultural, economic or social contexts in which they live, devise significant emancipatory and counter-hegemonic actions and discourses that are capable of transforming the referents of a whole society, while not necessarily leading to political independence or the founding of a new sovereign state.

These processes of social self-determination may have a broad scope of action with very different institutional implications. They may include rebellion, autonomy and recognition, demanding institutional and legally binding changes (García and Uprimny, 2000), struggles for inclusion according to differentiated statuses (feminists and ethnic groups), or changes in the political regime that imply some form of federation (Kymlika, 1996). Such

processes might not find any expression on the legal and institutional frameworks, but do find it within the social world, in the ways power is produced and the forms of action and knowledge put into practice by heterogeneous groups fighting against situations they deem oppressive, as they demand recognition, respect, moral restitution or quasi-sovereign autonomy for matters affecting the conditions of their life in society.

The novel and defiant experience of San José de Apartadó in its transversal approach to self-determination within a turbulent, multifocal, war-torn social context, in an effort aspiring not to social inclusion, reform or overthrow of the regime in power, but rather to unarmed civilian resistance against the oppressive situation created by war, requires that a new look be taken at the possible contents of self-determination, beyond the traditional definition of political science.

Within the context of war, political self-determination implies self-knowledge, that is, approaching a situation perceived as oppressive, discriminatory or exclusionary from the perspective of personal or social experience. Several types of social responses could be expected from people facing such experiences. One is conformity (Santos, 2000), but there is also a series of strategies that could be termed "invisible resistance." These do not imply direct action against hegemonic or authoritarian powers; rather, they are ways of evading the control being imposed on them, ways of denying their domination or apparent accommodation to such powers while waiting for a better moment to stand up and act. However, these responses may express hostility, rebellion, non-conformity, and rejection of any type of submission or acceptance of the dominant powers.

A variety of strategies can be used to express this so-called invisible resistance. These can include accommodation or passive acceptance of the dominant order or of competing orders, eschewing any participation in them, using hostile silence and passive rejection; self-imposed invisibility or strategic withdrawal from public life or from areas controlled by the institutional power can also be used as a means of preserving identity, autonomy and freedom in the face of established authorities who have sovereign, hegemonic aspirations and who attempt to civilize, discipline, control, dominate, exploit, or include the population in a political order it rejects but cannot confront openly. Finally, there is a dual type of action that implies a partial and selective acceptance of the various competing orders vying for the allegiance of the war zone populations, while steering clear of direct confrontation with or public rejection of any of the disputing parties (Uribe de H, 1999).

These different strategies of invisible and oblique resistance employed in highly conflictive areas submerged in a long-term state of war might simply be defined as means of social survival for the people in question. But even though they do not signify alternative forms of producing power, they do disclose silent and non-visible forms of expression, showing how a culture

has learned to avoid the violent and hegemonic claims of dominant actors. These forms are already part of the stock of common sense shared by the excluded and oppressed people in Colombia.

In order for rebellion to assume emancipatory forms, recognition is required in addition to self-knowledge. This means that the situation perceived as oppressive, discriminatory, or exclusionary must be presented in the public sphere, reasonably discussed, and narrated to other social actors outside the immediate environment. From here, autonomous forms of social organization and alternative ways of producing power can be developed for the purpose of confronting the existing oppressive hegemonic powers.

Emancipatory rebellion can take myriad forms, ranging from disruptive practices—such as mobilizations, peasant marches, occupation of public buildings, or roadblocks—to armed insurgency, and including unarmed civil resistance. Its purpose may be to overthrow an oppressive regime, express rejection of an action considered to be discriminatory or injurious, or to safeguard the right to autonomy and self-determination by setting limits to authoritarian powers.

Emancipatory rebellion is visible, publicly demonstrated, discursive and dialogic, and develops counter-hegemonic practices that may lead to alternative ways of producing power and of organizing the collectivity for a shared, autonomous and self-determining way of life, providing new contents to the traditional formulas of participatory democracy.

#### SAN JOSÉ DE APARTADÓ WITHIN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT OF URABÁ—A TRADITION OF REFUGE AND RESISTANCE

Urabá, the region where San José de Apartadó is located, is one of the territories where different *de facto* orders and insurgent political actors are established, each claiming sovereign power. A geographical area of great contrasts and marked ethnic diversity, Urabá is home to zones of accelerated and unplanned urbanization mixed with small traditional farmhouses and villages of indigenous and black people. The economy combines banana production for export (based on high technology and an entrepreneurial organization of work) with extensive cattle-raising, large areas of peasant economies, and spontaneous settlements that encroach on the surviving jungles and primeval forests. The region's forms of political and social organization are equally diverse and contrasting. There are farmer's unions (now silenced or co-opted) juxtaposed with community organizations, associations of peasants, indigenous councils (*cabildos*) and different organizations of blacks. Small cooperatives subsist alongside the huge producers' and exporters' guilds. Moreover, every single political party in the country has some type of representation in Urabá, although the historically strong left-wing parties have now been virtually eradicated (Uribe de H, 1992: 63–102).

If to this already complex scenario we add Urabá's strategic geographical location and the domestic and international interests at play, it makes for an even more complicated situation. It could be said that Colombia is personified in Urabá, one of the regions with the best prospects for entering international market networks. Its location between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, its proximity to Central America, the Caribbean, Panama, and Venezuela, its tradition in exports, its natural resources and the megaprojects designed to make it a globalized economic zone clearly denote the multiplicity of domestic and international economic interests that are found in a region plagued by major social conflicts and intense armed confrontation (Planea, 1999).

The Urabá territory was the entry point used by the Spanish from the sixteenth century on. But indigenous resistance to the Spanish, disputes between groups of conquistadors and between these and other foreign colonists (French, Scottish, and English), as well as the constant presence of pirates along the coasts, all helped to feed conflicts to such an extent that it was all but impossible to establish permanent settlements. This meant that Urabá was left out of the Spanish process of colonization and population. The beginning of the republic did not change this situation, and for centuries Urabá remained a vast, sparsely inhabited territory in which institutions had a weak hold; its economy was based on scavenging and exploiting the forest, and forms of semi-forced labor and rapacious capitalism predominated (Parsons, n.d.: 43–51).

Vast territory that it was, Urabá gradually became a refuge and stronghold for all those who, for whatever reason, did not fit within the narrow bounds of the desired national identity: runaway negro slaves fleeing the mines and *haciendas*, Indians fleeing the reservations and opposing the authority of whites and creoles, outlaws, smugglers of gold and European contraband, people vanquished during the endemic civil wars, political refugees, and societal outcasts, all gravitated to Urabá to form a highly diverse population, sharing only the stigma of exclusion, the need for refuge, and the desire to become invisible, far from the control of civil and religious authorities (Uribe de H, 1992: 39–52).

This was Urabá until the 1960s, when colonization was finally achieved thanks to two major events: the first being the opening of the 1954 highway that linked the region with central Colombia, which immediately led to a huge influx of peasants from provinces all over the nation fleeing the partisan violence of the 1950s; the second event being a proposal by the United Fruit Company, made through its affiliate Frutera de Sevilla, which offered highly attractive economic incentives to any would-be Colombian national banana entrepreneurs willing to take a business risk in this area. The proposal was very well received, and in only a few years a major portion of the territory was transformed by capitalist agricultural undertakings and rapid urban development (Botero, 1990: 13–41).

But these processes of economic integration were not accompanied by an institutional presence, respect for the rule of law or the recognition of the rights and guarantees of the region's residents and workers. Private interests, left to their own devices, imposed their own laws through the use of force, outright violence and territorial, authoritarian control of the inhabitants, who were violently ousted from flatlands due to the expansion of entrepreneurial agriculture. The same method was used on newcomers, who were subjected to a vertical labor regime, with no institutional mediation or social support. In this context of violent, abrupt and rapid change, San José de Apartadó was founded in the foothills of the Abibe mountain range, very near to the heart of the *bananera* zone and its main urban center, Apartadó.

Its historical role as a zone of refuge, combined with the social upheaval caused by an economic transformation that occurred in the absence of institutional mediation, led to armed confrontation in Urabá. By the late 1960s, the region had become a territory at war, with several armed factions in the area, the most important being the communist-leaning FARC and the Maoist EPL, although the latter became a political movement in 1991 after the conclusion of a peace process with the national government.

For the armed organizations, especially for FARC, the *bananera* zone was a site for military action, serving not only as a source of financial gains made from kidnapping and economic blackmail, but also as a field for political action. Here they exerted their influence over trade unions and social organizations, established negotiations with farm-owners and overseers whom they forced to take on workers, and pressured public administrators to channel social investments into the neighborhoods and rural areas where the armed organizations had political influence. These actions helped them gain favor with some, but also led to harsh reactions from those whose economic interests they harmed or whose lives they threatened (Uribe de H, 1992: 237–41).

However, in the areas of the peasant economy, the settlement zones and small villages such as San José de Apartadó, relations were smoother and tensions lower, because people did not feel threatened by the guerrilla presence, since they were not the direct target of their military actions. In these areas the armed groups maintained a significant influence. They played a role in the processes of settlement and occupation of territories, in the distribution of commons or squatter lands, in the definition of the rights to possession, and of the size and boundaries of peasants' individual plots; they also controlled timber-cutting and water use, monitored the price of supplies and goods distributed in the villages, forced local bosses to adhere to minimum wages and to create adequate living conditions for workers, helped social organizations carry out small-scale public works (some using government funding) and at times exercised pressure to channel public spending to these villages (personal interviews, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

Over a period of more than forty years—and in the case of San José de Apartadó, since its founding—these insurgent powers have become a point of reference for those who have taken refuge in these settlements, people with highly diverse regional and ethnic backgrounds and with cultural practices that have sometimes clashed. However, this situation of domination, control, and management has developed in many instances into the exercise of judicial functions: the insurgent groups have solved family conflicts and disputes between neighbors, they have gotten petty delinquency under control and provided semi-state functions of protection, order and security in exchange for unconditional allegiance and absolute, unquestioning obedience.

The settlers were drawn to the insurgents by a kind of shared morality rather than by political identification or ideological agreement. This was due to their own experiences, with exclusion and seeking refuge, their moral outrage at abuses, inequalities and lack of recognition, and perhaps also because they shared the armed organizations' notions of rebellion and justice—something akin to vengeance—that for them legitimized the armed groups' violent actions as a way of re-establishing a balance destroyed by earlier violence. The insurgent actions were seen by the settlers as “another form of law” capable of imposing sanctions and punishment, a law wielded by a different authority that also aspired to be absolute, total, permanent, and indivisible, but which for the peasants served as an intelligible principle of the social environment, and as a point of reference for their actions and behavior.

The uneven and regionalized development of the state of war in Colombia ended up activating private and illegal counter-insurgent processes, with the eruption of different paramilitary movements. Among these, the communist-leaning Autodefensas Campesinas (Peasant Self-Defenses) in Córdoba and Urabá were the most important. These groups focused their actions mainly on territories in which guerrilla organizations had had a longstanding organizational presence, in an effort to reconquer the territory and dismantle the insurgent control. Their strategy did not differ greatly from that of their enemies: it was a war of movements (Cubides, 1997).

These groups deployed a “full sweep” strategy, starting with the northern area of Urabá and moving southward. They left the reconquered zones bathed in blood, leading to massive, forced displacement; civilian and military authorities were co-opted or overpowered, and social networks and organizations were broken up or reorganized to further their plans for domination. And of course they also left behind armed groups and unarmed sympathizers to control the populations and hold on to the newly conquered military terrain. This paramilitary incursion began in Urabá in the late 1980s, but did not manage to subjugate the town of Apartadó or its jurisdiction, San José, until early 1996 (personal interviews, 1999).

### SAN JOSÉ DE APARTADÓ: A STORY OF REBELLION, RESISTANCE AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

One of the bloodiest and most violent chapters of the war over Urabá was written in San José de Apartadó. The paramilitary groups were suspicious of its history of resistance and rebellion. From the time the settlers arrived in the mountains in the 1960s, tensions mounted and there was constant conflict with the absentee landlords, who used dubious deeds to claim they owned the land. The newly arrived settlers quickly organized a communal action committee and carried out collective actions that brought them in contact with the Asociación de Usuarios Campesinos (Peasant Land Users' Association). The association taught them the tactics of squatting, how to claim their rights and guarantee their ownership of the land they farmed.

They also used their community organization to get in touch with the Apartadó local authorities and with politicians from the traditional political parties to demand that government funds be allocated to build a road linking San José with Apartadó. At the time there was only a mule path, which was impassable in winter, forcing the peasants to travel for at least twelve hours to get their products to the thriving municipal market. They further demanded state funding to build a school, a community center and money to buy the land for the village from the absentee landowner (Uribe de H, 1992: 116–17).

Since the landowner refused to sell, they began squatting. There were evictions, jail time for the leaders, and wounded and battered participants. But thanks to the effective work of the Asociación de Usuarios Campesinos, they won the lawsuit and began to build their village. They set aside plots for a chapel and a local police station, and reserved space for a town square, from which the main streets fanned out, much as they did in the old villages of the provinces of Antioquia and Caldas, from which most of the early settlers came.

This squatting invasion was followed by another to settle inhabitants who did not have their own plots of land. This second invasion was less traumatic than the first, since the landowner decided to reach an amicable agreement through Incora (the Colombian Institute for Agricultural Reform), which was carrying out a census of landowners in the area. The decision was also helped along by the presence of guerrilla organizations in the area. In this way, Mariano, as the settlement was first called, was founded (Parsons, n.d.: 224). The settlers later changed the name to San José, the patron saint of farmers, since all shared a dedication to life in the country and a love of the land. Thanks to social rebellion and organized resistance, the settlement was founded and the surrounding areas opened up.

From that point on, the settlers developed a dual approach: one with the state and another with the counter-state. The guerrillas set the guidelines for

local life, establishing order in the process of settlement within the territory, resolving conflicts and controlling small-time criminals. But at the same time the inhabitants also maintained relations with the municipal authorities through their community action, seeking funds for the settlement's infrastructure and new social improvement programs. Shortly thereafter, they gained the ear of the Corpourabá, the Regional Development Corporation, which started up cooperative programs for cocoa and banana production, supporting them with funding, technical assistance, post-harvest management, and crop sales (Corpourabá, 1990).

For the San José settlers, it was clear that two opposing political orders hovered over them. One was the institutional legal order, from which the settlers demanded economic support, public investment, social improvement programs, and other means for collective consumption, while rejecting any of its attempts to control public life, the use of force or a military presence in their area; judicial authorities and the police were absent from the village.

Juxtaposed with the selectively accepted public institutional order was the military-political order of the guerrillas, who defined authoritatively the rules of social coexistence, including where the residents lived within the territory; they controlled the forest, water sources, the price of supplies, wages, and the establishment of shops and canteens. They further served as a police force, keeping down petty crime, and as judge and jury, alleviating tension in cases of domestic conflicts and disagreements among neighbors.

After the municipal political regime was reformed and mayoral popular elections were held for the first time, the leftist party Unión Patriótica—fruit of the early peace agreements with FARC—managed to take over four municipalities in the Urabá region, including Apartadó, and obtained majority representation on several city councils after 1986. This was a major step forward for San José, because it began to receive a good part of city funding (Comunidad de Paz, 1998: 3).

The settlers, who in the past had barely taken part in elections, now threw all their efforts into supporting this political project, thus turning San José into one of party's major electoral strongholds in the region. Institutional recognition was achieved through the establishment of the jurisdiction of San José, and the population enjoyed a period of significant social and economic expansion. By the early 1990s, San José had slightly over 3,000 inhabitants living within the town limits and in 32 hamlets along the slopes of the Abibe mountain range (Comunidad de Paz, 1998: 2).

Its history of rebellion, social resistance, and organization, and then its status as a political sympathizer of Unión Patriótica, placed the jurisdiction in one of the hotspots of national armed conflict, on the FARC's side. This was reason enough for paramilitary action to focus on this small settlement, but there was an even more important reason that had to do with the geographical strategy of the war. In effect, San José de Apartadó is the main

entrance point into the Abibe mountains, which have been a guerrilla sanctuary for many years; it is only 12 km from Apartadó, the most important economy in the region, and a vital center of the banana farming zone. All of the above meant that the guerrillas could carry out their military actions in the zone and quickly hide out in the mountains, in addition to having access to a rich agricultural zone nearby for their supplies and logistical support from the settlers. The main routes used by the guerrillas also run through San José: the route linking Urabá with western Córdoba through the Abibe mountains; the one providing access to the middle and lower Atrato; and another connecting Urabá with the south of Bolívar and with western and northeastern Antioquia through the Paramillo crossroads, now a paramilitary stronghold.

Thus whoever holds control of the San José de Apartadó territory enjoys a comparative military advantage for controlling the entire region as well as a good portion of north-western Colombia. And so San José's destiny became linked to the dynamics of the armed conflict and, furthermore, to the strategic demands of the war for national sovereignty, which meant that the settlers lost their political bargaining power and even their livelihood. Their right to remain on the land was placed once again in question.

San José's tradition of rebellion, resistance and social organization, as well as its strategic location made it into one of the hubs of the war for Urabá. It was in this context that the strategy to declare itself a community of peace was framed.

#### The tragic trajectory of the Community of Peace

Armed conflict in San José de Apartadó escalated in the early 1990s. Unión Patriótica party members were systematically exterminated, and several of their supporters residing in San José were also killed. Armed confrontation between the army and the guerrillas became increasingly frequent, leading some peasants to flee to Apartadó, and to return gradually only when the attacks were over (Nieto, 1998). But most settlers remember 1996 as the year the paramilitaries came onto the scene and the war took a marked turn for the worse.

On 28 February 1996, several settlers were murdered at a paramilitary checkpoint set up at the only entrance to the village. A march was organized to denounce the crime, but at least ninety families fled the area, fearful and confused at being accused of aiding the guerrillas (Naranjo, 2000).

On 27 March of the same year San José declared its neutrality with respect to all armed groups. Although this was a strategy already adopted by some municipalities and indigenous communities in the region, that same night the paramilitary groups attacked the residents of the municipal seat, and told them that they would maintain the road blockade. At the same time, the

guerrillas continued to patrol the surrounding area, clearly unaware of the population's decision (Naranjo, 2000).

Declaring neutrality was a very difficult decision for the jurisdiction's residents to make since it meant emancipating themselves from the guerrillas, an armed contingent with whom the village had maintained complex multilateral relations almost since their arrival in the area. This implied giving up a political order that had been the main referent for the settlement's actions and structuring principles and that had significantly contributed to community cohesion, management and organization. Furthermore, the decision of non-collaboration implied setting limits to the paramilitary advance, as well as denying the sovereign attributes of the state, since neutrality included refusing to allow the security forces access to the territory or to occupy its seat. In short, declaring neutrality was tantamount to "declaring war on the war."

The declaration rapidly received a bloody baptism. In the second week of September 1996, a paramilitary group raided the homes of Gustavo Loaiza, chairman of Community Action, Juan González, chairman of the Cocoa Growers' Cooperative, María Eugenia Usuga, a member of the Women's Committee, and Samuel Arias, a well-known union leader, detained, and then murdered all four. "Strangely enough, the day before the murders, the army had withdrawn from the hamlet (*caserío*) it had been occupying since August" (Comunidad de Paz, 1998: 6). The population's response to the massacre was one of mass exodus, and the few who dared remain behind dispersed to sleep in the foothills "to keep from being killed by the paramilitary groups, who were acting jointly with the army, something we, the inhabitants, have witnessed" (Comunidad de Paz, 1998: 6). Of those killed, some had promoted collective actions defending the right to life, had denounced the paramilitary nine-month road blockade, and in July of that year had signed a letter of reconciliation with the national government in which they promised to stop the peasants' exodus in return for the government's promise to provide minimum guarantees for the return of those who had already fled (*El Colombiano*, 1996: 5).

1997 dawned no brighter for San José. One day in February,

[a] group of 40 paramilitaries, most of whom we recognized as being reinserted EPL members, showed up at six in the morning and forced all the villagers to go to the sports park and, after threatening to kill them if they did not leave the village, started tying up several people who were found dead on the road to Apartadó the next day. From that point on, the paramilitaries totally controlled the road. They controlled the passage of all food, constantly commandeered vehicles of passers-by, checked people's documentation against a list they had, and killed those whose names were on the list. (personal interviews, 2000)



San José was besieged by hunger and terror, while civil and military authorities stood idly by, doing nothing to stop the situation. This unbearable situation forced most of those living in the urban center to flee. With the town nearly uninhabited, the peasants attempting to hold out on their own plots of land were left totally isolated. All of their strategies (the formal complaints, the peasant marches, the declaration of neutrality) appeared to have failed to keep the war from sweeping through their territory. But the remaining peasants decided to resist the onslaught, stay on their land, and rework their proposal of neutrality by declaring themselves a Community of Peace (Naranjo, 2000).

The Community of Peace agreement was signed on 23 March 1997. To help draft it, the settlers had the aid and support of the Apartadó Diocese, the Intercongregational Commission for Justice and Peace, and Cinep. Thanks to the intermediation of these NGOs the settlers began establishing contact with international human rights' organizations, who helped denounce the dramatic situation of the San José settlers (Naranjo, 2000). Although the Community of Peace declaration qualified the former neutrality statement, and went into greater detail as to the commitments to be undertaken, it elicited no positive response from the armed groups, who continued with their armed actions as before, totally ignoring the wishes of a group of people who no longer accepted any of them as representatives.

On 28 March 1997, a skirmish between army and guerrilla troops in a rural area of the jurisdiction reportedly left four guerrillas dead at La Unión. The veracity of this information was disputed by the peasants, who said the dead were in fact unarmed peasants out working in their fields. Hostilities continued for several days, including massive bombings of the area. Shortly thereafter, paramilitary troops appeared in Arenas, La Unión, Las Nieves, and El Guineo. After murdering some peasants, they issued strict permanent evacuation orders to those remaining, saying their lands had to be vacated within two to five days (Comunidad de Paz, 1998: 18).

But the peasants refused to give up, and continued to stick to their project. Since it was nearly impossible to survive in isolation out on their individual plots, they returned to the nearly abandoned seat of the jurisdiction and together restarted their movement of resistance. Despite the lack of governmental guarantees, some evacuees returned armed only with the conviction that the moral strength of a community determined to live under terms of neutrality and collective work was powerful enough to allow them to remain on their lands and resist the ravages of war (Naranjo, 2000).

In May 1997, only two months after the Community of Peace agreement was signed, the settlers of San José, during an event on active neutrality held among the returned communities of Atrato Medio, reported that Francisco Turqunico, one of the most fervent and dedicated promoters of the Community of Peace, had been murdered. They also reported that 32 people

had died at the hands of the armed groups over the previous year. The guerrillas were cited as being responsible for the violent death of a young woman engaged to a soldier in the national army, and that of one male peasant accused of being an informer for the paramilitaries, who in turn were held responsible for the remaining 30 murders (Comunidad de Paz, 1997: 6b).

The guerrillas, now relatively isolated, suffering from supply problems, and missing the logistic support they had counted on in the past, began to place increasing pressure on the San José settlers. As a response to the settlers' persistent refusal to help them, they killed Ramiro Correa, a member of the internal council of the Community of Peace, along with Luis Fernando Espinosa and Fernando Aguirre, members of the community work groups, at Cristalina on October 6, 1997 (*El Tiempo*, 1997: 7a).

1997 was one of Urabá's most tragic and bloodiest years. Virtually the entire region was in flames, one population after another fled *en masse*, and the number of murders and massacres rose dramatically. San José de Apartadó was only one of the numerous settlements and hamlets under siege. The residents of middle and lower Atrato, of Mutatá and Bajirá, as well as the inhabitants of the municipalities of the *bananero* axis were in the same straits (Naranjo, 2000). Nevertheless, this organized social group somehow continued to resist. Hopeless though it seemed, they stubbornly adhered to their decision to remain on their land and rebuild daily life within the framework of the founding agreement of the Community of Peace.

Despite this situation, one year after proclaiming itself a community of peace, those who had sought refuge in the urban area began to return to their lands. In March 1998, a group of 300 peasants returned to their fields in La Unión. This courageous, risky step initiated a kind of second stage in the process: as the year progressed, more and more waves of peasants returned, and the organization became stronger, gained greater visibility with national state bodies and established major ties and links with international non-governmental organizations that decided to directly support the peasants' resistance and quest for autonomy.

The increasing international support led the paramilitaries to issue a declaration saying they would respect the community of peace as long as the guerrillas left the zone. The insurgents made no formal statement, but did adopt a more cautious attitude, and so an entente was reached between the armed groups and the community. This lasted a few months, long enough for the peasants to restart crop production, consolidate their organizational strategy and begin to implement the goals of their community of peace (personal interviews, 2000).

On a national level, the settlers established contacts with the office for displaced persons, the Ombudsman's Office, the Ministry of the Presidency, and the Social Solidarity Network, among others, to request minimum guarantees that they could stay on their lands. They also sought economic

aid, since food and basic goods were becoming increasingly scarce, due to the roadblocks, the controls on food supplies, the loss of crops, tools and domestic animals and their months of absence from their lands (GAP, 1998). Neither municipal nor departmental authorities served as their interlocutors; the settlement made its case known nationally, sidestepping intermediate administrative bodies and relying on the constant help of NGOs who had worked with them from the onset. But perhaps the most significant contacts were the strategic alliances with different international non-governmental actors who were also the only reasonably effective guarantee for the continuity of the Community of Peace project (Arenas, 1999).

The NGOs with the longest and most enduring relationship with the Community of Peace are the Intercongregational Committee for Peace and Justice, a national body comprising several Catholic NGOs, and the International Peace Brigades, whose work in Colombia focuses on protecting vulnerable groups and persons placed at risk by the war. Both organizations have been following the process since its inception and have representatives living in the community, assisting it in many different ways. They work with the settlers on their unarmed civil resistance strategy, travel with them to the fields, to the municipal seat at Apartadó, to the capital, Bogotá, or to other regions. They collaborate in organizational and pedagogical tasks and have also helped put the settlers in touch with the representatives of foreign governments and other NGOs working to protect universal public goods.

Moreover, their ongoing presence serves as a reminder to all armed actors, including the state, that this group that has opted for peace and resistance to the war is protected by the Catholic Church and the international community. Therefore, any aggression against these inhabitants will meet with energetic protests from the countries and organizations the NGOs represent. This collaboration, as well as the letters and communiqués of solidarity and support arriving continuously from all over the world (around one thousand per month), is what the inhabitants of San José value most. In their own words,

international solidarity [...] is what has helped us to maintain the strength of our convictions and to endure all this suffering [...] because it is a way to tell the state that our community is not alone, and because we ourselves realize we have many friends all over the world who are concerned about us. (Arenas, 2000)

Thanks to the intermediation of the International Peace Brigades and Peace and Justice, the settlers have been receiving economic aid in the form of food, seeds and farm tools, as well as the logistic support they need to start producing crops again and so guarantee their survival. The UN Association

for Cooperation with Refugees has been in constant communication with the settlers of San José and has accompanied many refugees as they return to the zone. The office of the UN Advisor for the Protection of Human Rights has also sent representatives on several occasions to hear the settlers' accounts of murders and abuses and to launch the corresponding actions. Other international NGOs, such as Pax Christi and Amnesty International, have also helped out at different moments of this process (Naranjo, 2000).

York University in Canada, the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the United States and the cities in which they are located have declared themselves twin cities of San José, providing highly valuable support, and keeping in constant touch. These bodies help disseminate the San José experience of unarmed resistance internationally and coordinate the collection and shipping of different types of aid to the settlers. Colombia Support is a North American NGO that is helping to relaunch cocoa and exotic banana crops, and working to market and eventually export the banana crops (Arenas, 2000).

Through the NGO Echo, the Dutch parliament and the Spanish organization Paz y Tercer Mundo, the European Union has recognized San José's experiment in social reconstruction with aid allocation. In 1998, San José was awarded the Pfeffer Peace Prize by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, international recognition of the example it was setting for a world in search of peace (Naranjo, 2000). A contingent of settlers went to accept the award and had the opportunity to explain their situation to the people of the United States. They toured the USA again in 1999, visiting the Madison, Wisconsin, area among others. That same year, thanks to the support of the European Union, representatives of the Community of Peace visited the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. The community of San José also received and met with a delegation of more than ten European ambassadors, who heard them out and later manifested their concern to the Colombian government regarding the ongoing violation of the terms of the peace project (Arenas, 2000).

The people of San José highly value such international solidarity:

The fact that we are carrying out production processes, that the children are back in school—the schools had first been first closed, then destroyed—that we have minimal health care is the most important thing, because we achieved it by fighting back, and sacrificing the lives of our people! (Arenas, 2000)

These strategic alliances with international non-governmental actors are leading to what might be called the globalization of the local. A tiny settlement of peasants who had probably never traveled outside their own region managed to make their case known to the world. They have been visited by

foreign ambassadors and government representatives, they have traveled to other continents, and have received expressions of solidarity and economic aid from many different sources. And more importantly, they have defied their hierarchical subordination to the state itself, bypassing the substantive attributes of sovereignty and establishing direct contact with a wide variety of international actors. It is as if the Euclidean space of national states and of the world organization that is based upon them had been replaced by a quantum space that shapes decentered networks and waves whose purpose, as Badie would say, is to build responsible communities (Badie, 2000: 128), which, although made of fragmentations and interpenetrations, aim at protecting universal public goods such as the right to life, peace, human rights, the environment, and the fight against poverty.

The uneasy balance achieved by the settlement during 1998 started to crumble at the time of the second anniversary of the Community of Peace. In March 1999, a group of Urabá cattlemen, merchants, and industrialists issued a communiqué stating that they felt it was too much of a coincidence that the guerrillas maintained a presence in the localities receiving aid from international and national NGOs (*El Colombiano*, 1999: 8a). These accusations were refuted by national supervisory bodies, such as the Attorney-General's Office and the Ombudsman's Office. Nevertheless, the allegation sowed seeds of doubt, not only as to the neutrality and autonomy of the different peace communities in the region, but also as to the work of the NGOs that backed them. Using this pretext, direct attacks against the communities of peace were resumed, unleashing another cycle of atrocities and murders in San José that has not yet ended.

In April 1999, the community suffered a new paramilitary attack. According to several eyewitnesses, members of the Self-Defense Brigades of Córdoba and Urabá entered the village and intimidated the population with threats, herding them all into the community center. Once there, they selected six previously identified persons and killed them in front of their neighbors and families (*El Colombiano*, 1999: 7a). This massacre was followed by bloody guerrilla attacks. By the year 2000, barely three years after the establishment of the community of peace, the village's death toll had risen to 83.<sup>2</sup> After these bloody events the precarious equilibrium attained over the previous year was lost, and the logic of war once again came onto the scene.

In July 2000, a new massacre shook the foundations of the community organization. This time a group of paramilitarists invaded La Unión, one of the most resistant and courageous hamlets. The victimizers once again gathered all the villagers at one site and asked them to identify their leaders. Given the response that the entire village was involved in moving the peace process forward, they selected six people at random and executed them on the spot (telephone interview, 2000).

From that moment, harassment and violence escalated. By December 2000, the Intercongregational Committee for Justice and Peace issued a communiqué to Colombia's highest-ranking public authorities denouncing a new road blockade. They said that, both in the village and in the municipal seat of Apartadó, the residents and the international NGO representatives accompanying them were followed and threatened by paramilitary groups, who seized the aid and money donated from outside sources, as well as what the residents got from the sale of their crops and products, while threatening to occupy the village if the population did not leave within a reasonable period of time. The communiqué ended by denouncing complicity between the army's 17th Brigade and the paramilitaries in the area (Justicia y Paz, 2000).

In March 2001, four years after the establishment of the community of peace, they made good on their threat. A paramilitary commando entered the village, took it over, and partially burned the headquarters out of which the Community of Peace operated, which was where aid materials were stored and also where religious representatives and members of the International Peace Brigades were housed. They burned 15 homes to the ground while repeatedly ordering the population to leave the area; in cases of disobedience, they swore to return and massacre the population, starting "with the women and children" (Justicia y Paz, 2001). The communiqué issued by Justicia y Paz denouncing this situation to national authorities and the international community ended in the following words:

The recommendations made by the international community through the United Nations or the regional Organization of American States are not enough; the words of accredited diplomats in Colombia are not enough; the resolutions of the European Union are not enough; the recent statements made by two US senators on the situation of San José de Apartadó's Community of Peace are not enough; international solidarity is not enough and the moral support of international observers are not enough; the testimony given by the Community of Peace before the Human Rights Unit of the Nation's Attorney General is not enough to open the paths of truth and justice. Today, given the announced bloodletting, we hope that it is the last time that we manifest our constancy and moral censure, and that, by fulfilling your constitutional duty, you will keep those who have threatened us from carrying out the criminal actions of the state. (Justicia y Paz, 2001)

Even though the people of San José's dreams of peace had been shattered once again, they decided to continue to resist, stay on their lands and rekindle their hopes of a future where dignity, respect, and autonomy would be possible.

### THE COMMUNITY OF PEACE: A FOUNDING PACT

The declaration of the Community of Peace was the result of an accelerated process of collective political learning through which the inhabitants of San José discarded, one by one, all the resistance and rebellion strategies they had used to resolve crises in the past: mass demonstrations, the occupation of public buildings, forced exile, hiding in remote, abandoned areas, the alliance with different armed groups for protection and support, and even the declaration of active neutrality. But the shift from a state of war to active war meant a break with traditional practices; they had to invent new strategies and come up with a different socio-political order that would ensure minimum conditions for survival. Upon declaring itself a Community of Peace the group was forced to design new forms of community production, to devise political referents and ethical foundations for action in times of war, to make individual decisions and assume social commitments that gave them visibility and helped open up a dialogue not only with the armed groups, but also with national and international actors. Thus they recovered their autonomy, sovereignty and self-determination, adhering to a new founding pact they called the "Declaration of the Community of Peace."

#### The collective organization of production

The inhabitants of San José had ample experience in the cooperative marketing and sale of their crops and products, particularly cocoa. Associational experiments for the purpose of improving income and better prices were not unfamiliar to them. In fact, the cocoa growers' cooperative became one of the main community referents by attracting settlers scattered around the jurisdiction who came to understand the meaning of associationism and solidarity from the co-op. Even so, at first, individuals worked alone or with their families in their economic units, but the backdrop of the war and the extreme situation they faced led to a change in production, transforming a traditional peasant economy into a collective unit (Uribe de H, 1992: 293).

After having abandoned their individual plots of land to take refuge in the seat of the jurisdiction, the peasants began venturing out in groups to work the fields, due to the continuing harassment of any peasants who ventured out alone, as well as to the paramilitary blockade whose purpose was to starve them out. Their first crops were merely to help stave off hunger and complement the food rations they received from the international community. But later they renovated the old cocoa plantations from which they are now harvesting crops that they market in Medellín through the National Chocolate Company. They also began developing other crops such as exotic bananas, sowing around 20 hectares with 26,000 individual plants, and hope to export the fruit in the future. According to the settlers, "in the Community

of Peace we don't want to exploit others' work, we don't want to sell our products and let others reap the profits; you can't work just for yourself, because strength lies in unity" (Arenas, 1999).

Working jointly implied subverting the idea of individual property and collectivizing the use of the lands, which became the property of the group. It also meant that the crops themselves or proceeds from their sale were equally divided among the settlers: "any crop we raise or sell is for the benefit of all and not only for those who work the land; since we all perform our assigned tasks within the Community of Peace, we all have a right to those products" (personal interviews, 2001). They began a system of planned production, organized by work committees under a coordinator appointed by the community. These committees jointly decide where to sow and which crops will be raised, and make the work assignments, reporting later to the community as a whole.

Although this process of collective organization was initially begun due to the war, the settlers now feel it is a central element of their emancipation and a logical result of the sense of community participation. For them, working together for the benefit of all means opposing vertical forms of power such as those of capitalism (Community of Peace, 1998: 11). According to them, this is a way of establishing an alternative form of power, turning group participation and joint work into a strategy to combat economic exploitation.

#### The political referents of the declaration of the Community of Peace

In the words of the settlers, the Community of Peace has been an experiment in civil resistance, an effort to recover the dignity of all those people caught in the crossfire of a war of which they were the main victims, even though they were not active participants. Civil resistance for them meant several things: refusing to be forced into exile, staying on their plots of land and continuing to work the land, living alongside their neighbors as before. It also implied demanding the respect of all the armed groups—including those of the state—for their persons and their property, as well as the recognition of their right not to become unwillingly involved in any direct or indirect military actions that benefited any of the armed forces fighting for control over the territory and its populations (Community of Peace, 1998: 11–13). In short, they rejected "exclusionary and discriminatory vertical forms of power," proposing instead to create strategies of pluralistic and autonomous participation different from those "imposed on us through the use of weapons and economic power" (Community of Peace, 1998: 10).

But civil resistance also meant resistance by unarmed citizens: a rational, voluntary and public opposition to a war of which they wanted no part. This included a formal declaration rejecting the way the armed groups were representing their interests, utopias and goals, and informing these groups

that the people of San José were prepared to take charge of their own destiny, through self-determination. Thus, for the settlers of San José, the Community of Peace became more than a strategy to avoid the devastating effects of war. It was, they say, a political option

to respond in an organized way to a war that has victimized the civilian population and so become an alternative to that very war [...], to become a power the armed groups have to reckon with, one that challenges the logic that sustains them [...], constructing, on the basis of the communities themselves, different alternatives to those imposed by war and by economic oppression and capitalism. (Community of Peace, 1998: 11)

Taking the political option meant proposing an alternative project, entering an agreement among equals to reinvent the rules of social coexistence. It meant instituting a different political order, unlike those that had shaped their lives in the past, and recovering individual sovereignty. Thus it meant opposing politics to war, changing the dynamics of the conflict and opting for peaceful coexistence. The new order proposed would work only within its boundaries, confronting through locally based unarmed resistance the armed actors fighting for sovereignty over all of Colombia. This made the Community of Peace in San José doubly vulnerable: first, in relation to the geo-strategy of internal war, which requires the conquering of territory; and second, in relation to the state, which would be left out and explicitly unrecognized by the signers of the new social pact.

#### The ethical foundations of the pact

The Community of Peace proposal is based on highly significant political and ethical foundations. The first of these is social participation: "we all take part and have the right to make decisions" (Community of Peace, 1998: 19). This means that any member of the political body enjoys equal opportunities to lead the process, but also that individual actions affect the group and therefore that the solidarity and responsibility of its members is extremely important: "that is why every step we take is taken in the knowledge that our actions affect others" (Community of Peace, 1998: 20) and the ethical force of the project rests on the concept of a solidary, fraternal group. The principles of solidarity and responsibility are put into practice in the meetings, training workshops and shared work in the fields so as to strengthen the ties of solidarity and to allow the joint planning of political actions and production processes.

The second ethical principle is freedom. This is defined by the group as "the capacity that communities and individual members have of making autonomous decisions, without any kind of pressure and without feeling

excluded for dissenting with the majority" (Community of Peace, 1998: 19). Thus, it rediscovers a basic principle of democracy: one of accepting difference and even dissent without the threat of exclusion from the body politic.

Based on respect for the great principle of neutrality, each individual has a right to argue, disagree and propose alternatives, whether that individual is black, indigenous, mestizo, white, liberal, conservative, or communist. All receive equal respect because we are fighting for something much more important: our lives. (Community of Peace, 1998: 10)

The third ethical principle is transparency:

In order to survive in a war zone, it was necessary to lie to the armed groups. Conversely, the Community of Peace has based its possibilities for survival on truthfulness, telling the armed groups that we cannot cooperate because that would involve us in a war in which we have declared ourselves neutral. (testimony, 2000)

The signatories of the pact realize that their transparency is one of the conditions for the existence, or more precisely the reason for the existence of the Community of Peace. And while this has not guaranteed survival, it has given them the moral strength to protest and be heard by national and international organizations protecting universal public goods.

These modern, democratic and pluralist ethical principles are a contrast to some of the criteria derived from traditional rules and religious morality, which in theory would deny the former. It is extremely striking that the internal by-laws of the Community of Peace strictly prohibit the consumption of alcohol. One of the duties of the Internal Council is to "prevent the consumption of alcohol, which is prohibited in the Community of Peace, and if violated, both the consumer and the seller shall be called in, and section d of this article shall be applied" (Community of Peace, 1998a: 2). The procedure for violators is two warnings, and in case of a third violation, expulsion from the Community.

The Internal Council also appears to be too much involved in other aspects of the private lives of community members, making regular home inspections (Community of Peace, 1998a: 3) and keeping watch over persons entering and leaving the jurisdiction, as well as over those who fail to attend meetings or do not take part in work assignments. The ethical foundations of the San José Community of Peace are a paradoxical mixture of modernity and tradition, of lay ethics and Catholic morality, of public liberties and control of private life by neighbors and family, of collective production and liberal individualism. Such mixtures reveal what an extreme situation can do to traditional groups that rediscover politics in the midst of war.

### Rational, voluntary, and public decision-making

The declaration of the Community of Peace meant a step forward in relation to the declaration of territorial neutrality, since it implied an explicit, voluntary and public commitment, made by individuals and communities, to the political and ethical principles of the founding pact, which included the following: no direct or indirect participation in the war; no bearing or keeping of arms, ammunition, or explosives; no provision of support to any parties involved in the conflict; no requests for help from the armed groups to resolve personal or family problems; no handling or delivery of information to any of the parties; a commitment to take part in community work and to reject injustice and impunity (Community of Peace, 1998: 10). In the settlers' own words:

Each of us, according to our occupation, assumes specific commitments. For example, if I am a shopkeeper who has signed on with the process, I cannot sell to any armed actor [...]. Furthermore, we try to involve those who do not live in the jurisdiction but with whom we are in constant contact, convince them to observe the same principles, and to join the Community of Peace. One example is that of the bus drivers covering the Apartadó route; they have agreed to refuse to transport any armed actor, because they pose a danger for persons using that same form of public transport [...]. Another very touchy subject is the orders and errands the armed actors ask us to perform, like carry messages, give information, hide arms, give them a place to sleep or feed them, because we as peasants end up paying for anything we do. (Personal interviews, 2000)

In order to join the Community of Peace, each individual must voluntarily and individually express his/her desire to join the project, and must take part in four workshops offered over a one-month period by the training committee. Then they must formally apply for admission in a "document signed by each individual over 12 years of age, indicating their acceptance of the process. Parents or responsible adults take responsibility for children under twelve" (Community of Peace, 1998: 1). Once the commitment has been signed or marked by the applicant, the Internal Council will officially issue a membership card, accrediting that person as a member of the Community of Peace.

In addition to the above requirements, before taking possession of the card, the applicant must show that he/she is familiar with the declaration of the Community of Peace; that he/she takes no direct or indirect part in the conflict; accepts the internal rules; will faithfully keep the symbols of the community; is actively committed to the success of the process and will carry out the community tasks assigned (Community of Peace, 1998a: 3). This

explicit, informed, voluntary and rational consent serves to reconstruct the group through another path, a political one, thus leaving behind traditional nationalistic notions like territorial belonging, proximity, blood ties or cultural and historical circumscription to a given community. It helps build an incipient body politic, with obligations (neutrality and participation) and rights (protection and voting).

Given the voluntary and individual nature of the Community of Peace, not all inhabitants of the jurisdiction are members. Of the 32 hamlets around San José, only 17 have signed on. Besides the village of San José, the hamlets comprising the Community of Peace are the following: La Unión, Arenas Altas, La Cristalina, Mulatos Medio and Mulatos Alto, La Resbalosa, Las Nieves, El Guineo, La Linda, Alto Bonito, Las Playas, El Porvenir, Buenos Aires and La Esperanza Bellavista (Community of Peace, 1998: 4).

### The socio-political organization of the collectivity

The Community of Peace declaration and the concern for neutrality called for a solid organizational model, one vested with authority and recognition that would provide minimum guarantees of compliance with the objectives proposed. The Internal Council is the sole and highest authority within the territory. It is responsible for administrative and disciplinary functions, coordinating all the group's activities and resolving the inhabitants' conflicts through discussion and dialogue. It also keeps a vigilant eye on the population, imposing sanctions on signatories who violate the terms of the agreement (Community of Peace, 1998a: 1-4). But it is a non-institutional authority with no official recognition and no formal or constitutional ties with other regional or national authorities. It is a pluralistic, collectively managed social authority that is elected by the people and that directs the lives of the signatories of the pact, although it exercises an undeniable influence on all inhabitants of the jurisdiction.

The Internal Council also represents the community on different fronts: it speaks with the armed actors, demands that they take responsibility for their actions, defends any member of the community whose actions are questioned by them and clears up ambiguous situations. The Council also represents the Community before national and international social organizations and national state bodies providing humanitarian aid or protecting rights and liberties. Within the Community, the Council is seen as the authority to which they owe obedience and respect.

The Council's disciplinary functions are focused mainly on ensuring neutrality and compliance with the prohibition on the sale and consumption of alcohol. The pact states that "the Council shall call in any violator for the purpose of resolving the problem [...], if there is a second infraction, he/her will be called in again, and upon the third infraction the violator will be

expelled from the Community of Peace" (Community of Peace, 1998a: 3). The Council applies no penal sanctions, but it should be noted that expulsion from the Community is practically the equivalent of being exiled from the territory.

The Internal Council is made up of eight members: a general coordinator, an assistant coordinator, a treasurer, an inspector, a secretary and three electors; if the Council so decides, it can be assisted by representatives of the Apartadó Diocese and of one of the NGOs working in San José (Community of Peace, 1998a: 2). The Council is elected by all the members of the Community of Peace, who decide whether it should continue in office every six months; a minimum of two persons from the previous Council are to be kept in office in order to ensure the continuity of the process. It meets once a week, on Saturday, or at any other time if the situation so requires; sessions can take place only when the absolute majority of its members are present. Council members are elected in the following manner:

We meet in groups and by hamlets to reflect on the desired traits of each council member. Based on this we propose candidates, a list is drawn up, and then we hold elections. The eight candidates receiving the most votes will become the new Council, if each freely chooses to accept the position. (Community of Peace, 1998: 25)

The working groups and committees report to the Council. The first are in charge of food production in order to meet the most basic needs of the members of the Community of Peace. There are 22 groups of men and eleven of women, each with its own coordinator who is in charge of organizing the work and of reporting to the open information assemblies on the advances or setbacks encountered in the group tasks (testimonies, 2000). The committees work on specific thematic aspects central to the organization of collective life, such as health, education, work, sports, culture, women's issues, and the political training of the Community of Peace members. Each committee has a coordinator who, besides his/her specific functions, is in charge of organizing the delivery of received aid to families, working groups or individuals, depending on the case. All the signatories of the peace pact agree to participate in collective tasks, and have to take part in working groups or committees. This is not a choice but a commitment undertaken by anyone signing on with the Community of Peace (personal interviews, 2000).

This program of collective production, with a strong community focus, contrasts sharply with a socio-political organization centered on the individual, on personal autonomy and on a liberal democratic pluralism. It is this that makes San José de Apartadó a hybrid or mixture where one can find traces of several political systems, of different historical periods, of

overlapping spaces, openings, and closures that make the apparently simple destiny of this group of peasants so complex.

Thus, this organized community, permanently mobilized, facing adversity, has managed, through collective and solidary work, to fulfill its basic needs, resisting imposed exile. Showing extraordinary dignity and courage, it has attempted to hold in check the forces of war. Perhaps without realizing it, this community is now creating a new political order based on the local.

#### Notes

- 1 To ensure the safety of those interviewed, no names or places are given. The interviews were conducted between 1999 and 2001 with settlers, displaced persons, members of the clergy, and NGOs.
- 2 Data supplied by an eyewitness working with international NGOs in the area and confirmed by the Apartadó Diocese.

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