

Part III

STRUGGLING FOR DEMOCRACY IN A
SCENARIO OF CIVIL WAR AND
FRAGMENTED DESPOTISMS:
THE CASE OF COLOMBIA

Paradoxical Pacts

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CHAOS AND THE PACT TRADITION

Colombia combines two features that have generated experiences, convictions, practices, and skills shared by wide sectors of the population: stability of macro-institutional forms and a long tradition of diffuse, chronic and scathing armed conflicts. But we should be wary of easy conclusions. These traditions are not necessarily “violent” or “intolerant” in an explicit or direct manner. In fact, the need to govern and to make decisions in an institutional environment in which power—including the power of weapons—is subject to multiple restrictions has fostered a strong *pactist* tradition in which every war generates agreements and each agreement generates wars (see Uribe, 1997; Gutiérrez, 1997; but of course the best reference for understanding the phenomenon is still the prodigious *A Hundred Years of Solitude*). This pendular movement is part and parcel of our constitutional practice and thought. The result is that the pendulum pact war constitutes the attractor of the dynamics of our conflicts.

In this context, “attractor” has two possible interpretations: 1) the social conflict converges toward a certain configuration, or 2) it is essentially described by this configuration. Here, we will assume that both meanings are more or less equivalent, although this is a little inexact. What we want to highlight is that this notion leads directly to the classical tension between necessity and freedom. If our description of the pendular movement that characterizes Colombian society is acceptable, a question immediately arises: is it possible to imagine “exits” or even “new cycles” in a social world governed by an attractor? In other words, can statements of resistance and social protest be articulated only in a pendular language or can they generate their own grammar? Throughout this text, we will maintain that this question is both extremely crucial and ambiguous.

The ambiguity lies in the fact that the strong *pactist* tradition of Colombia in recent years has given way to a series of “high-level blockage” traps, to

use Elster's terms (1992: 105): a form of very sophisticated adaptation, which, however, given its own convoluted elaboration, blocks the transit toward new social forms. A brief review of the peace pacts in the last 20 years allows us to assert that they are indispensable at the national level, but undesirable at the local level.¹ They generate one of the following three outcomes: the physical destruction of the protagonists of the pact² (as in the case of the *politicides* of the Unión Patriótica and of Esperanza, Paz y Libertad); the rupture of the pact (as has happened many times in the negotiations between FARC and the state); or the antidemocratic concentration of power in the hands of one or several of the protagonists of the pact—or even a combination of some of the previous outcomes (see Romero, 2001, on unionized workers in Urabá). They also constitute, somewhat perversely, the mental and moral horizon of the alternative options: the strategy for emancipation is based on processes of peace in which the interlocutors and protagonists, as well as their opponents, are warlords.

This may be unavoidable, but it gives origin to a series of paradoxical dynamics in so far as it forces an articulation between emancipatory languages and non-emancipatory materials. The common denominator of these outcomes is both a substantial loss of density of participatory life and an equally remarkable narrowing of the cultural and intellectual horizon on which society and its possibilities of transformation are conceived. This is the other side of the very real effect of the decrease of violence (again, see the experience described in Romero, 2001). In this case, emancipation cannot name itself because it is caught in the pendular dynamics, and it can only aspire to be recognized as an alternative through a counter-factual exercise (what would happen if we stayed in one extreme of the pendular movement?).³ But the counter-factual discourse has a problem of scale (the impossibility of translating the national into the local and vice versa), and also a problem of perspective (as soon as you approach *extreme B* of the pendular movement the costs of *extreme A* diminish and those of *extreme B* increase). The national experience has demonstrated that, as it advances, the costs of the negotiation are felt to be excessive by wide sectors of the population.

On the other hand, this *pactist* tradition that we are talking about is recursive in time and space. Experiences produce historical memories that concentrate on a group of visible precedents and shared conventions that bridge different languages, experiences and aspirations. However, this generates long chains of social arrangements that, at the same time, express and disturb hierarchies. This is clearly shown in the very practice of war, in which, for example, the urban militias developed policies of cleansing in their territory, attacking, harassing, and even physically eliminating drug consumers, but dramatically changing, in this process, the power relations in the areas under their influence.⁴ We will see a similar, although clearly differentiated,

effect in another aspect of the process of the militias: a syncopated traditionalism that defends the image of a community past with guns, motorcycles, and wild *salsa* music, and which indirectly destroys all of the conditions on which the notion of a traditional community is based.⁵

Now then, the very idea of recursion leads to the following question: Pacts among whom? To answer this question we will have to go “beyond fragmentation.” Contrary to what one would assume from liberal criticisms of violence (such as intolerance or fear of diversity), in Colombia the destruction of the other is founded—actually and discursively—on fear of the similar (and of oneself).⁶ Instead of the social explosion so obsessively blocked by the national elites, we have experienced a social implosion, in which poor, Catholic, *mestizo* young people shoot poor, Catholic, *mestizo* young people. The armed groups—and also their correlate, the peace pacts—are conceived as pedagogic projects with the mission to discipline and mold a mass that is simultaneously represented as a source of legitimacy and of incivility. This forces us to carefully study how limits are defined. What resources are needed to trace limits? It is evident that to just state them is not enough. The subtle plot that supports the specific “us,” in opposition to the generic and discursive “us” (“us” the poor, “us” the watchmen of morals, or “us” who are outside the law), is made of long chains of people, territories, and artifacts, inseparable from the *local* exercise of differentiation that is one of the keys to the Colombian war. Thus tracing limits is not a simple academic game: to know who we are and who they are is a military matter, literally a matter of life and death. But inasmuch as the contours of differentiation are only supported by local experiences, we again meet with the simplification and erasure of the identity marks when we move from “small scales” to larger scales. The negotiators of the process of the militias in Medellín had great difficulty in understanding the multiple segments of the “reinserted” groups. This underscores the fact that, at different scales, different languages and mental maps operate (Santos, 1997a). Simply, there is no discursive device to name the local conflicts from a national and macro stance or a way to conceive new possible worlds from micro-territorial wars.

In sum, in Colombia there is an armed resistance based on an ethos, a practice, and some protest discourses (opposing and/or bitterly criticizing the state or the current social order). At the same time, they are governed by the attractor *pactism/violence*. Thus, it is difficult to see in them a new social and cultural horizon. This phenomenon can be envisioned from three different perspectives:

a) The “hegemony effect.” “The words, images, symbols, forms, organizations, institutions and movements used by the subordinate populations to name, understand, confront, adjust to, or resist domination have been molded by the very process of domination” (Roseberry, quoted in Binford, 2000).

For example, the power of the cult of the Virgin Mary in social sectors involved in protest is carefully documented (Salazar and Jaramillo, 1992). The militias⁷ made an effort “to cleanse” their areas of bums, “undesirable” people and gangsters in an exercise of effective security transcending the restrictions of the state of law that evokes the demands of a hysterical right. It is also possible to see how the pedagogic agenda of armed sectors reflects the expressions, rituals, books, and procedures of school life just as it was lived directly by their leaders and militants, who use them as instruments of control of their social base: there are “manuals of coexistence” (FARC), “catechisms of coexistence” (Western Boyacá), and, in Medellín, if somebody were sentenced to death or murdered, they would say that s/he had “failed” [the year].

b) The “percolation effect.”⁸ But at the same time, hegemony is a relationship that is always evolving. As the subordinate sectors appropriate the discourses and practices of the dominant sectors, they transform them and introduce innovations that are passed on to the elites who, in turn, give them an “official form.” This, again, irrigates the society, producing changes, and so forth. We find many examples of this in the Colombian case: from the many ways of killing to military tactics, everything is in a constant process of appropriation and imitation. *Parlache*, a social dialect that was developed among lower-class young people and that had to do with the use of drugs and the unemployment crisis, transcended the borders of the place where it originated and became a dialectal form shared by many social sectors in the city. The *pactist* experience is also exposed to this effect.

The elites, it is true, wanted to handle the country through “conversations between gentlemen” (according to the accurate expression of Wilde), but today the barrio life in Medellín or the town life in Western Boyacá is a derivation of the “friendly” chats and agreements among different armed actors of very dissimilar origins: they decide to put an end to the “fratricidal” fights and to impose rules for the games that operate as frameworks for daily life, creating scenarios to settle disagreements. This experience, in turn, is picked up by the elites, who imitate the plebeian disturbance of the original practices. Thus, contestation sometimes gives birth to extensive two-way cultural circuits (global and regional ones—a phenomenon that emerged quite early, as in the case of the influence of the Tupamaros on the iconography and conception of revolutionary justice among certain sectors of the Colombian guerrillas⁹) that imply learning, innovation, and appropriation, and that are often related to the creation and establishment of counter-cultural tastes within the market economy.¹⁰ We underscore that the percolation effect can be vertical (between elites and subordinate sectors), horizontal (between two different moments of society, though not hierarchically related, as in the connections between politics and crime that we will discuss later on), and diagonal (a combination of these two).

c) The “uncertainty effect.” As we have suggested, since the exercise of differentiation is based on chains that are only interpretable in local environments, beyond them the frontiers are blurred and any motivation can be used to justify an act. Local differentiation produces national non-differentiation. Anyone can be a victim; anyone can be the victimizer. Alliances are made and unmade in a matter of days (Jaramillo, Ceballos, and Villa, 1998: 56). This situation of extreme fluidity—“turbulence” (Gutiérrez, 1997)—generates an impression of sameness, and therefore everything is solved with collective self-deprecation. The most hated person in the Colombian national discourse is the first person plural: an “us” imagined from “a community of guilt” (Cubides, 1999). If this is used to cope with uncertainty—offering specific objects for the distribution of responsibilities—it also has the immediate result of undermining the idea of democratic control and distributive justice.¹¹ Moreover, it reduces the politics of protest to a half-tone between rebellion and self-help (“learn to be better”¹²), underlining, very eloquently, the relationships between diverse modalities of contestation and mercantile circuits.¹³

The uncertainty effect can be examined from another point of view, that of the state. In the cases that we examine here, we cannot speak exactly of an absent state: Medellín is one of the most important cities in the country, with around two million inhabitants, the most efficient institutions (as a matter of fact, efficiency is a grounding part of its sense of identity) and an important presence of security organs. Western Boyacá, hardly a couple of hours away from the capital, Bogotá, is the center for the production of a very important natural resource (emeralds) controlled by the state until the 1960s. As we will see throughout the text, more than with a weak state, here we meet with an excluding, inequitable¹⁴ and porous state that generates extreme forms of uncertainty at the regional and local levels, at the same time that it strengthens diverse advanced modalities of guarantees at the national level (see Uprimny and Villegas, 2003).

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows: first, we introduce an explanation of the ideology of war that makes explicit how the environment of the discourse of protest and contestation was established. This, in turn, offers an interesting viewpoint to see, though obliquely, what this kind of contestation is in our context. Second, we introduce two cases: the militia experience in Medellín, and that of the emerald miners in Western Boyacá. On the one hand, we have protest groups of impoverished youths strongly influenced by the armed left, and on the other we have plebeian entrepreneurs involved in organized crime and interested in keeping the central government away. In spite of the enormous distance separating them (see Table 7.1), they share at least the following features: a) they are eminently local/regional, but they also have a clear global component (in the case of

the militiamen, this is absorbed through ideologies and cultural consumption. In the case of Boyacá, one of the central motivations for peace was to be inserted successfully into the world market—one of the more visible results is an international emerald stock market that takes place in Bogotá every year); b) they are *pasadistas* (Mariátegui), that is, religious, nostalgic moralists and defenders of tradition (the most eloquent illustration of this is maybe the great relevance of Catholic imagery); c) however, they think of themselves as pedagogic and liberal, and appropriate important parts of the modernizing intellectual discourses that fed the constitutional change of 1991, with explicit accusations against intolerance and impunity. Once again, we are not entitled to conflate the two cases into a single category, since each shows a different way of assuming the territory in connection with rights; d) they have a conflicting, but at the same time cooperative, relationship with the national state. Finally, we sketch a comparison between the two experiences and draw some conclusions.

Table 7.1. COMPARISON OF THE TWO EXPERIENCES

Issue	Medellín	Boyacá
<i>Hierarchies</i>	Weak and diffuse	Strong
<i>Territorial control</i>	Unstable	More stable
<i>Economic resources</i>	Minimal	Very important
<i>Globalization</i>	Ideological-political	Economic
<i>Counterbalances (exogenous or endogenous)</i>	Many	Very few
<i>Main social sector</i>	Youth from the popular sectors	"Capitalist pariahs 15"
<i>Still existent</i>	No	Yes

IDEOLOGIES AND DISCOURSES OF THE ARMED PROTEST

The raw material on which this section is built is simple: from the 1980s onwards, a specific group of "marginal" intellectuals grew in Colombia. It was divorced not only from the institutionalized academy but also from the legal actors who have a certain degree of visibility in the Colombian public record (Scott, 1985). Furthermore, it was organically linked to diverse armed groups, many of which were volatile and diffuse.¹⁶ In other words, the justification of the armed struggle gradually ceased to be intellectually

respectable,¹⁷ but did not disappear. On the contrary, it found new niches, expressions, and languages. It is still quite important because, contrary to what one might suppose, argumentative ability is a matter of life and death for the more or less peripheral armed organizations that have emerged in Colombia in the last 20 years. Urban militias, large peasant guerrilla groups, guardians of the drug traffic, paramilitary groups, sometimes even gangs, appeared either as intellectualized projects or, with time, discovered that without a layer of intellectuals they would not reach that national, regional or municipal relevance to which they aspired. In some cases, it was clear that they simply could not survive without ideas and rationalizations—an ironic but fully consistent expression of Descartes in the tropics: "I think, therefore I am," "I am justified, therefore I survive" (see also Gutiérrez, 2001). These intellectuals would endow the projects with a vision of the future, with the ability to create an "imagined community," in Benedict Anderson's expression, and with the construction of an interface to present and represent themselves before the "larger society." A crucial aspect of such an interface was that it combined rhetorical and iconic aspects; it produced reasons, but also believable images capable of capturing the imagination of wide sectors and of proposing positive stereotypes for emulation. Think of the effects achieved, at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, by the image of hooded men surrounded by microphones, explaining their *modus vivendi*, dictating their reasons, in short, building new forms of visibility. To meditate about our war also implies to recover that iconic and argumentative fabric, as well as the rhetoric, practices, skills, and social techniques that simultaneously constituted the armed groups' historical condition of possibility and specific identity "signature."

However, at a certain level of abstraction that discourse is generally quite simple. Precisely because of its condition of (relative) marginality, it grants little space for mediation between instrumental objective and explanation. The latter has to follow the former rigorously. On top of the thought, one places the coil of immediate utility, thus following a strong national tradition.¹⁸ But inevitably it becomes refined, inasmuch as it is addressed to heterogeneous audiences and, therefore, must be stripped of its most simple and brutal coercive and justifying dimensions. The refinement, certainly, is developed in a specific direction: above all, it will be stylized and standardized, dwelling in a continuous re-enunciation of some few central motives that are considered untouchable. In other words, an "armed violentology" appeared and developed, managed by a specific layer of intellectuals, and dedicated, among other things, to explaining, documenting and legitimating before heterogeneous audiences their practices and procedures. "Armed violentology" is not at all ineffective, and neither is it a particularly spectacular feature worthy of being mentioned only because of its extravagancy.

Although we do not yet have the ability to fully interpret the common senses—the “rhetorical *topoi*” (Santos, 1997b) or the “winning strategies” (Hintikka, 1973)—of “armed violentology,”¹⁹ we can suggest some basic intuitions in this direction.²⁰ Let us begin by highlighting the fact that in these cases the desired future involves a combination of peace and vigilance (Huggins, 1991), which, in turn, implies a brutal tension between the impulse toward collective incorporation (of a more regional character in the example of Boyacá, more social in that of Medellín) and a radical ignorance of individual rights through a gregarious reconstruction of society. If there is an obsession in the two experiences that we are reviewing, it is a rejection of all forms of individualism and selfishness: it is necessary to keep up with the rhythm of a common project. Since society is a project, and rights are means and not ends, any expectation of guarantees is subordinated to a notion of discipline and organization. In other words, the armed group extrapolates its disciplinary experiences and expectations, some of them completely idiosyncratic, to the territory in which it has established its domain. A resident from Medellín recapitulates with approval: “Today we are a threatened community and that is good for me: there can’t be thieves, robbers. There can’t be drug addicts, and those who are will have to hide [...] we all know that we have to behave.” The obsession of the militias for making people behave well and for educating them had a thousand faces: “A drunk rude husband who arrived home and wanted to [beat] his wife, no, he was not killed, but he was sensitized: you have to be an example for your family and if you are not, you have to leave this place, because here we do not need antisocial people” (both testimonies quoted in Jaramillo, Ceballos, and Villa, 1998: 88). In Boyacá, the *guaquero* organizations (artisan emerald miners), once the peace pact was formalized, decided to get rid of those who misbehaved. “Some delinquent fugitive *guaqueros* settled at Quípama River, but they were received with the demand that they respect the already accepted forms of coexistence” (Ocampo, Rangel, and Díaz, 1993: 13). There, they did not need antisocial people either, because they endangered the delicate balances conquered with so much effort. “Recently, around April 1993, facing the imminent recapturing of the control of the Coscuez mine by the partners of Esmeracol with Carranza, the *guaqueros* were forced to leave the mine of their own will. If this order was not obeyed, the bosses would be forced to ‘clean’ the area in order to guarantee the exploration by the legitimate state contractors” (Ocampo, Rangel, and Díaz, 1993: 32). Notice how the “cleaning” metaphor is used to invoke a gregarious image in which transgression is equivalent to illness and, therefore, must be eliminated.²¹ Thus violence and intolerance are not actually linked here. The problem has to do with disciplining and homogenizing the social base that operates as a source of legitimacy and over which you also shoot. The “small intellectuals,” to use Gramscian terminology, express this disciplinary enthusiasm

through codes, manuals, catechisms, poems, and hymns that together with the direct speeches in public squares constitute the most powerful weapon in their rhetorical repertoire. For example, the organized *guaqueros* of Quípama, led by a powerful don of the precious stone traffic, elaborated a “code of coexistence” in which “disposing of garbage in the streets is prohibited, the handling of contaminated water is demanded, and robbery and dishonesty in business are settled before the police inspector” (*ibid.*, 12).

The vision of the future associated with this gregarious reconstruction shows a movement from the epic to the pastoral and from the eponymic to the local landscape: no more founding heroism like that of the leftist projects that gave a first impulse to the militias at the beginning of the 1980s (see the following section), no more references to the mythology of hero-ideologists but a mentality of survival at the service of an inclusive restoration. A militiaman says: “The Ché bled to death, the rest is history.” He, on the other hand, wanted to live. Where? Another militiaman gives the answer: in a self-managed and integrative community. “Since I began working with the organization, I like festivals a lot, brother, for example when there was a wonderful cultural weekend, there, with music bands, the whole day there were bicycle and sack competitions among children, there was a game here with a greasy pole and the children, all of them happy, everything was, brother, very nice, there, one saw everybody smiling, for example, old men playing dominoes and poker over there, drinking *guarito* [spirits], over there, the old women joking and making *sancocho*. If you understand me, brother, that is all great for me” (quoted in Gutiérrez, 1998). A revolution to establish the tranquility of the barrio and to recover the local color? If one remembers the extreme conditions of insecurity in the barrios in Medellín at the peak moment of the militias, one will immediately discover that this program was not trivial at all. It constituted indeed an “inclusive restoration”: claiming rights and entitlements for groups, but denying them to the individuals of those groups on behalf of a community with nostalgic values.²² Hence their disturbing mixture of conservatism and protest, of solidarity and cynicism.

We can see this contrast more clearly in the relationship between transgression and resistance. In Colombia, social protest has gone through several cycles. In the period in which the narratives of both cases begin (around 1980), the country was at the same time in a very intense moment of a crime cycle and at a turning point for the entrance of drug trafficking into several forms of making politics and war. To turn protestors into criminals was, and still is, a key tool in the repertoire of answers to social protest. It was approximately at that time that the epithet “narco-guerrilla” was discovered. At the same time, a whole set of institutional designs and conflict dynamics were producing a percolation effect between the political and the criminal worlds across the ideological spectrum. The unwanted side-effects of that mixture of texts (discourses) and contexts (the mixing processes) were huge. In a

surprising result that shows all the links of the chain hegemony-percolation-uncertainty, the 1980s witnessed the conscious attempt of organized criminals to become political actors, and of the protest groups to justify their bonds with criminality. When the intellectuals of different armed projects defined the "official society" as a territory to be entered and exited—an image they shared with wide sectors of the elite and with several "formal"²³ discourses—they produced a sophisticated "topology of exclusion and incorporation": there were two escape routes, delinquency and rebellion, that generated two isomorphic pairs, irruption/stigma and rebellion/prosecution. The purpose of establishing differentiations in order to produce a unique identity signature, together with the justification of the existence of all the "outsiders" or excluded, would lead not only to discursive contortions but to volatile alliances between bandits and police forces (which are deeply involved in this game of trying to be inside and outside at the same time), between them and militiamen, between militiamen and the drug dealers, and so forth, in a frantic carousel that is extremely difficult to follow but that is NOT incoherent, inasmuch as it responds to a unique mental map. To kill bandits/to empower them, to differentiate between bandits and revolutionaries/to make them identical, become powerful cognitive games marking our peace and war processes and are tied to a long tradition (regarding this point, see the work of Sánchez and Meertens, 1984).

THE URBAN MILITIAS IN MEDELLÍN

The emergence of the militias has a recent antecedent in the period of strong violence that began in the mid-1970s with paid killers (*sicarios*). In the 1980s, with the boom of the drug traffic, favorable conditions were created for the interconnection of diverse processes already under way: the appearance of gangs in the barrios, the consolidation of gangs of delinquents and problems related to the corruption of the police and other security organisms. The drug traffic did not create anything new, but it did introduce important changes in the forms of organization and operation of delinquency with the formation of gangs specialized in paid killing, the use of the most modern armament and the capacity of developing joint activities and criminal business (the so-called "*cruces*") with the police, the army, the judges, and the inspectors.

To this, one can add the guerrillas' presence, with the formation of some commands or groups dedicated to obtaining financial resources or performing terrorist actions. In their negotiation process in the 1980s, the M19 created some "peace camps" with a strong component of military training. Many of these "camps" gave birth to bands of delinquents. The experiment of the M19 also had an important influence on the crisis of the traditional model of the guerrillas' presence in the city, which was based on the creation

of commands for the performance of attacks, hold-ups, and blackmailing to support the guerrilla fronts in the rural area. This *modus operandi* was questioned by militants and sympathizers of the National Liberation Front and of the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, which favored a strategy of military political work in the barrios to put an end to the excess of criminals and to establish a moral and communal order.

The militias themselves originated in the Barrio Popular no. 1, in northeast Medellín. This barrio is a heterogeneous conglomerate of low middle-class and lower-class sectors and of recently occupied neighborhoods. One of the main goals of the project was to defeat powerful gangs that had completely taken over these territories, many times with the complicity of the authorities. The success obtained in a first phase with the "cleansing" work was the key to its acceptance by the population and the neighborhood associations (Juntas de Acción Comunal). The militias defined themselves by the control of territories temporarily abandoned by the gangs, and by the appropriation of a function that the state should fulfill—security. "We are a state within the state," stated Pablo García, the leader of this project.

The military and political training of the founders of the militias was later retaken by some urban guerrilla nuclei and by the gangs, which shows the interconnection between political delinquency and common delinquency, additionally favored by drug traffic. This turns the militias into openly ambiguous actors in their discourses and practices. Although in their official statements and in their declarations to the media a leftist language was used, their activities were concentrated on eliminating the gangs to protect the community against the disorder caused by *chichipatos* (criminals who steal and rob in their own neighborhood), drug addicts, and rapists.

The experience of the People's Militias (Milicias del Pueblo) worked as a role model for other leftist organizations that established their own groups. They sought to copy a successful organizational model in a growing market of demand for security. However, this process of growth was offset by a weakening of the political dimension, with the massive recruitment of youngsters with no political training but with military experience, and the selective entrance of delinquents to the militias. This mechanism served the double purpose of re-socializing and co-opting individuals with the best military technique and the highest morale for fighting, but increasingly muddled the nature of the territorial control of the militias. Furthermore, the internal control—the ability of a personalized leadership, ideologized but weak, to model the behavior of the cadres—also became precarious. The abyss between the disciplinary mentality—which also inspired a war against bad behavior—and daily praxis became deeper and deeper. If in the beginning it was clear "who was who"—at least for those in the barrio who had called upon the militias to "cleanse" their territory—the task of identification became increasingly difficult, even for the protagonists of the military action.

In so far as the territory to be overseen also expanded, the different militias started to compete with each other, and this increased the so-called "settlings of accounts" among them.

More than because of the vicissitudes of war or because of political reasons, peace agreements began to be considered due to the coincidence between the burnt-out feeling of a generation of survivors and the atmosphere of optimism caused by the convocation of a Constituent National Assembly in 1991, which was expected to help design "a new country." The struggle with the gangs stagnated, and it was not clear who was actually fighting whom. The barrios that had been enthusiastic about the militias because they had expelled the criminals and established a certain moral order began to get tired and to rebel against their arbitrary power. The older militiamen began to evaluate their own trajectories from an ideological stand different from the one they held at the time of their involvement in the armed struggle.

From 1991 on, the first encounters between the founding nucleus of the militias and the local authorities took place, but the national government assented to a formal process of negotiation only in 1994. Time in this case was on the state's side, but both parties had high stakes in the negotiations. The militias expected to obtain political recognition and some advantages in order to consolidate their areas of influence. They risked being accused of treason by those forces that did not want to participate in the process. For the government, it was an opportunity to demonstrate its willingness to establish peace, in the face of the failure of negotiations with FARC. It feared, however, that the militias were not proper political actors, and that they were so divided that in fact there was nobody with whom to establish a dialogue. The local government, in turn, acted as a third party with its own interests, and it promoted the process as a unique event in Latin America (which in fact it was).

Between February and May 1994, a negotiation process with the participation of the *Milicias del Pueblo*, the *Milicias del Valle de Aburrá* (under the National Liberation Army), and a dissident sector of the latter, the *Milicias Independientes del Valle de Aburrá*, took place in Santa Helena, near Medellín. Other militia groups rejected any possibility of negotiation.

The process soon took an unexpected turn: the almost central role of the government's negotiators consisted in trying to prevent different factions of the militias from entering into a war of extermination, amid crossed accusations of complicity with the delinquency, with the authorities or with both. The urban war had served somehow to "freeze" the militia leaders into a conspiracy mentality (applied to their internal opponents), fed with popularizing literature and a visual military culture, but unable to come to the technical level required by a negotiation with the state. Even worse, the negotiation process weakened the social bases of the militiamen. The increment of homicides of militiamen in the barrios produced uncertainty among the

inhabitants of the north-eastern area, who had not been consulted about the convenience of a negotiation with the government and an eventual demobilization of the militias.

After six months of struggles, an agreement was reached and publicly signed on May 26, 1994 in the northeastern area. The central points of this agreement were:

—Social investment in the communes for the improvement of the community infrastructure and the increase in the coverage of basic health, education and recreation, as well as the creation of "nuclei of civic life."

—Creation of a cooperative of surveillance (*Coosercom*). The government signed a contract committing itself to paying a monthly amount of 150,000 to 500,000 pesos to 358 members of the cooperative, and to lend them up to 1,750,000 pesos. The cooperative would have five headquarters and surveillance coverage of 32 barrios in the north-eastern and north-western communes. The operation of *Coosercom* would be assessed by the Government's Office (*Secretaría de Gobierno*), and it was based on an explicit commitment of its members to respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of the community and to work jointly with the security services of the state in the prevention of crime, abstaining from assuming behaviors reserved to the police.

—Political privileges. The agreement did not include the concession of political privileges (for example, a minimum number of seats in the Municipal Council). Everything depended on the initiative of the militias to promote the establishment of a political force or to make agreements with other opposition groups. The only possibility validated was that of being invited to discussion forums per zone and organs of the administration on the mayor's initiative.

—Judicial benefits. This was the most discussed point due to the difficulties of adapting the points established in Law 104, 1993, to the situation of the militiamen. Many of them were being prosecuted not for political crimes but for common delinquency. For these militia members, what could be achieved was the concession of pardons and the suspension of criminal prosecution for collaborating with justice.

The agreement was plagued with difficulties. First of all, the creation of the cooperative placed the militiamen, reinstated in civil life, in a false position.²⁴ Their two missions should be to control the population and to offer information to the police. This turned them automatically into "traitors" in the eyes of their former partners, and favored the degradation of an atmosphere already poisoned by mistrust and mutual accusation. The work of surveillance of the barrios, exercised no longer by the militiamen

but by the members of the cooperative paid by the state itself, generated a discomfort that increased with the violations perpetrated by the members of the cooperative and their complicity with criminal acts. In the aftermath of the negotiation, numerous accusations of homicides, threats, blackmailing, and banishment on the part of the members of Coosercom were presented before the Ombudsman's Office (Defensoría del Pueblo), the Public Prosecutor's Office (Fiscalía) and the Social Pastoral. How could an organization whose main feature had been its expeditious character and its accusation of the slowness and complicity of the authorities become an appendix of the police?

Only 47 days after the signature of the agreements, an event that compromised the development of the whole process took place: Pablo García, the main leader of the Milicias del Pueblo, was murdered. The possibility of guaranteeing the cohesion of a direction team totally disappeared in the midst of the new actions of crossed revenge that unfolded soon after this event. The investigations of the public prosecutor to find the people responsible for Pablo García's murder culminated with the detention of the boss of the Milicias Independientes del Valle de Aburrá, who was accused of being the intellectual author of the crime. After Pablo's death, there was endless killing of militiamen of different factions.

In the electoral terrain, the militias also suffered a serious setback with the few votes obtained by their candidate to the town council of Medellín. As has happened in Colombia to many other actors, they had great difficulties in translating civil recognition into political recognition. For the militias, this was even harder since they were not prepared to cohabit with independent civil society organizations. For example, the social investment in the areas agreed upon with the government, instead of contributing to the legitimation of the militias, became a factor of discord among leaders and social organizations that accused the militias of unduly appropriating the achievements that were the result of community work. The voters in areas controlled by the militias chose to support the candidates of the traditional parties. The militiamen did not perceive that there was a huge gap between the elaborate and complex political culture of a generation of manual workers and their own proposals, with opaque literate references for the initiate and full of idiosyncratic experiences. Once again, the cohesive "us" of a local war ("us" of this street, "us" of this block, against those of the next one) did not have any possible translation into the scale of political life in a modern metropolis.

The relationships between Coosercom and the government became increasingly conflicted in the face of the difficulties related to the implementation of certain judicial privileges. A Supreme Court verdict struck down the benefits obtained by the militiamen, establishing that they should comply with the provisions contained in Law 1194 of 1989. Furthermore, the local

authorities were uninterested in the follow-up of a process for which the national government was responsible, and there were tensions among the Coosercom, security organisms and the 4th Army Brigade regarding the delivery of ammunition in view of the disappearance of weapons and their permits.

Although around 1995 the failure of the process was evident, the government tried to introduce some correctives to revert its dynamics, but to no avail. The liquidation of the cooperative in 1996 put an end to this experience, but not to the existence of groups of militias, which continued to operate in other areas, although under difficult conditions due to the strengthening of gangs that, in turn, have used the same methods as the militia for the "protection" of people living in its areas of influence. Coexistence pacts in the barrios also continued to be made, but with the mediation of local authorities through the officials in charge of peace and coexistence.

THE EXPERIENCE OF WESTERN BOYACÁ

Perhaps the first economically meaningful enclave taken over by organized crime in Colombia was the emerald business. Given in concession by the state to private companies, the emerald mines became a space where paternalistic practices, mafia protection, and violence comfortably cohabited. The network of complex relationships between the state and illegality illustrates the differences between a "porous state" and an "absent state." From the establishment of the republic (1819), legislation was passed according to which the resources of the subsoil were the exclusive property of the nation. Until 1946, the "nation's reserves" were administered through a system of concessions, with the presence of foreign companies and of illegal occupants. In 1946, the administration of the emerald mines passed to the central bank, the Banco de la República, whose status was also ambiguous (it operated as a central bank, but it was in the hands of a board of directors from the private sector. It would only become a real public entity about twenty years later). Through complex regional, ethnic, and political networks, the bank's administration encouraged the illegal economy, sometimes in conflict and sometimes in connivance with the central government. There were several attempts to correct such an anomalous situation, but they were always unsuccessful. The state has indeed been present, but it has unsettled pre-existing social relationships instead of regulating them (this brief summary is based on Guerrero, 2001, and Guerrero, 1986).

The above-mentioned pre-existing social relationships must have been, from very early on, a complex combination of verticality and social mobility. We are talking about a simultaneously hierarchical and dynamic society, in which not only violence but also primary allegiance supplanted the legal establishment as a guarantor of contracts. The *guaqueros*, workers who went

to the mines to try their luck, could enter the business if they got a *plantero* (a mediator who provided the tools and other indispensable conditions to begin the work). But they owed loyalty and respect mainly to the "leaders," entrepreneurs with their own armed forces who, in most cases, had also begun as *guaqueros*. The combination of intimidation, conspicuous expenditure, and vertiginous social upward mobility gave the leaders an enormous influence on the *guaqueros*.

They perform multiple functions, because they act as judges when they punish offenders and reward their more faithful servants: they are referees in family quarrels or employers that give work in the mines to their relatives or friends [...] the leaders are characterized by a combination of benevolence with the poor and an implacable coldness with those whom they consider their enemies. They have performed the role of both judge and party in dealing with all sorts of conflicts, watching that everybody gets what they consider fair, and even end up defining actions concerning public order and security in the municipalities and in the whole region. (Uribe, 1992: 100)

The stability of such a paternalistic domination was occasionally disturbed by killings involving territorially defined gangs. These "wars" involved not only different armed groups but also wide sectors of the population, in so far as the restrictions and prohibitions established by the conflicting parties implied, for example, the closing off of certain roads or areas, not to mention the possibility of vendettas that might affect the relatives of combatants. Moreover, the authorities also took sides in the conflict, because the enormous wealth generated by the emerald business was used to buy their connivance and even their direct participation. "The police force is not well regarded by the population in general," says an interesting government report.

During the last war, members of the police and of the army rented their uniforms, and agreed to perform official actions that exacerbated the rivalries even more. For example, a death that re-ignited the last war, that of Torcutato López, was executed by a soldier following the orders of the Vargas: the police arrested people that were wanted by the rival gang in order to facilitate their elimination. Some people were even killed in jail, since the paid gunmen hired to execute them had direct access to these prison facilities. (Ocampo, Rangel and Díaz, 1993: 26; see also Guerrero, 2001)

In the 1980s, the most virulent wave in the chronic confrontation among *esmeralderos* started. This time the conflict had to do with the control of the Coscuez mine. It is difficult to establish an exact date, since different oral sources, authors, and testimonies offer slightly different versions. More

important than to locate the day, month, and year of the beginning of this new phase is to highlight that two large national wars were taking place at the time. On the one hand, the dispute over the control of coca crops and the mutual accusations of having denounced to the authorities the existence of such crops set Molina, an *esmeraldero* leader, against Rodríguez Gacha, a don of the drug traffic. On the other hand, the *esmeralderos* soon became involved in a territorial dispute with FARC, and created armed groups to fight them. This led them into an alliance with the paramilitary, whose headquarters were close by at that time. "In January 1987, the mayor of Otanche denounced to the press the existence of an 'alliance between common criminals and the 12th Front of the FARC' whose objective was to control the resources of the emerald mines in Boyacá. This alliance made people from the emerald area look for protection among the inhabitants of Puerto Boyacá" (Peñate, 1991). But it is not clear that these groups were able to develop a collective action, and, in fact, at the moment in which Rodríguez Gacha was in the paroxysm of his dirty war against all that smelled of the left, he was also fighting against opposing *esmeralderos*. In 1989, Rodríguez Gacha died in a police operation. In 1990, Víctor Carranza, in the name of peace and of good business, was able to begin conversations with other leaders, and was recognized as a *primus inter pares* for his long-term vision.²⁵ Once again, the local rhythms coincided with the global ones, and the constitutional ethos of 1991 seemed like a big river in which all the pacifist slopes converged. The arguments in favor of pacts were enunciated nationally but were then appropriated in different ways by different actors. The conversations quickly produced results, and in September 1990 all the *esmeraldero* factions signed the first peace agreement, which ensured the joint exploration of Coscuez. Later, a more institutional option was chosen with the establishment of a Committee of Development and Normalization presided by the bishop of Chiquinquirá, and including the most prominent *esmeralderos*, the governor of Boyacá, the police departmental commandant, the commandant of the Sucre battalion based in Chiquinquirá, and the manager of the company Mineralco (Ocampo, Rangel, and Díaz, 1993: 27).

How does this bizarre peace pact work? Several features should be highlighted. First, "internal peace" did exist, if by that we understand a formal end to the hostilities among the *esmeraldero* factions, and the consequent decrease in diverse kinds of homicides (Ocampo, Rangel and Díaz, 1993; see also Table 7.2).²⁶

But the connections with the national war continued. Víctor Carranza, for example, did not stop in his fight against drug dealer Leonidas Vargas, following the tradition of conflict between *esmeralderos* and drug dealers (*El Espectador*, 1998; Guerrero, 2001). He also continued with his activity on the other flank: Carranza was arrested and imprisoned when the Prosecutor's

Table 7.2. COMMON HOMICIDES IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF WESTERN BOYACÁ BETWEEN 1984 AND 1998

Municipality/ year	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	TOTAL
CHIQUINQUIRÁ	18	18	28	27	30	34	26	14	52	45	34	28	31	24	25	434
BRICEÑO	10	6	9	2	8	16	9	7	10	1	1	3	3	0	4	89
BUENAVISTA	12	0	6	11	11	21	16	14	11	8	1	3	3	2	2	121
CALDAS	4	3	4	4	6	10	8	2	8	2	1	4	4	3	2	65
COPER	4	10	3	6	9	8	9	7	6	10	1	0	5	4	0	82
LA VICTORIA	3	11	4	3	8	4	11	8	1	3	0	1	0	2	1	60
MARIPI	17	23	37	45	19	41	23	11	14	12	4	7	7	3	6	269
MUZO	54	25	78	42	68	109	84	23	24	17	6	14	3	7	5	558
OTANCHE	18	24	31	32	25	13	17	32	34	27	10	9	8	19	9	308
PAUNA	24	32	17	28	31	39	19	27	43	46	12	14	12	9	13	366
QUIPAMA	0	0	0	30	63	95	37	17	11	6	3	8	7	2	2	281
SABOYA	5	8	6	8	8	20	8	7	5	13	8	7	9	7	4	123
SAN MIGUEL	1	1	2	0	5	2	2	3	2	6	4	3	6	1	1	39
DE SEMA																
SAN PABLO	41	32	54	82	41	46	22	27	64	74	25	45	47	16	27	643
DE BORBUR																
TUNUNGUA	2	4	0	1	2	3	3	5	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	25
TOTAL	212	197	279	321	334	461	294	204	288	272	110	146	145	99	101	3,463

Source: Boyacá Police Department

Office found serious indications that he was involved in paramilitary activities (*El Tiempo*, 1998). This generated multiple protests in Western Boyacá. It was believed that the prosecution of Carranza was only the first step in an attempt by the central government to dismantle the *esmeralderos'* power. Miguel Espitia, mayor of Quípama, expressed the following unconsciously Brechtian admonition: "The government should look at us in another way and understand that the leaders of this country are apostles of peace and that Don Víctor deserves respect, solidarity for his cause. This is a case that affects us all, and if we remain indifferent, tomorrow they will take us all. Because of this, we should remain united" (Records of the Verification and Normalization Committee, Coscuez, 1 April 1998).

Second, the Church has played a central role. Even the vocabulary ("apostles," "catechism," "faith") used in the basic discursive routines is colored by Catholicism. In the peace agreement that put an end to the hostilities between the parties in dispute there is a meaningful combination of the typical motives that fed the Constitution of 1991 and basic Catholic categories: "Solidarity of the same race, as Christians, brothers in the same faith," we defend "mutual harmony, [...] community organization for progress, respect for all human rights, for legal norms." In sum, "we have decided to opt for the civilized and Christian way of dialogue, coexistence, concord, harmony, respect for individuality and understanding."

Furthermore, the Church has been the only party with credibility in the mediation processes. Since in these "conversations between gentlemen" there is a permanent temptation to not behave as gentlemen (the mutual post-pact accusations include murders, turning the authorities against a leader, slanders and rumors), the Church is the last instance to which one can appeal, and in spite of all the difficulties that this role implies,²⁷ it has learned to keep it without losing face. In addition, it has offered to the process a network of intellectuals and mediators, the priests in every town, able to formulate the terms of civic coexistence through sermons and the use of the "catechism," as well as the participation in specific disputes. "Some parish priests in Muzo and Quípama act as mediators in conflicts among the clientele of the different leaders. These clientele are made up of all the people in the leader's retinue, especially ordinary people without any position or rank. In this sense, the parish priests have represented a support and a channel for airing the disputes among families in favor of contrary parties in times of war" (Ocampo, Rangel, and Díaz, 1993: 22).²⁸ The line that separates mediation and justification is indeed a thin one. "The bishop of Chiquinquirá is an ally of the leaders, his intervention has been a bridge and mediation in quarrels and confrontations to death" (Ocampo, Rangel, and Díaz, 1993: 13). The intervention of the priests "does not exclude the exaltation of the influence of the bosses as authority figures." This is corroborated many times not only in the field but also in interviews with the protagonists of the pact.

What the leaders are proposing is in fact the reconstruction—invention would be a better word because there is no precedent—of a traditional community under their leadership. To the Church, a double civilizing role is attributed: on the one hand, to educate the social bases in civic skills and to disarm them, in a literal and figurative sense, and, on the other hand, to accompany the leaders in their maturation process, so that they are able to solve their dilemmas of collective action. For this reason, the social structure that serves as a correlate to the pact is a pyramid: “The departmental authorities describe as a pyramid the structure of the peace agreements in western Boyacá. At the base, we have the *guaqueros*, in the middle the merchants, and at the top the leaders” (Ocampo, Rangel, and Díaz, 1993: 45). Going back to the anti-political and civic slogans predominant among public opinion in the 1990s, they have also subordinated the traditional political class, making theirs the role of mediation of the politicians or using it to their own benefit. The leaders launch mayors and councilmen and support them. They are paid off with loyalty and deference. If there are not many cases of direct intimidation against the municipal authorities on the part of the leaders, this is perhaps due to the fact that disobedience is quite uncommon (although this does not mean that it is non-existent). But the range of the leaders’ influence, and their capacity to subordinate the political middlemen, is not confined to the municipal field: “In the course of one of our visits we met a deputy and a municipal council representative that were inside the facilities of the Quípama mine, presumably working as *guaqueros*; their dependence on the leaders is evident” (Ocampo, Rangel, and Díaz, 1993: 28). However, as the pact developed, political competition started and some leaders had to face resounding, and unexpected, electoral defeats. The political middlemen find that peace has produced democracy. For an interviewee, “When we were at war, there were restrictions and several times the first mayors were the only candidates. The town’s first two mayors chosen by popular election were the only candidates. In those elections there were no more candidates; they were of course imposed candidates, but since then there has been more democracy and more candidates in the elections.”

But obviously it is a strange democracy, even taking into consideration that the opening seems to have been real, and this highlights the ambiguous role of the state. Since peace has led to real results—a decrease in homicides—the state would not want to destabilize the pact. Therefore, it does not intervene and in effect turns a blind eye,²⁹ but at the same time it allows the participation of the governor, and commandants of the army and the police in the Committee of Normalization. This is curious enough, since the official policy of the armed forces during the last ten years has been to refuse to participate in negotiations with guerrillas, arguing that they did not have anything to talk about with outlaw groups.³⁰ However, the armed forces in Boyacá have fluctuated between acceptance of the pact and alarm at the

esmeralderos’ armed power and illegal activities, keeping complete silence on the latter’s connections with paramilitary activities.³¹ The *esmeralderos*, in turn, see themselves as defenders of legality, and continue to see the central government as their adversary, at least while their two basic demands are not met: demands of a regional character (which the government would be willing to accept to a certain extent) and judicial immunity for the leaders (impossible to grant, among other reasons because of the international repercussions that it would have). Meanwhile, following Carranza’s lead, the emerald activity has been successfully internationalized. This highlights the fact that traditionalist restoration and globalization not only can cohabit, but that there are even situations in which one is a prerequisite for the other, as Ocampo, Rangel, and Díaz have already pointed out (1993).

This situation can be maintained only if there is a politicization of war and peace among the *esmeralderos*. Some typical motives in the most openly political peace pacts—“forgive and forget,” “a fresh start,” regional and social demands, strict respect for the law in the post-pact period, guarantees—were imported directly from other processes, and the imitation has sometimes been truly meticulous. Nevertheless, the most important legitimating role corresponds once again to traditionalist civic conduct: to appease, to make behave, and to teach and lead a social base that has violent customs and is indifferent to the common good. The promise of a new, much better, life is associated with good behavior. Thus it is understandable that the pact has been celebrated in every locality as a true civic festival—usually paid for by the dominant leader—with speeches that proclaim the beginning of a new form of social regulation. But one cannot forget that, on behalf of the common good, petty thieves, transgressors, personal and political opponents are stigmatized, exiled, and even eliminated—they are all enemies of order. If the machinery seems perfectly oiled, this is an erroneous impression. There are people who can look critically at and denounce this pyramidal order. With simple and direct words, they make the victim’s voice, not that of the victimizers, be heard:

Mr. Archbishop of the Diocese of Chiquinquirá, I greet you with all respect. I, Pedro Pérez, [write to you] with the purpose of making you aware of the following anomalies that have been afflicting the region of Muzo. The self-defense group, or whatever they call it, because the authorities are aware of all these crimes that are silenced because they are not announced on the radio, catch the people and take them at night to the Minero river [...] there they shoot them dead, they steal their documents so that no name appears. It is not possible that there is no justice, because to my understanding a person that kills another and takes all he has is unsociable, it is not as [they believe], that the unsociable one is the dead person. (Letter, personal file)³²

Conclusions

The two cases that we have presented are, in many ways, deeply different, but they have something in common: an "inverted Lamarckianism." Necessity hinders, rather than facilitates, the appearance of an organized whole. The more cycles of the pendular movement there are, the more difficult it is to think outside this movement. This is not by chance, and it points to the possible importance of the Colombian case. Inasmuch as the export of formal democracy to Third World countries is one of the most important characteristics of political globalization, the tension between stable institutional macro-forms and violent dynamics, with the resulting pendular "attractor," could become widespread. For the analysts who have denounced the wrongs of the country as the result of the weight of pre-modernity, the irony may consist in the fact that the Colombian experience points more to the future of global capitalism, at least in the less-developed territories, than to its past.³³

It is important to stress the fact that the pacts described here were not simple legitimating instruments or purely strategic maneuvers. All the parties involved made concessions, and the result was that the agreements in fact saved many lives. But the costs are also evident. The armed actors in both cases saw the opportunity to continue doing the same thing, although under new forms and with the aura of legality that the symbols and guarantees of the state confer.

As for the options for democratic development, both cases—and especially the militias—have an integrative component, but at the cost of sacrificing the individual rights of each member of the *comunidades* they want to incorporate. Taking this into account, the possibilities of formulating ideas on democratic emancipation are reduced. In the first place, there is no adequate language for formulating national proposals, in so far as certain demands are unacceptable under the rule of law (for example, the judicial immunity of armed actors for crimes such as homicide). In other words, the possibilities of success for these territorial dictatorships are inversely proportional to those of the establishment of a viable national framework in the world order. The socio-technical correlate of this is the inability of the armed discourses to propose policies in universalistic terms. Their speeches, admonitions, manuals, and catechisms say something—much, in fact—to their social bases, but they do not make sense when the scale of enunciation is amplified. Second, their synchronization with globalization is merely opportunistic, in the sense that they use the resources offered by it to produce a territorial enclosure based on tradition. Third, the mixtures in all the dimensions—via imitation, alliance, co-optation, representation (in the theatrical sense, as in the case of criminal actors who adopt political roles and vice versa)—are so dense that it is difficult to know "who is who" and "what is what." As we said in the beginning, the more sophisticated the exercise of local differentiation, the more complicated it is at the national level.

We highlight the fact that this experience is and has been criticized with great clarity by all kinds of voices. "Inverted Lamarckianism" refers only to the ability to make proposals. The criticism, which is certainly not restricted to the academic sphere, has centered on denouncing a certain "Colombian model," a complex system of interdependent conflicts with very visible (and unpleasant) emerging features: a terrorist state by delegation (a political form that has quickly achieved prominence), with constant regional shifts between territorial dictatorship and war, all of this amidst "a savage model of development that denies rights" (García, 1995). In many parts of the world, this may sound increasingly familiar.

Notes

- 1 Several actors, including terrorist groups of the extreme right, have taken advantage of this fact to mobilize broad social sectors against the peace policies. For example, in 2000, a group of peasants of Magdalena Medio, Asocipaz, supported by Carlos Castaño's vigilante group, led a powerful mobilization to prevent the government from granting a clearance area (*zona de despeje*) to the National Liberation Army. The immediate referent of this successful demand was the experience of the clearance area of FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).
- 2 This could be, at least partially, a result of self-destruction, as we will see below. In actual cases, the three outcomes can be combined, in different processes and periods.
- 3 Threats of a civil war.
- 4 This could be true even in the case of the paramilitary groups. This explains their difficulty in leading a block of the extreme right. The paramilitary groups, staunch defenders of the old order, have turned to social practices that irreparably weaken the old order (plunder, alliance with the drug traffic, military use of resources such as gasoline and information). Something similar happens in the case of Boyacá which we will discuss later.
- 5 For example, changing gender roles for good. See Salazar, 1993.
- 6 A novel by the Antioquian writer Manuel Mejía Vallejo, *Aire de Tango*, develops this topic marvelously. A lower-class young man murders his teacher and role model precisely because he wants to imitate him.
- 7 Rural armed groups also developed similar practices.
- 8 We understand percolation as an iterated mix.
- 9 According to the periods established by Mario Aguilera.
- 10 The canonical example is surely the icon of Ché Guevara.
- 11 Of course, this is often consciously taken advantage of—and designed—by the elites: "We are all guilty" is a foundational statement of Colombian Republicanism (see Gutiérrez, 1998). Here there is a combination of hegemony and uncertainty, with mutual feedback.

- 12 Many militiamen changed the readings of the Marxist manuals for those of Deepak Chopra. The cases of re-conversion from political militancy to religious illumination are not scarce. Less provoking, but more significant, is that the armed activity of the militias—and the pacifying one of the *esmeralderos* in Western Boyacá—has been guided by a powerful pedagogic agenda whose center is the idea of self-reform and personal growth.
- 13 As in many other countries, self-help literature is invariably that which has sold best in recent years. The ratio of books sold to books read is perhaps also very high.
- 14 That is, unable to build “the material basis for consensus,” to use Przeworski’s expression (1995).
- 15 According to Marco Palacios’s expression.
- 16 A common matrix of critical thought led to the modernization and re-founding of Colombian social science in the 1960s and 1970s. Later developments led to the institutionalization of the activity of planning within the state, and to the creation of autonomous academic communities in the universities. Some of the sectors that remained at the margins of this process—either because they considered it a betrayal or because they were not incorporated into it—supported new phases of the armed struggle. Being in a different activity, they knew well the argumentative repertoire of “the other” intellectuals, as became evident in the many debates that occurred in the last decade between figures located at both sides of the barricade (Gutiérrez, forthcoming). Of course, as time goes by, the distance between the two languages has increased, and the possibilities of translation have diminished.
- 17 This was not evident until very late in the 1980s.
- 18 The permanent game between “negation” and “recovery” of traditions is, as we will see, one of the most remarkable aspects in armed argumentation.
- 19 Maybe it is not possible to find them, and so it is necessary to begin with a typology: on the one hand the protest forces, on the other the paramilitary groups, etc. Nevertheless, an important aspect that should be stressed is that the paramilitary groups develop, in the discursive field, a subordinate and clearly imitative role that sometimes has an evident tone of an inverted Leninism. See, for example, Quiñones Nova, 1990, the bible of the members of the self-defense groups in wide areas of the Magdalena Medio. This is a clear and tragic example of percolation. See also Cubides, 1997.
- 20 A still more ambitious, and perhaps necessary, proposal would be to decipher the “ideology” of the armed groups—in Van Dijk’s sense (1999) of “fundamental coordinates of social groups”—and then to evaluate similarities and differences between such groups.
- 21 The militiamen from Medellín also responded to the explicit demand of “cleaning” their barrios. In fact, the notion of racial cleaning/purity/superiority has a long tradition in the department of Antioquia, and must have been inherited, amid multiple mediations and discontinuities, by the militias.

- 22 This may not be confined to the cases we are discussing. In an extensive interview, Jaime Guaracas, one of the historical commandants of FARC, defended the revolution on behalf of a community existing before and not after capitalism. “Those regions were so healthy, that one really wants to go back to those times” (Aldana, 1999: 32). This spirit pervades the whole interview.
- 23 Notice that in this exercise only literate people, with the ability to study, understand, translate and read the press, the academic texts, and government declarations, could be involved.
- 24 But the perspective of the government negotiators and of the militiamen should not be taken lightly: the members of the organization only knew how to make war, and their “reinsertion” into non-qualified manual labor would be unacceptable to them.
- 25 The trajectory of Carranza, a first-generation multi-millionaire of rural origin, is an example of another version of the “literate revolution”: self-taught, he quickly learned how to move in business and in politics. In association with professional teams and allied institutions, he managed to develop his own discourse for the region (*El Espectador*, 1998 A).
- 26 In fact, the decrease has been substantial but partial: there are less dead people than during the war, but more than before it began. Something similar happens with the militia process in Medellín that we have just described. Apparently, the pacts did “stabilize,” but did not “normalize.”
- 27 Every leader would want the Church to be an impartial guarantor of the agreement and at the same time to favor his interests.
- 28 In the barrios influenced by the militia in Medellín, the priests also constituted a network of enormous importance for mediation activities and for the consolidation of the vision of a “desirable environment.”
- 29 This produces strangeness and bitterness among the *esmeralderos*. The president of the republic was not present at either the signature of the pact or the celebration of its tenth anniversary. He was represented by delegations, and sent uncompromising, anodyne greetings.
- 30 They also attended the conversations with the militiamen.
- 31 The denunciation of such connections has been exclusively entrusted to the Public Prosecutor.
- 32 Spelling and punctuation have been adjusted.
- 33 This idea is stated and developed in detail in Gutiérrez (1997).

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