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Building a Culture of Peace: The San José de Apartadó Peace Community

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Abstract

The case of the Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó (San José de Apartadó Peace Community) in the Urabá region of Antioquia, Colombia—a geostrategic territory disputed by various actors in conflict—calls attention to the importance of the transformation and handling of social and political conflicts and building a culture of peace.

El caso de la Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó en la región de Urabá en Antioquia, Colombia, un territorio geoestratégico disputado por diversos actores en conflicto, nos remite a la importancia de la transformación y manejo de los conflictos sociales y políticos, así como la construcción de una cultura de paz.

Keywords

Peace community, Culture of peace, Social movements, Conflicts, Colombia

Among the many experiments in resistance created by subaltern sectors faced with the lengthy social and political conflict in Colombia is the Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó (San José de Apartadó Peace Community), in the Urabá region of Antioquia, which by 1997 had become a landmark case because of the uniqueness of its structure. Through collective decisions, its members have built a culture of peace based on active neutrality[1] and a popular peasant base that promotes nonviolence, education for peace, and peaceful civil resistance. This experiment has succeeded in resisting both political violence and economic devastation. The objective of this article is to show how, through an organizational structure with legal, economic, cultural, self-governance, and territorial defense dimensions, the community has consolidated new social alternatives, developing aspects that contribute to peace building and becoming an agent of community political sovereignty in the midst of violence. This case study has elements that may be useful in research on other social movements in Latin America that are fighting for autonomy in settings of systematic violence. The text has two sections. In the first we describe some grassroots peace experiments in the Colombian context and explore the reasons for the construction of projects from this perspective. In the second we examine the Peace Community's building of a culture of peace over more than 20 years.

Theoretical Rationales

Much of the literature on violence in Colombia has focused on human rights violations, the guerrilla organizations, and particular social movements. There is very little theoretical input on peace initiatives, which, although they are not social movements in a strict sense, do share their objectives with regard to opposition to violence. In order to analyze the Peace Community, we first gathered inputs focused on the

transformation of conflicts and alternatives for building peace and reconciliation, particularly in complex scenarios of armed conflict such as the Colombian case. We used the theoretical-methodological route proposed by Lorenzo Cadarso (2001), which employs seven elements (process, contentious interaction, social actors, mobilization, cognitive guidelines, organization, and objectives) to explain the origins of conflict in the community, its resources and opportunities, and its proposal of a social counterproject. We also drew upon the proposal of López Martínez (2017) regarding the conceptualization of nonviolence and the construction of a culture of peace. Through these concepts we examined the community's ethico-political practices, strategies, and politico-social pressure mechanisms, which emphasize respect for life and the physical integrity of adversaries. Along this line, with Fisas (1998) we were able to envisage five possible scenarios for building peace in settings of armed conflict and promoting mechanisms for education about a culture of peace that link alternative experiences with the acknowledgment of reciprocal interests and respect for the diversity of cultural identities. In addition, we included the work of Hernández (2000; 2002), a pioneer in the study of peace building in conflict settings led by Afro-descendant, indigenous, and peasant communities in Colombia, on what she calls community-based civilian peace initiatives.

In a second approach we focused on the contributions of researchers on the new social movements in Latin America and their links to territoriality and political ecology. Through the socio-territorial studies of Escobar (2010) we reflected on the ways in which communities connect with their territories and build their *sentipensar* (thinking-feeling) and place-based practices in a context of the intersection of armed violence, nature, and development.

Finally, drawing on the research of Ballvé (2013), we confirmed that violence in the Urabá region was due not to the absence of the state but to the relationship between state policies, drug-related violence, and the geostrategic interests of the region's various actors.

With these approaches we constructed a theoretical-methodological framework for analyzing the practices of the Peace Community and the features of peace initiatives and grassroots civil resistance in conflict settings.

Methodology

For this qualitative investigation, we used the ethnographic method, with fieldwork in 2018 that included 12 semistructured interviews to explore the organizational process centered on the culture of peace. We also held broad discussions with teachers and researchers who had studied social movements, conflict, and peace from various epistemological positions and conversations with people who, while not members of the Peace Community, had provided it support in different areas for a number of years. Among these latter were the current and former peace *brigadistas* Father Javier Giraldo, who has accompanied the Peace Community since its inception, and Gloria Cuartas, who in addition has conducted valuable research on its critical geography.

We also undertook critical collective mapping (Ares and Risler, 2013) to interpret the past, present, and future of the population and nature on the basis of historically rooted conventions and to understand the productive-reproductive infrastructure and services, interpret social and cultural relations, and comprehend conflicts, risks, vulnerabilities, and possibilities from an intergenerational perspective that drew on the community's oral history.

At the same time, we employed the methodology developed by the Mexican human rights organization Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz (Advisory Services for Peace—SERAPAZ), which allowed us to examine timelines, maps of actors and correlations, maps of the conflict, and the "ABC triangle" (attitudes, behavior, and context) to understand the different perceptions of the problem and create

strategies for its transformation that could be used in consciousness raising with the communities (SERAPAZ, 2008).

Urabá: A Contextual Sketch

Urabá is a geostrategic zone of Colombia located between the departments of Antioquia, Córdoba, Chocó, and Tapón del Darién that has great cultural diversity, including indigenous peoples (such as the Kuna and the Emberá Katío), Afro-Colombians, and mestizos. As a coastal region on the Caribbean Sea in Antioquia, contiguous with Panama, with an outlet to the Atlantic Ocean, it has attracted many interests. Historically, there have been numerous confrontations in the region of the Gulf of Urabá; various dominant national and transnational sectors dispute the geopolitical control of this agro-industrial area and its coal, petroleum, gold, timber, and water resources.

Disputes escalated in the 1970s and 1980s, when the country was immersed in warfare and many social sectors were urgently demanding agreements to deal with the social unrest. During the Belisario Betancur administration (1982–1986) an initial peace dialogue with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—FARC) took place, and the Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union—UP), a leftist political party made up of several guerrilla sectors challenging the country's traditional two-party rule and supported by a large number of peasants (some of them now members of the Peace Community), emerged. However, although the UP grew as a party in the 1980s, gaining acceptance among the popular sectors, so did the strength of the alliance between drug traffickers and paramilitaries. Urabá became one of the trade routes used for arms and drug trafficking with Panama and Central America. With the exception of the guerrillas, who no longer exist in the region, those interests continue to be causes of conflict today. Threats and assassinations in Urabá continue, with an ever-increasing presence of paramilitary groups.

What we have said here about Urabá is true of much of the country because of the policies established by the government of Iván Duque. There are at least three major threats for social movements in the country: systematic persecution and killing that stifle the legitimate right to social protest, measures aimed at dismantling citizen rights, and noncompliance with commitments, including the peace accords. Despite these threats, through the peace accords Colombians took on the challenge of creating another kind of society, and new forms of mobilization and rebellion have arisen that are keeping the existing order in check. The November 21, 2019, national strike and that of April 28, 2021, in which millions of demonstrators took over the streets demanding that the Duque government rescind its reforms of labor, pensions, and taxes, seeing them as neoliberal economic measures detrimental to the popular classes. In addition to the strike, experiments such as the Cumbre Agraria, Campesina, Étnica y Popular (Agrarian, Peasant, Ethnic, and Popular Summit)[2] have been proposing bottom-up peace building stemming from grassroots organizing.

Urabá is coveted by various actors. Megaprojects endangering the Peace Community are being conducted by transnationals, and military operations are continuing the national security policy begun under Álvaro Uribe Vélez. A 2017 report by the Ombudsman's Office issued an alert regarding the expansion of the Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (Gaitanista Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) in Urabá and the consequences of their socio-territorial control of rural and urban areas, increasing dispossession, threats to the population, and pressure on human rights advocates and peasant leaders, especially those connected with the Peace Community.

Grassroots Peace Experiments: Civil Resistance and Active Neutrality in Light of the Colombian Conflict

Various countries the world over have experienced or are now experiencing armed conflict. According to the Global Peace Index, peace has been eroded by the COVID-19 pandemic not only in the Middle East and Africa but also in Europe. During 2020 some 34 armed conflicts were recorded, with the majority concentrated in Africa (15) and Asia (9), followed by the Middle East (6), Europe (3), and the Americas (1). After Syria, Colombia is the country with the greatest number of internally displaced persons and increasing attacks on and murders of human rights defenders. "Seventy-three percent (73 percent) of the cases of tensions analyzed were linked to opposition to internal or international policies of certain governments or of the overall political, social or ideological system of the state; 39 percent had to do with demands for self-government and/or questions of identity; and 31 percent were due to disputes over the control of territories and/or resources" (Escola de Cultura de Pau, 2021: 13). However, the report points to factors that could result in positive change: transition in Sudan and South Sudan, progress on a peace, gender, and security agenda in the European Union, the resolution of the political status of Bougainville Island, and possibilities for justice and reparations for the victims of the conflict in Syria. In other cases there are possibilities for peace and a cease-fire in the midst of an armed conflict, although they will require political will, commitment, and a guarantee of nonrepetition. Fisas (2010) speaks of five possibilities: (1) reinsertion, which occurs when an armed group agrees to lay down its arms in exchange for receiving assistance in reintegration (participating in a program of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration), as in the case of the Frente para a Libertação do Enclave de Cabinda (Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda—FLEC) and that of the Ninja in the Congo; (2) political, economic, and military power sharing, which occurs when armed groups rise up against the established powers and take over the political leadership of the country and then economic and military affairs, as in the cases of Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (where various factions participated in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue) and Burundi's peace process; (3) interchange, by which peace is achieved in exchange for something else, such as the "peace for territories" exchange in El Salvador and Guatemala, in South Africa with the African National Congress, and in Colombia between the government and the FARC; (4) the creation of confidence measures, as in India and Pakistan in the resolution of the Kashmir conflict and in the relations between the two Koreas; and (5) "intermediate political architectures" such as were undertaken to achieve peace in Northern Ireland, in Indonesia (the Aceh region), and in southern Sudan and in the negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines (Fisas, 2010).

Our case study of the Urabá region stems from a context in which a geography of accumulation and dispossession has been imposed with a continuum of aggression promoted by the state, the actors in the conflict, and the transnationals. Reflection on the geographies of resistance is urgent. Hernández (2009) has pointed to the emergence in Colombia of a significant number of community-based civilian or grassroots peace initiatives that bring together the values of their cultures, bolstering nonviolent mechanisms of an incomplete or imperfect peace. She distinguishes these initiatives according to their original intent as follows: (1) civil resistance against structural violence, armed conflict, and neoliberalism (the indigenous resistance in the Department of Cauca); (2) civil resistance against structural violence and armed conflict (Cocomacia in Chocó's Medio Atrato); (3) civil resistance to the violence of armed conflict (the San José de Apartadó Peace Community, the Comunidades de Autodeterminación, Vida y Dignidad del Cacarica, the Organización Indígena de Antioquia, and the Carare Peasant Workers' Association; (4) cultural resistance (the indigenous Uitoto, Bora, Okaina, and Muinane de la Chorrera and the Afro-Colombians of Palenque de San Basilio); (5) women's denunciation of the effects of war on women and demands for respect for their bodies as territories of peace (Ruta Pacífica and the Organización Femenina Popular); (6) municipal constituent assemblies seeking to transform the situation using participatory processes that strengthen democracy and enable them to plan

their development (an estimated 300 instances, among them Mogotes Tarso and La Argentina); (7) conscientious objector collectives resisting the militarization of society and the restrictions on freedom of conscience represented by mandatory military service; and (8) the pursuit of humanitarian accords with the armed actors, protection of their rights, and support for other victims of political violence (the Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crimenes del Estado [National Movement of Victims of State Crimes—MOVICE], Amor, and the Asociación Colombiana de Familiares Miembros de la Fuerza Pública Retenidos y Liberados por Grupos Guerrilleros [Colombian Association of Family Members of Police and Military Held Hostage by Guerrillas—ASFAMIPAZ]).

Among these the community-based civilian peace initiatives, the peace communities were distinguished by the creation of their own laws and justice system. They originated as a mechanism of self-protection in the late 1990s, when Urabá was the site of four significant initiatives of the Comisión Intercongregacional de Justicia y Paz (Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission). These four peace communities were Natividad de María, made up of villagers from Bocas de Curvaradó, established in 1998; Nuestra Señora del Carmen, formed in 1999 in Río Salaquí; San José de Apartadó, founded in 1997; and San Francisco de Asís, in the Department of Chocó, established in 1997. The last of these was located in one of the areas most affected by the conflict and was organized by 49 communities there that had been displaced by the wave of violence. However, a year and a half after the formation of the community the residents were able to return to their territories because of agreements reached with the government. Similarly, all of the remaining members of the peace communities returned to the 57 settlements they had come from in Bajo Atrato (Burnyeat, 2015: 67), and in the case of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community some families began to return to the township of La Unión on their own and without government guarantees. Others later returned to the hamlets of Arenas Altas, La Esperanza, and Mulatos.

Although the peace communities may have nominally disappeared with the return of their members to their territories, conflict and violence persist in Urabá, causing other peaceful civil resistance initiatives to emerge. Among them are the humanitarian zones of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, made up of Afro-descendants displaced by the security forces and paramilitaries in the late 1990s who returned to demand the right to land and an end to the expansion of African palm cultivation in the area. Similarly, the humanitarian zones of Cacarica are made up of some 1,200 returned peasants who had been displaced by the Seventeenth Brigade's Operation Genesis and the paramilitaries. Through Law 70 of 1993, they possess a collective title that makes them beneficiaries of 103,024 hectares of land.

The San José de Apartadó Peace Community is one of the most meaningful experiments in the construction of autonomy and peace in Urabá in that it not only constitutes a political challenge to agro-industrial capitalism's territorial dispossession but also organizes alternative social relations through a community economy and popular self-governance. It allows one to think about the possibility of an anticapitalist project structured around civil resistance[3] to war and political violence.

The Creation of the Peace Community

The San José de Apartadó Peace Community came into being in 1997 in a group of 32 hamlets 12 kilometers from the municipality of Apartadó, one of the 11 municipalities that make up Antioquia's Urabá subregion. The municipality had been formed in the mid-1960s with the arrival of families displaced by partisan violence in Dabeiba, Peque, Urama, and Frontino, who colonized vacant lands and began to coexist with the FARC's Fifth Front and pursue job opportunities in banana production with the United Fruit Company. Later, in the 1980s, Apartadó was an electoral stronghold of the Communist Party and the UP, but it was also the site of their annihilation through the combined action of the paramilitaries,

the army, and the transnational companies. The Peace Community came together in the midst of a conflict marked by massacres and the assassination of one of its founders, Bartolomé Cataño. Apartadó in the mid-1990s was engulfed in violence, but more than 500 peasants refused to leave their lands, risking their lives to demand change. The San José de Apartadó Peace Community was formed on March 23, 1997, with the support of the Diocese of Apartadó, the Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (Center for Research and Popular Education), and the Inter-Church Justice and Peace Commission—the latter coordinated by Father Javier Giraldo and represented by Eduard Lancheros, who remains a key philosophical and ethical referent for the community to this day. According to the community's account of the event (Comunidad de Paz, 2017),

> The majority of families had left because of the two massacres perpetrated by the military in September 1996 and February 1997. . . . Those of us who remained took on the process as the only possibility for sustaining ourselves and living decently in the midst of war. We often had to contend with the armed actors as a group: the guerrillas said that we were with the paramilitaries, and the paramilitaries and the army accused us of being guerrillas. By standing together we had the strength to confront them and say that they had to kill all of us because we would not let them take anyone away. This was one of our first instances of resistance.

To achieve their objectives, they had to have the two parties in conflict commit to respecting the neutrality of the community, and therefore they had to speak directly with the commanders of the army and the guerrillas. The International Red Cross declined to mediate because they dealt only with armed actors, but the Church agreed to do so and received a positive response from both parties (CINEP, 2019). Despite this, a few days after the signing of the declaration the community was attacked by the paramilitaries and the military. According to Giraldo (2000),

> The military and paramilitaries did not want to accept this type of neutrality. Their understanding of "neutrality' was only about severing relations with the guerrillas and would not allow a community to decide not to participate in the war, not to provide [the combatants] with information or sell them food, and to demand that they not enter their peace territory bearing weapons. And for that reason they decided to destroy it at all costs.

Building a Culture of Peace

The San José de Apartadó Peace Community is located in a geostrategic zone coveted by numerous actors who regard the community as an obstacle to achieving their objectives, and this has limited its organizing efforts. It governs itself with a set of bylaws, developed in a participatory fashion, that has 12 articles and a declaration informed by five principles: freedom, transparent dialogue, respect for plurality, solidarity, and resistance and justice (Comunidad de Paz, 1997). These regulations and principles are reflected in the self-governance that is the first dimension of its organizational structure. It has an internal council, chosen by the community every two years, that is made up of seven delegates and a public prosecutor, but its highest authority is the assembly, which meets weekly and makes decisions. This organic structure is horizontal, and in it the natural world, Mother Earth, is seen as a participant in the decisions made. Faced with the need to protect its territory and its autonomy through civil resistance, the Peace Community has had to strengthen its organizational process through broad networks of support and solidarity with human rights organizations, collectives, and nongovernmental organizations, first to make demands of the state and later to position itself with regard to it.

A second dimension of the community's organizational structure is legal autonomy. It promotes alternative restorative justice and the recognition of collective rights. Initially, it operated in terms of the Colombian legal framework, seeking recognition by the government through the intercession of the Inter-

Church Justice and Peace Commission. However, the murders and harassment continued to occur on a regular basis. For example, on July 8, 2000, six people were assassinated by a joint operation of the military and paramilitaries in the hamlet of La Unión, and on February 21, 2005, seven people were murdered, among them Luis Eduardo Guerra, one of the community's interlocutors with the state, who had prevented a police station from being installed in the territory. In response to this, the Peace Community decided to sever relations with governmental institutions (Comunidad de Paz, 2005: 116):

> The community is opposed to the continued participation in a formal but completely ineffective and evasive dialogue regarding the critical problems affecting it, which are the crimes perpetrated by agents of the state against the community, and especially after demonstrating that this dialogue was a façade, since by the president's ordering of security forces into the homes and workplaces of the community in March of this year, it completely ignored the progress made on this matter in the dialogue with the vice president's office.

Subsequently it maintained ties solely with the Constitutional Court, which has been diligent in its protection of the community and issued three judgments in its favor. At the conclusion of a security council meeting in Carepa, Antioquia, at the headquarters of the Seventeenth Brigade, Uribe Vélez (2005) stated:

> Peace communities have the right to establish themselves in Colombia owing to our system of freedoms. But they may not, as is occurring in San José de Apartadó, obstruct justice, reject security forces, prohibit the sale of lawful articles, or restrict the freedom of the citizens residing there. There are good people in the San José de Apartadó community, but some of its leaders, sponsors, and defenders are seriously identified by persons who have lived there as having aided the FARC and as intending to use the community to protect this terrorist organization.

With this declaration, he proceeded to militarize the area. In light of this situation, the Peace Community responded (Comunidad de Paz, 2005: 103):

> The head of state is engaging in the crimes of slander and insult, compounded by the evident intent to destroy the values and essential practices of a community known for its uncommon effort to live out the provision of Article 22 of the constitution and having devised mechanisms for the defense of life, physical integrity, and freedom in a context of war.

Various international organizations spoke out, among them Amnesty International, which called on the government to clarify the facts, as did a delegation from Wisconsin, which produced a report for the U.S. Congress and the State Department requesting that aid to the armed forces of Colombia be cut as long as there was collaboration between the armed forces and the paramilitaries and the Colombian government failed to respect the wishes of the Peace Community not to have armed actors in its territories (Comisión Investigadora, 2005).

In 2011, after numerous massacres and eight years of the Uribe Vélez administration, the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos seemed to open the door to dialogue with various social sectors. In response to a petition presented by Father Giraldo, the government expressed a desire to establish dialogue with the Peace Community, and it agreed with the following conditions: (1) retraction of Uribe Vélez's accusation that the community was a sponsor of the FARC, (2) the removal of the police post in the town of San José de Apartadó, (3) a commission to evaluate the unsuccessful attempts to obtain justice, and (4) recognition of the humanitarian zones in the territory as protection against forced displacement. On this matter, the Constitutional Court ordered the government, by means of Judgment T-1025 of 2007, to adopt the measures prescribed by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, among them a request that the minister of the interior set in motion the procedure for an official presentation of the retraction and that

the government provide the names, military codes, units, and chains of command of the members of the security forces who were present at the times and places when serious human rights violations and crimes against humanity were committed (Corte Constitucional, 2007). In 2013 Santos had to ask the Peace Community for forgiveness, but he did not give in to the other demands. In his speech he declared (Santos, 2013):

> Some years ago, unjust accusations against the San José de Apartadó Peace Community were made by the presidency of the nation. Therefore the Constitutional Court ordered the state, led by the president himself, to recant. Today I wish to comply with that retraction. . . . I recognize in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó a courageous demand for the rights of Colombians who, despite having suffered directly from the conflict, have persisted in their aim to achieve peace for the country.

Therefore, in spite of these advances but faced with a lack of real national legal guarantees of protection, the Peace Community has chosen to leave written historical proof of the attacks it has experienced and turned to the use of international human rights and humanitarian law.

The third dimension of the community's organizational structure, economic autonomy, began with a cooperative that sold wild plantains, jams made from its orchards, and clothing made in the dressmaking shop—the last two produced by women. The economic aspect was a response to the food shortage created by the paramilitaries between 2002 and 2004. People began to plant subsistence crops (corn, beans, yucca, and bananas and also sugarcane for cane honey and rice) and partnered with other cooperatives. Cacao was also important, in 2008 reaching a considerable level of production and export, particularly to the British firm Lush Cosmetics. As part of its economic strategy, the community pursued organic product certification from Ceres for cacao and baby bananas for the United States and the European Union and fair-trade certification from the global certifying body FLOCERT and began to distribute food and dividends (Burnyeat, 2015):

> The most significant buyer is Lush Cosmetics in England. They normally send shipments of 25 tons, two per year, although Lush would like to purchase as much as 100 tons annually. Another international buyer is Europe's largest fair-trade company GEPA [Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Partnerschaft mit der Dritten Welt] in Germany, which purchases 12 tons annually. When they have an excess of cacao, they sell it to La Nacional de Chocolates or to Luker in Medellín and send 150 kilos of pasilla chiles that they blend with the cacao to produce their chocolate.

The lands on which community members plant are largely shared, although there are individual parcels on which the crops may also be communal. Since 1997 the community has acquired collective lands, currently possessing some 1,000 title hectares (Burnyeat, 2015: 192).

The fourth dimension of the organizational structure is the cultural (education, communications, and the recovery of community memory). In 2003, along with other organizations, the community created the Red de Comunidades en Ruptura y Resistencia (Network of Breakaway and Resistant Communities —RECORRE), later the Universidad Campesina de la Resistencia (Peasant University of the Resistance), an itinerant university formed by peasants, indigenous people, and Afro-descendants whose priority areas revolve around agrifood production, health, independent rights, and legal-philosophical issues. Since 2005 it has been strengthening alternative education with the goal of enhancing its connections with the territory (Germán Graciano, interview, Apartadó, July 25, 2018):[4]

> We always thought that alternative education was a fundamental aspect of the community: shaping from birth, educating the children, the mothers, fathers, the elders, to return to the knowledge of our ancestors, which is very important in these rural regions in helping us to discern how much value our territories and our history have. That is why it is necessary to have a generational handover and a memory.

In the field of communications, the mechanisms include the new technologies and the dissemination of information through virtual networks, especially Twitter. This information is amplified with networking of organizations and popular alternative media that has allowed the community to shed light on what is happening in the territory. With regard to recovering community memory, there is a linkage between memory and history in the creation of a structure where religious ceremonies are celebrated that also functions as a memory museum. Built by members themselves, it was part of the community work done every week by the youngest to the oldest. In it there are more than 50 paintings, including portraits of some of the 300 members of the Peace Community who have been assassinated, and there is a small mausoleum containing victims' remains. In addition, to give continuity to its peace-building project, the community raises consciousness and cautions the young not to engage with the armed groups.

The fifth dimension of the organizational structure, territorial defense, includes mechanisms for protection and resistance—nonviolence, active neutrality, civil resistance, and the culture of peace. The main project that it has been consolidating is far from a relationship with the Colombian state, although it recognizes the need to increase efforts toward total independence from services provided by the state such as health care and electricity. Along this line, according to the members interviewed, democracy is considered to be the power of the people for the people, and while the state may be legitimate when it is the guarantor of rights for its citizens, there is no possibility of achieving this and therefore they do not vote. . They believe that the government does not live up to its commitments and uses every possible means at its disposal to hold onto power (María Brigida González, personal conversation, 2018):

> Autonomy is not voting for the government. . . . If there weren't so much corruption in the country and things were done legally as they should be, with honesty, then we would vote, because we would know that it was legitimate. But here the governments are elected by those in power, and if poor people vote, they cheat to steal the votes, so that's why we don't believe in it. And yes, we do have elections here in the community. We have candidates, people who can be leaders, because leaders are not born, they are formed.

With respect to this abstention it is worth recalling the 2018 elections for Congress, in which the former combatants of the FARC voted and were established as a political party. In San José de Apartadó, their bastion for decades, they received only 18 votes. Of the 1,522 people eligible to vote, only 322 participated (21 percent). The winning party was the UP, which was deeply rooted in the area: it obtained 78 votes (*Semana Rural*, 2018). The abstention rate was 79 percent, much higher than in the rest of the country (50–60 percent) (Grupo de Análisis Político, 2013).

Political construction in the Peace Community has been sustained by collective decision making that defends and exercises control of the territory as an inherent feature of its project vis-à-vis the state, the capitalist model, and its practice of domination. An analysis of its resistance strategies demonstrates its dynamism, reflectiveness, and reconstruction in response to successes and challenges, taking as a starting point the constant tension in the area and the existing correlation of forces. All of this has meant building its own institutions separate from the state's.

Conclusions

The Peace Community is a civil resistance initiative with unique characteristics that has been solidified over a number of years of community life. One of its distinctive features is having declared itself a neutral zone with respect to any armed actor and putting its standards into practice: no weapons carrying, no alcohol consumption, no to injustice and impunity, no individual reparations for victims, no illicit crops, no manipulation or provision of information to any of the parties, and no participation in the war, whether direct or indirect. This means that it must seek protection in the face of constant threats, and this

has resulted in the departure from the community of those who do not follow the rules. As we have shown, the state does not guarantee the work of human rights defenders threatened by paramilitary groups, and this situation contrasts with its permissiveness with regard to the neo-extractive companies in their actions all over the country. Attacks have been increasing in Urabá. At the same time, while neither marijuana nor coca is grown in the Peace Community, the area has been affected by drug trafficking and threats by paramilitary forces such as the Gulf Clan, which guards its coca fields and processing labs and has forced peasants to plant coca.

Faced with the structural crisis, however, the community is building an imperfect or unfinished peace that takes a stand against various types of violence, especially the armed conflict. This peace building is a long process that involves reconstructing the social fabric and protecting the territory. The pursuit of autonomy and self-determination set in motion by mechanisms of pluralistic participation such as assemblies, promoting the active participation of women, nonviolence, and resilience—although very limited because of the destructive logic of capital and the state—are decidedly a first step toward community autonomy.

As we have indicated, the Peace Community's organization, characterized by self-governance, legal autonomy, economic autonomy, cultural considerations, and defense of territory, has been very important in protecting common goods and peace building. The community has been able to abide by its standards, highlighting collaborative labor through working groups, committees, and a council that implements the assembly's decisions. However, the process has its contradictions, and there are doubts about its future that make people feel that it is more appropriate to talk about the present: "As a peace community we don't have a future because we are really fighting against a monster, against an empire, against multinationals and transnationals, in the face of governments that are totally influenced by the power of the multinationals and transnationals" (Germán Graciano, interview, Apartadó, July 25, 2018).

In the area of legal autonomy, the community has managed to resolve internal conflicts through ways other than violence, prioritizing dialogue and restorative justice through sanctions that are collectively discussed. Members who commit minor offenses must do work for the community or leave, depending on the gravity of the offense. "The council does not apply criminal sanctions, but it is necessary to bear in mind that, in reality, being expelled from the community is almost the equivalent of being exiled" (Uribe, 2004). International legal mechanisms such as the international courts have been very important for the protection of members' rights, along with the political will demonstrated by the Constitutional Court in its judgments. Examples are the various resolutions issued by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.[5] However, no one has been held responsible for the crimes against humanity committed against the community.

Economic autonomy has been more complicated because of restrictions imposed from the outside. The community aims to become increasingly independent of the market. It continues to suffer hostilities in the export of its primary product, cacao, the preferred market for which is England. Paramilitaries have blocked some of the trucks transporting the product and stolen some 150 million pesos (US$40,000) from the cacao warehouse. At the same time, it is trying to promote cooperation with other communities and food sovereignty by growing subsistence crops.

In the cultural area it has focused on the preservation of memory. It has been able to recover and resignify its peasant identity and to strengthen its relations with other social movements that have also been direct victims of the armed conflict such as indigenous peoples and Afro-Colombian communities.

With regard to territorial defense, one of the community's great strengths has been its building of support networks at the local level (the Cacarica Sur collective), nationally (the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers Collective and MOVICE), and internationally (the International Human Rights Network,

volunteers from Peace Brigades International, the Italian nongovernmental organization Peace Doves, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation) that maintain a presence in the territory in an effort to reduce attacks on it. Also of note is the support of other social experiments not only in Colombia but in other countries. The community has entered into Sister Cities arrangements with municipalities and city councils in Alburquerque, Burgos, and Rivas (Spain), Narni, Fidenza (Italy), Herselt, Laakdal, Nijlen Schilde, and Westerlo (Belgium), Tamera (Portugal), and elsewhere in Europe that provide it support and opportunities to exchange technological, ecological, and food-sovereignty knowledge. According to the mayor of Alburquerque, Ángel Vadillo (2018), "what is asked of Alburquerque and all the other cities that wish to help is not economic assistance but international pressure, wide recognition outside of Colombia—asking the Colombian government and institutions such as the United Nations to remain vigilant so that there is no aggression against this community or any other."

Another good example of this support is the signing by more than 42 international organizations, among them the International Human Rights Network, headquartered in Geneva, and 11 European city councils, as well as renowned figures such as Noam Chomsky and David Kay, of an amicus brief addressed to the Constitutional Court seeking the annulment of a ruling in favor of an action filed against the Peace Community by Coronel Carlos Alberto Padilla Cepeda, commander of the army's Seventeenth Brigade, accusing it of having violated the brigade's constitutional rights by denouncing on its webpage that the brigade was acting in complicity with unlawful organizations. The Constitutional Court asked that the community not make this kind of statement in the absence of a prior conviction.

One of the community's aims in this area of the defense of territory is to be able to cultivate its land in peace. Some of the settlements lack current property titles, but Law 1561 of 2012 grants a title to anyone who can demonstrate having lived there for more than five years.

The Peace Community's alternative project, arising in the midst of social and political conflict and widening structural crisis, has shown that it is possible to build a collective community movement from the bottom up. Therefore, the need to advance projects geared toward the construction of a culture of peace in these communities seems fundamental. Drawing upon Escobar's (1999: 251) notional positions, we have analyzed the alternatives to development present in the Peace Community in the form of social relations and more sustainable and just exchanges with nature based on cooperation and the communal, displaying "alternative constructs (never pure, always hybrid) in relation to women, nature, development, the economy, democracy or citizenry that disrupt the dominant definitions." Through Ballvé's (2013) work we have confirmed the way in which the alliances among drug traffickers, paramilitaries, and agrarian elites (and we would add the army) operate in Urabá, imposing agro-industrial projects and seizing land through illicit profit and money laundering and thus generating direct political violence. We have deepened this analysis with the contribution of Svampa (2019), identifying the commodities consensus in the area on extracting natural resources and the Peace Community's stress on territorial defense through what they call an "eco-territorial shift"—common assets, food sovereignty, environmental justice. and *buen vivir* (living well)—that in turn has generated criminalization and repression of resistance and the violation of human rights.

In situations of violence, achieving autonomy and peace is complicated, and therefore we must examine the legal frameworks, not only national but international, that can serve as a context and consider studying these experiences in terms of the five dimensions mentioned— legal, economic, cultural, self-governance, and defense of territory—to obtain a more accurate picture. The Peace Community continues to face dispossession and violence, with the systematic killing of social leaders and human rights defenders making survival a constant challenge, and will need to continue to promote active neutrality and strengthen the alliances that may prevent their elimination.

Notes

1 The principle of neutrality contemplated in international humanitarian law guarantees that the civilian population may maintain itself outside of the armed conflict, not collaborating with any of the actors involved.

2 Formed in 2013 after the indigenous and agrarian strikes as a broad platform of movements and social organizations from the agrarian and popular sectors, among them Afro-descendant, peasant, and indigenous groups, that proposed a comprehensive agrarian reform and the right to decide on the use of the land.

3 Eduard Lancheros (2000) suggests that civil resistance understands "democracy" as power exercised by the people for the people in pursuit of equality and becomes legitimate by adopting as its primary goal the development of the community as a whole in its various dimensions. He believed in universal rights and universal justice. Rights extend beyond the borders of states, and states are therefore required to punish the terrorist actions against communities that they have attempted to justify in terms of private interests determined by the market.

4 Graciano is a leader and legal representative of the community who was a direct victim of the armed conflict. Thirteen of his relatives, among them two brothers and his father, have been murdered, and he has suffered constant threats and assassination attempts by the paramilitaries and was wounded in December 2017.

5 There have been 10 resolutions: October 2000, November 2, 2000, June 18, 2002, November 17, 2004, March 15, 2005, February 2, 2006, December 17, 2007, February 6, 2008, August 30, 2010, and June 26, 2017.

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