Rethinking the Link between Civil Society and Civil War: the Case of Colombia
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Introduction

Democratic peace theorists argue that civil society is an effective mechanism to enhance democracy and hold governments and non-state actors accountable for their actions. However, in the context of civil war their efforts are constantly challenged by the dynamics of violence. During 1990s, the hopes that civil society was an effective mechanism to promote peace even in times of war increased; local and international human rights groups, advocacy groups, local non-governmental organizations (NGO), international non-governmental organizations (INGO), and other local, national and international movements mobilized around a collective interest to promote peace, to organize and react against the illegal use of violence, and to demand armed groups improve their human rights records. More recently, the 2005 Human Security Report (HSR) found that conflicts today are less deadly and suggests that an increase in conflict prevention, peacemaking, and peacebuilding could be responsible for this decline. These kinds of claims assume a causal link between civil society and reduced violence that lacks a rigorous analysis. What is the correlation between variations of levels of violence and civil societies that work for peace? Does an active civil society reduce violence? If so, how is that possible?

In the case of Colombia, civil society has actively worked for peace in a variety of ways. Local organizations and peace initiatives in the form of *peace communities*, *peace laboratories* or *peace territories* have emerged as local opportunities to resist the armed conflict with the support of national and international governmental and non-governmental organizations. What are these forms of association able to accomplish during ongoing armed conflict? This paper carefully examines the link between civil society that works for peace and variations of violence in Colombia through a comparison between Magdalena Medio and Valle/Cauca. Between 1998 and 2001 both regions experienced high levels of violence and both are known to be areas with active civil societies working for peace. After 2001, levels of violence have decreased dramatically in Magdalena Medio; on the other hand, in Valle/Cauca levels of violence remained high. What explains this divergence?

If the cause was an active civil society working for peace, then why in Valle/Cauca did levels of violence not also decline? Using the framework of analysis provided by Kalyvas (2006), this paper demonstrates that, at least in these two cases, it is not possible to establish a causal link between an active civil society working for peace (CSWP[1]) and less violence. Instead, the evidence suggests that variations of violence in these two cases have more to do with the struggle for territorial control between armed groups than with specific efforts by civil society that works for peace.

The paper is divided in five parts. The first section reviews the recent findings in the literature on civil society and peacebuilding as well as on civil war and portrays the

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[1] CSWP is used here to group all those societal networks that emerge from a wide variety of non-state actors, that interact with governments, international organizations and private institutions and that explicitly work to resist violence and promote peace.

methodology and the selection of cases. The second section presents the cases in detail and section three portrays the findings and suggests some hypothesis on how to rethink the link between civil society and civil war.

1. Civil Society and Civil War: The Literature

Scholars have stressed on the virtues of civil society for decades. However, we are still struggling with a concept that everyone uses but no one agrees on what it is and what it is good for. For the most part, the debate has presented two main obstacles: 1) a lack of consensus on what civil society is and 2) little systematic analysis on what civil society is able to accomplish. Recent analyses have shifted our attention towards the study of civil society's capabilities during challenging contexts. Nevertheless, there are still tensions between those that put too many hopes on the capabilities of civil society and link it to positive outcomes such as peace and democracy and those that claim that civil society has also "its dark side" and not always result in positive outcomes (see Armony 2004).

The concept of civil society has its root in the classic thinkers of politics and democracy. Locke, Montesquieu, and Tocqueville refer to the idea of civil society as a separate entity from the state and the market which functions to protect individuals through independent voluntary built organizations. The Marxian approach, based on Hegel's idea of civil society as a separate entity, defines civil society as "(…) as the structural antithesis of the state" (Boyd 2004: 4). Gramsci revived the concept after World War II and suggested that civil society is a way for the oppressed to contest the hegemony of the state and achieve a social acceptance of the ruling class (Holdgkinson and Foley eds. 2003: 1963). More recently, a very dominant notion of civil society has been framed within the democratic peace theory. For example, Putnam (1993) suggests that social organizations enhance trust and social networks necessary to produce functioning democratic institutions. In addition, building on Putnam's theory, Warren (2001) argues that "(…) democracies require a mix of different kinds of association to carry out the diverse and complementary tasks that, together, enable democratic responses to political conflict" (Warren 2001: 13).

In the case of Latin America, Smulovitz and Peruzzotti (2000), emphasize that civil society is an alternative mechanism of vertical accountability vis-à-vis the state and the market. During 1990s, advocacy networks increased dramatically according to Keck and Sikkink (1998) resulting in a new political space where The most contemporary idea of civil society is describes as a new political space where " (…) citizens groups, social movements, and individuals engage in dialogue, debate, confrontation, and negotiation with each other and with various governmental actors – international, national, and local – as well as the business world" Anheir, Glasius and Kaldor (2001: 4). Associations of non-state actors and transnational networks appeared as an effective mechanism not only to aim policy changes, but also to advocate for the protection of human rights.

Kaldor (2003) provides a comprehensive approach of societal networks working for peace suggesting that a "global civil society" is a possible answer to war. According to Kaldor, within the "new" global context, civil society plays a humanitarian role of protecting civilians, increasing international presence and influencing political outcomes. But she argues that such humanitarian role of civil society is only possible under a

framework of a rule of law. In her own words, "Particularly important is the removal of fear, the absence of violence and coercion in everyday life so that people feel able to speak freely and be heard" (Kaldor, 2003: 109).

More specifically, scholars examine the role played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in conflict areas[2]. However, this "NGOization" of civil society have shifted the debate to organizational factors and away from their interaction with the dynamics of conflict. In contrast, Van Tongeren eds. (2005: 7) argue that civil society needs to include other forms of organizations in addition to NGOs and suggest that civil society ranges from "(…) officially constituted institutions to small, informal community groups". Also Wood (2000) recognizes the importance of grassroots in bringing about peace from below[3]. Such evidence is complemented on the field by practical frameworks that inform practitioners on the ground how to enhance the opportunities for peace[4]. However, as suggested by Orjuela (2003) this literature "(…) tends to take the form of manuals or quick evaluations which lack deeper analysis" (Orjuela 2003: 196). Goodhand (2006) recognizes the insufficient systematic research in the field and aims for a more methodological analysis of the role NGOs play in achieving peace. He argues that the evaluation of impacts should go beyond the dichotomy between success and failure to analyse rather how the probability of peace decreases or increases. However, his findings rely on the specificities of each case without recognizing patterns of peacebuilding opportunities across cases calling for more context awareness. Although this work is an important contribution, it does not provide a useful framework of analysis.

Overall, all the different approaches described above are examples of how the literature on civil society and peacebuilding has assumed a causal link between civil society and peace, but so far they have not provided useful frameworks of analysis. Even more, they have not engaged in meaningful dialogue with the recent literature on civil wars and the frameworks they provide. As a result, their findings have not systematically tested the premise that active civil societies contribute to peace. Although the lack of consensus on what civil society is, all these different approaches suggest that civil society matters. This thesis seeks to explore the link between civil society and peace.[5] In the context of armed conflict, CSWP participates in common activities, establishes alliances and works to transform armed conflicts and bring sustainable peace even in a context where the rule of law is not the norm and violence against civilians increases.

For a long time, studies of civil war focused on the outbreak and the onset of armed conflicts[6] but recent studies have clarified our understanding of why and how violence[7] varies over time providing us with useful frameworks of analysis. For example, Posen (1993) argues that during war a threat (real or perceived) cause a natural reaction

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[2] See for example Doylle and Sambanis (2000); Cooley and Ron (2002) and Rieff (2002).

[3] Béjar and Oakley (1996); Cousens eds. (2001), and Hernandez (2004) document anecdotal evidence of local communities working for peace.

[4] For a more detail description of practical frameworks to evaluate the effectiveness of projects in war-torn areas see Anderson and Olson (2003) and the World Bank Report (2006).

[5] Peace is used here to group both negative (absence of violence) and positive approaches and includes efforts in both peacebuilding and peacemaking. For a detail definitions of peace, as well as peacebuilding and peacemaking see Galtung, Jacobsen and Brand-Jacobsen, 2002.

[6] See for example Van Den Haag (1972), Tilly (1978), Scott 1976, and Gurr (1993).

[7] For the purpose of this paper, violence used in civil war is understood as that "(…) produced by at least two political actors who enjoy partial and/or overlapping monopolies of violence" (Kalyvas 2006, p. 30).

to respond violently and that the intensity of such "security dilemma" escalates levels of violence. However, in the case of highly organized and illegal armies or systems of violence, Richani (2002), building on Tilly (1978), suggests that variations are more the result of multiple sovereignty and competition for territorial control than of a clear security-dilemma. Advancing further in the identification of patterns and dynamics across different cases, Weinstein (2007) suggests that patterns of violence are a consequence of the organizational structures of illegal armed groups. Moreover, Ron (2003) identifies differences in the methods of violence used and argues that in areas inside total territorial control (i.e. ghettos) the type of violence corresponds to a police-style while in territories out of control (i.e. frontiers) the methods are much more destructive.

The most influential contribution is such presented by Kalyvas (2006) and is used in this paper as a starting point to clarify the link between CSWP and civil war. Kalyvas' theory describes two main hypotheses. First, he recognizes that variations of violence across time and space are a function of struggles between armed groups for territorial control. Therefore, in areas where territorial control is being contested, violence increases in the form of more destructive methods, whereas violence decreases in zones of total control and is exert through more selective means. As rational actors, illegal armed groups understand the consequence of indiscriminate violence against civilians and once they gain certain control over territory, the pattern of violence changes.

Second, societal characteristics vary according to territorial control. Incumbents have the control over territory and insurgents use their violence to overthrow them. In this scenario, insurgents use violence to gain incumbent's support. Kalyvas calls these new allies defectors. As a result, in times of territorial competition between non-state armed groups the space for neutrality shrinks, "fence-sitting" is risky and political actors force neutrals to take sides. At that particular time, who ever is perceived as the group more willing to use devastating means of violence against civilians gets stronger local support. If Kalyvas suggestions are correct and variations of violence respond to transitions of territorial control between armed groups, then his theory challenges the opportunities of civil society that works for peace to result in less violence. However, the available evidence suggests that it is possible for civilians to organize and work for peace even in times of territorial competition.

To summarize, there has not been meaningful dialogue between these two bodies of literature. This paper is an opportunity to enhance their communication through a methodological comparison.

2. The Methodology and the Cases

Irregular warfare in Colombia[8] has varied significantly during the last twenty years. Although reliable measurements are still a big challenge, Restrepo, Spagat and Vargas (2004)[9] identify three main stages of variation of one-side violence. Figure 1

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[8] A very rich Colombian literature studies the variation of the armed conflict in Colombia, in terms of territorial dynamics (Echandía 2006; Pecaut 2003), organizational differences between armed groups (Gutierrez-Sanin 2008) and the specific dynamics of the violence used against civilians (Lair, 2000).
[9] They present a more accurate measurement of one-sided violence than that of battle-related deaths. As Mack (2002) suggests, the little agreement on measurements has resulted in little interdisciplinary dialogue (see also Sambanis 2002).

shows a slight decrease of the intensity after 1992 but a rapid increase between 1998 and 2002 (see Appendix A).Three main armed groups are responsible for the use of violence against civilians during this period.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were consolidated in the late 1960s as a peasant guerrilla movement originally operating in departments as Caquetá and Guaviare but in1982[10] they extended their territorial influence to new places with availability of natural resources or opportunities for extortion (Echandia 1999). During the 1980s and 1990s, FARC fronts grew from 15 in 1982 to 66 fronts in 1996 (Ricahni 1997). Although it is not clear if FARC has been debilitated by Uribe's Democratic Security Policy (DSP), or if their strategy changed to operate using a less offensive strategy (Rangel 2004), as of 2006, the armed conflict persisted in Colombia with FARC as the main leftist guerrilla (Pizarro 2006).

The National Liberation Army (ELN) emerged in 1964 in Magdalena Medio as a leftist guerrilla inspired by the Cuban revolution. As an anti-imperialist movement it initially attracted university students, academics, and community leaders claiming for more social justice. Their number of fronts and combatants also increased during 1990s. By 1991 they were a seven-front guerrilla with 200 combatants; figures that almost triple by 1996 when they reach a total of thirteen fronts and 715 combatants (Richani 1997). In spite of several attempts by the Government to engage them politically, during 1990s they committed a number of massive kidnapping and attacks against infrastructure. As a result of the methods of violence used by both guerrillas, the claims for social justice and grievances on land tenure disparities that motivated their emergence during 1960s and 1970s changed the nature of the civil war into a "war against civilians" (Lair 2003: 93).

Paramilitaries appeared in the late 1980s as private security forces at the service of cattle ranchers and drug trafficking networks to respond to guerrilla attacks but unified in 1997 under the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) with a much more offensive strategy (Gutierrez-Sanín 2004; Romero 2003; Cubides 2001). As a consequence, their activity increased dramatically during the late 1990s using methods such as homicides, massacres, kidnappings, attacks of infrastructure and hijacking as their methods (Arjona and Kalyvas 2006) mainly with the purpose of spreading terror and undermining any kind of support towards the left (Mason 2003). Initially paramilitaries operated mainly in territories of big land ownership, particularly Urabá and the Caribbean region, as a mechanism to protect economic activities, but with time, they expanded to other places of guerrilla influence. All three main illegal armed groups have recognized their strong reliance on illegal economies and drug trafficking networks to finance their struggle.

As a result of the long-lasting armed conflict and the increasing violence used against civilians, civil society in Colombia has organized at multiple levels (i.e. national, regional, local) and has work for peace through multiple approaches[11]. These forms of association are not only significant in the number of participants, but also in the diversity of initiatives they support and implement on the ground. Datapaz, a CINEP special program, documents the territorial distribution of peace mobilizations and of collective

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[10] A strategy that came up after their VII Conference.
[11]The literature of conflict resolution uses the terms multi-modal and multi-track approaches. See Miall (2004).

actions for peace (see García-Durán, 2006)[12]. Collective actions for peace have varied significantly at the national level. According to CINEP, between 1986 and 1992 there is an "activation" of peace mobilizations with a total of 255 actions. Between 1993 and 1999 CINEP reports a total of 1015 peace mobilizations, an increase of almost four times, that according to Rettberg (2006) was reflected in the number of actions and also in the number of participants (see Appendix B).

The coexistence of both peace initiatives and armed conflict in Colombia is evident. However, national trends hide the significance of regions and territories and their variations of violence over time. In Colombia, violence varies significantly across five macro-regions: Amazonía, Andina, Pacífica, Caribe and Oriental (Sanchez 2007). Echandía (2006) identifies ten regions that concentrated the total of massacres and homicides between 1998 and 2001: Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Montes de María, Serranía del Perijá, Magdalena Medio, Costa Pacífica, Urabá and Paramillo, Caquetá and Putumayo, Meta y Guaviare, Arauca and Casanare and Catatumbo. At the same time, Garcia-Durán (2006) suggest that there is a strong correlation between collective actions for peace and highly conflictive regions such as Magdalena Medio, Montes de Maria, Catatumbo, Urabá, Valle del Cauca and Cauca, and departments such as Guajira, Antioquia and Meta.

From this group of regions, Magdalena Medio and Valle/Cauca were selected based on other controlling variables[13]. Despite sharing similar characteristics, the variation of levels of violence after 2001 is divergent. Magdalena Medio experienced a dramatic decrease of violence against civilians while in Valle/Cauca levels of violence did not clearly decrease and increased in recent years. Since in the case of Magdalena Medio the presence of an active CSWP coincides with less violence, Valle/Cauca is used as a controlled case where, although an active CSWP, levels of violence do not show a dramatic decline (for a map see Appendix C).

This paper relies on statistical data available on violence against civilians[14] such as massacres, conflict related homicides and internally displaced people (IDP) and as well as on field research[15]. I highly relied on data from the Presidential Human Rights and IHL Program Observatory of the Vice-Presidency (PHRO) which reports yearly the situation of human rights violations in Colombia, not only at the national level, but also by department and municipalities[16]. For observations on the activity of CSWP at the national level, I use information from the Centre for Research and Popular Education (CINEP) and the subsequent analysis presented by Mauricio Garcia-Durán (2006) for an understanding of the regional trends. Access to disaggregated data of peace initiatives at

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[12] For a complete description of Datapaz, see http://www.cinep.org.co/datapaz_definiciones.htm

[13] Strategic position of the regions, presence of the three main non-state armed groups (FARC, ELN and paramilitaries) and presence of illegal economies.

[14] For a detail discussion on measurements of one-side violence see Restrepo and Spagat, 2004.

[15] These findings are based on field work in Colombia between June and August 2007. The research was part of my Master's thesis. I conducted twenty two semi-structured interviews to local community leaders (i.e. human rights activist, Church representatives, indigenous leaders and women's groups), representatives of peace and development programs and members of national and international organizations as well as national and international non-governmental organizations.

[16] Missing data was complemented with other sources: Early Warnings System (SAT), the Magdalena Medio Observatory for Integral Peace (OPI) and the peace observatory of Valle del Cauca. The historical data on municipalities of Cauca is poorly documented by the sources.

the municipal level is based on the list of initiatives provided by Rettberg (2006) and complemented with information from the Bank for Good Practices, a program of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

4. Magdalena Medio

Throughout the history of the Colombian armed conflict, FARC and ELN have exerted significant influence in Magdalena Medio. Also, individual units of self-defence groups first appeared in Puerto Boyacá (south) supported by a "trinity" between cattle-ranchers, drug-traffickers and military officials. Paramilitaries in Magdalena Medio were the result of a clear alliance between the Peasant Association of Cattlemen and Farmers of the Magdalena Medio (ACDEGAM), the movement Muerte a Secuestradores (MAS) and the S-2 Section of the Bárbula Battalion (Gutierrez and Barón 2004: 11). During the second half of the 1990s, The *Autodefensas Campesinas de Cordoba y Uraba* (ACCU), the leading group of the AUC consolidation in 1997, began to increase its violent activities in Magdalena Medio, especially using massacres and selective assassinations. Paramilitaries were not only interested in defending big land-owners from guerrilla's attacks but they also began an offensive campaign against FARC and ELN (Romero 2003: 107). In 2000 the Government declared its intention to start a peace negotiation with the ELN who was asking for a demilitarization of two municipalities of Magdalena Medio: San Pablo and Cantagallo.

Paradoxically, between 1998 and 2001 violence in this region increased dramatically. For instance, in 1999 homicide rates increased in thirteen out of 29 municipalities of the region, especially in Barrancabermeja and Sabana de Torres, where the homicide rate increased from 14.51 to 133.1 and from 93.37 to 200.33 respectively (PHRO 2001). In addition, in 1998 the number and magnitude of armed group-led massacres escalated significantly[17]. This situation increased the number of internally displaced people (IDP) moving into the city looking for protection, although during the late 1990s, cities became also affected by massacres[18]. After 2001 violence decreased noticeably (see Appendix C). For instance, massacres stopped for three consecutive years 2003, 2004 and 2005 (DNP and, CDPMM, 2005). What explains such stark variation in the levels of violence throughout this region? What is the causal link between the traditional activities of civil society and the de-escalation of violence? The decline coincides with the active role played by CSWP in Magdalena Medio. Is it possible to establish a causal link in this case?

CSWP in Magdalena Medio

The repertoire of CSWP includes a wide variety of initiatives promoted and supported by local, national and international networks, even before violence escalated. Since the 1970s civil society in Magdalena Medio has played an important role in

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[17] From a total of six and 22 victims in 1996, in 1998 the numbers escalated to eleven massacres with 61 civilians killed (a killing of four or more civilians is considered a massacre). *Cifras de Violencia 2002-2005 Magdalena Medio*, DNP and PDPMM, 2006.

[18] For example, the Barrancabermeja massacre in 1998. For details see *Barrancabermeja: La otra Versión*. CINEP and CREDHOS, 2004.

promoting and participating in peace initiatives (Sandoval 2004:88). For example, The Popular Women Organization (OFP) has been actively participating in regional peace initiatives since 1972 and is one of the oldest women's organizations in Colombia working to mobilize women at the local level. Their main objective is the protection of their territory to achieve "a life with dignity".

In early 1990s the OFP participated in an agreement among local communities and social organizations to work collectively for the protection of human rights in Magdalena Medio; an effort that resulted in the creation of the Regional Corporation for the Defence of Human Rights (CREDHOS) in 1987. CREDHOS became highly known, at the local, national and international level for their active role in providing information about human rights violations and naming victims and shaming perpetrators. In addition, *peace territories* and *peace constitutional assemblies* were already taking place in since 1980s. For example, after the killing of 500 peasants, in 1987 the Association of Peasants in Carare decided to consolidate a non-violent response. With their slogan "for the right to life, peace and work", they declared their territory neutral and promoted local humanitarian agreements with armed actors to maintain their space free of violence (Hernández, 2002).

During 1990s the Catholic Church and the private sector became more actively involved. In 1995 the Peace and Development Program of Magdalena Medio (PDPMM) was consolidated, as a joint initiative between ECOPETROL, the Union of Oil Workers (USO) and the Catholic Church. The PDPMM acted as a mechanism to coordinate local peace initiatives and to implement local development projects. According to Roux (2005) these initiatives come from "free and sovereign inhabitants that look for structural changes in order for peace with dignity and justice to be a possibility in Magdalena Medio". The program includes also Humanitarian Spaces (HS) or specific areas where local communities declare their territories neutral from the influence of any illegal armed group and where communities resist to displacement. In the region, the program supports at least fourteen HS promoting humanitarian negotiations such as that of 1997 in Barrancabermeja that achieved an agreement with FARC to stop targeting local communities in their actions against the private company Merieléctrica .

International organizations such as the Christian Peacemaking Team (ECAP), the Peace Brigades International (PBI) have accompanied communities in the region since 1990s. INGO provided support to victims, monitor and disseminated information about the armed conflict in Magdalena Medio promoting a negotiated solution. On the ground, they work together with local community organizations such as OFP, CREDHOS and union organizations[19].

During the escalation of violence, CSWP did not stop. For example, during this time, the work of CREDHOS was essential in getting support from PBI and Amnesty International, organizations that constantly reported the situation of violence in Magdalena Medio and the forms of violence against civilians[20]. As (Jaime Mesa 2007),

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[19] In addition to the traditional union of oil workers USO, other unions include Cimitarra Valley Rural Association, Adodesamuba, Asorvim and Sinaltrainal.

[20] See for example *Barrancabermeja: a city under Siege* by Amnesty International, May 1999 accessible at http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR230361999?open&of=ENG-COL. Also, see The 2001 Human Rights Watch Report *"The "Sixth-Division" Military Paramilitary Ties and U.S. Policy in Colombia"* available at http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/colombia/

Although non-state armed groups threatened the social space for deliberation, they also used it. For example, a representative of the Corporation of Eastern Development (Compromiso) suggests that:

"[Paramilitaries] *have threatened local leaders and have invited them to become members of their campaign. They have also asked them to hand over their position so another person could run it. They have influenced social organizations promoting the creation of their own NGOs too. So they became part of the social network. From there, they promote specific issues such as "we need to improve security""* (Conde, 2007).

CSWP also continued to disseminate information, support victims and implement development programs. For example, between 1998 and 2000 it was the third stage of activities for the PDPMM. With a World Bank loan, the Government was able to support the implementation of at least 90 different initiatives in partnership with 64 local communities operating already in the region (PDPMM, n.d.). In 2001, PDPMM was awarded with the National Peace Price[21] and encouraged the European Commission (EC) to support in 2002 the first Peace Laboratory in the region. The PDPMM also coordinates the implementation of additional programs supported by United Nations agencies such as UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

Based on the evidence, a causal relationship between CSWP and less violence is not precise if we take into account that CSWP was active before violence escalated and continued to work during escalation. For instance, interviewees recognize that the variation in levels of violence after 2001 is strongly associated with the territorial competition between FARC, ELN and paramilitaries.

Territorial Competition

The high levels of violence before 2001 are the result of open armed conflict between non-state armed groups. Is the notable decline the result of a paramilitary victory? Since early 1980s leftist guerrillas have constantly shared overlapping influence over Magdalena Medio. In addition, a third actor came into play. Although paramilitaries were not considered a unified armed group until 1997, by 1994 paramilitary groups were already operating in some areas as an offensive force against leftist guerrillas (Restrepo and Spagat 2005). In addition, the CONVIVIR groups, a type of self-dense organizations, were created in 1994 under a "neighbourhood watch" concept to respond to guerrilla's activities (Rabasa and Chalk 2001) but due to their ties with paramilitary organizations, they were finally declared illegal in 1999 (Semana, 1999). By 1998 paramilitaries had advanced to Puerto Wilches and Yondó, with a clear objective of surrounding Barrancabermeja as their ultimate goal as suggested by an interviewee:

"*We were aware of their plans for Barranca[22], which they called "the lock", or "the closing up of the ring". They already controlled some municipalities around Barranca and only Barranca was outside their influence*" (Mesa, 2007).

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[21] The National Peace Price in an initiative that wards every year the most prominent and successful peace initiative. The award includes a diploma and about thirty thousand US dollars. This initiative is supported and promoted by the UNDP, the media and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation in Colombia.

[22] Short name for Barrancabermeja.

Also, massacres had a clear objective of spreading terror among locals, displacing a large number of people from highly fertile areas for paramilitaries and drug trafficking networks to gain their control. Although levels of violence began to increase in 1998, in the case of Barrancabermeja, December 22, 2000 was mentioned by interviewees as the official date paramilitaries "took over the city". The use of destructive methods of violence during this territorial dispute is clear with the increase of massacres during that time and their clear halt in 2002. Furthermore, during territorial dispute, the need to differentiate friend from foe put in danger the neutrality of civil society. Polarization of civil society increases in contested zones as suggested by an interviewee: *"(…) civil society starts to be classified. A civilian is asked: who are you with? Are you with FARC? Are you with elenos[23]? Are you with paras[24]? Are you with the State?"* (Soto, 2007).

Interviewees also refer to the role played by guerrilla combatants changing sides and providing paramilitaries with information about guerrilla supporters. In the particular case of Barrancabermeja, ELN members in the city played the game of defectors and in some cases gave paramilitaries information about guerrilla collaborators:

"Many guerrilleros, that were once ELN combatants betrayed its ideal, even they were ELN commanders that participated in paramilitary activities. So this people, began to point at others as guerrilleros. (…)So guerrilla combatants became paramilitaries" (Jaramillo, 2007).

The methods of violence against civilians changed after 2001 to less destructive attacks and to a more selective method of "social cleansing"[25] practices. Once paramilitaries effectively withdraw leftist guerrillas out of the territory, paramilitaries privatize security and were able to police the area. As a way to maintain their control over population they established a set of "rules of behaviour" for political and social control[26]. Such rules included, for example, curfews for minors or disarmament of civilians (Jaramillo 2007).

In summary, the evidence shows how homicides and threats remained with the logic to maintain social, political and economic control over the territory as a complement of their military presence. Massacres and massive assassinations to disseminate terror and displace population were not the methods used anymore. As a result, the total number of civilians killed decreased without meaning peace or absence of violence. When applying Kalyvas' framework of analysis, the causal link between active CSWP and less violence is not strong. In contrast, the evidence shows that there is a stronger causal correlation between territorial disputes and variations of violence. The territorial competition between paramilitaries and leftist guerrillas in Magdalena Medio explains why levels of violence increased dramatically in a very short period of time and how once paramilitaries gained control over the region, violence decreased noticeably.

5. Valle/Cauca

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[23] Name that refers to ELN supporters.

[24] Name that refers to paramilitary supporters.

[25] Social cleansing in the Colombian context is used to make reference to selective assassinations committed by paramilitaries to "clean" the territory from guerrilla's influence, see (Taussig, 2003).

[26] For a detail description of the "rules of behavior" see *Barrancabermeja, la otra Version*

Valle/Cauca also faced an escalation of violence between 1998 and 2001. During this time, homicide rates in the region exceeded the national average in addition to a high number of massacres and massive kidnappings. At the same time, according to García-Durán (2006: 180 and 181), during the last twenty years, Valle/Cauca present a high concentration of collective actions for peace. However, as opposed to Magdalena Medio, levels of violence do not present a clear de-escalation after 2001. For instance, municipalities in north of Cauca were still facing massacres in 2003 and 2004. Moreover, Buenaventura became the city with the highest rate of homicides in 2006 in addition to high levels of IDP. Although similar characteristics, what makes levels of violence reluctant to decrease in spite of an active CSWP?

The increasing levels of violence included not only high rates of homicides, but also a considerable number of massacres, massive kidnappings and IDP. For instance, according to Garzón (2005) and the PHRO (2003), homicide rates (per 100,000 inhabitants) increased considerably during 1999 in 11 municipalities and in 2001, at least 16 out of the 29 municipalities had a rate of homicides higher than the national rate. In terms of massive kidnappings, during the late 1990s the ELN gained significant influence in municipalities around Cali and they were able to consolidate the *José María Becerra* Front. Such consolidation resulted in two of their biggest massive kidnappings. *La María* (180 civilians) and the *Kilometro 18*, (79 civilians).

In addition, during the 1990s FARC increased its activity with the consolidation of the Sixth Front in Santander de Quilichao, Miranda, Piendamó, Caldono, and Corinto in Cauca. By 1990 and 1991, FARC increased its influence mainly on the road between Cali and Buenaventura. Also, since early 1990s drug traffickers and big land owners begun to support illegal private security organizations to operate in Caloto and Miranda, places of the first two massacres in the region. And after AUC consolidation in 1997, as in the case of Magdalena Medio, paramilitaries entered the region and committed a significant number of massacres, including the massacre of the Naya Valley, a By this time the total number of victims of massacres in the region increased dramatically by 2001.

However, as opposed to Magdalena Medio, it is difficult to identify a clear period of de-escalating violence. For instance, levels of homicides tend to illustrate a perpetuation of high levels between 2002 and 2005. For instnace, levels of homicide remained stable in Valle del Cauca and Cauca between 2003 and 2006 (PNUD, 2007) amd the total numbers of victims of massacres decreased, they never went down to cero as happened in Magdalena Medio and they are certainly higher than in 1998 (PHRO, 2003). In 2004 violence also reached the urban spaces of Buenaventura when 12 young men were massacred in *Lleras* neighbourhood (Semana, 2007). In addition, the PHRO (2005) suggests that in Cauca, clashes between the Armed Forces and illegal armed groups increased between 2000 and 2004. By 2005, Cauca was one of the departments in Colombia with the highest number of clashes.

For the last twenty years local peace initiatives in Valle/Cauca have included a wide variety of collective actions for peace. Women, peasants, victims, and indigenous populations have come together to promote alternative responses to the increased levels of violence. However, in this case, the active presence of CSWP does not coincide with a decrease in level of violence. Why have the levels of violence been so reluctant to a sustainable decrease?

In this region, the New Constitution of 1991 and the formal recognition of minority rights and other democratic mechanisms has incentive the emergence and consolidation of a variety of peace initiatives. Some of them focus on a humanitarian approach giving support to victims and promoting short-term responses, others promote a culture of peace trough education and others engage directly in non-violent initiatives to confront illegal armed groups directly and demand better practices. Although very diverse, Peñaranda (2006:548) argues that "there is an increasing perception that these initiatives could have a positive effect in the future of the armed conflict".

One of the most successful peace initiatives is the NASA Project[27]. The project was initially promoted by the *Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca* (CRIC). Since the early 1970s the CRIC emerged as a mechanism to support the indigenous communities in recovering their land, problem addressed by the New Constitution of 1991, which granted them granted them autonomous administrative units known as *resguardos*. However, most of these *resguardos* are territories of non-state armed groups' influence since they constitute a strategic corridor connecting the southeast of Colombia with the Pacific Coast (Echandía, 2006: 234). Leftist guerrillas constantly claimed to represent indigenous communities in the region. However, such claims are not acceptable for local communities:

"We constantly tell them [guerrilla] *that we are not part of their social base, that we do not share their revolutionary ideology. Although we respect their project we do not share their means"* (Valencia, 2007).

In 1995 the NASA Project, came up with their own security strategy: *La Guardia Indígena*. It mainly assists local communities in emergency situations, maintains constant communication between municipalities, trains members, monitors the territory, organizes meetings, assemblies and mobilizations and exchanges experiences with other social groups, such as afro-descendant communities. In addition, as a form to unify afro-descendant communities and to promote their rights as visible minorities, in the early 1980s the Organization of Black Communities in Colombia (OCN) also emerged. Created not only to claim the government for their rights but also to demand the private sector for better practices in their territories, OCN supports various local communities in Valle and Cauca. Also, since 1996 the Women's Pacific Route (RPM) created a national movement with representation in different war-torn areas claiming armed groups for the respect of their territories. They not only include in their project the discourse against war, but also a number of symbolic acts such as dress codes and acts of disobedience against norms imposed by illegal armed groups (Miller, 2007).

As a response to increasing levels of violence, the indigenous movement initiated in 1999 a stage of mobilization (Valencia 04:08). The use of their territory by illegal armed groups was of major concern for the NASA Community during this period. The groups of kidnapped by ELN in the *Kilometro 18* and *La Maria* Church were seen constantly in their territories, and the last group was released in the Naya Valley. These issues are seen as triggers for the paramilitary incursion in Naya in 2000. Since then, the indigenous community began to be highly targeted by massacres and massive

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[27] Promoted by *Paeces* indigenous communities.

assassinations in the region. According to data reported by the PHRO (2005), about one hundred and ten members of the Nasa community were killed in Buenos Aires, Corinto, Jambaló, Caloto, Caldono, Santander de Quilichao and Toribio.

Indigenous populations continue to respond with their own "weapons" against violence, achieving temporal successes that go beyond statistical measurements. For example, in 2003 the *Guambiana* indigenous community in Silvia (Cauca) demanded that FARC free their Mayor. In that same year, Florián Arnold, the director of an NGO *Manos por Colombia* was kidnapped and a week after, about four hundred indigenous demanded FARC leaders his liberation (Bank of Good Practices, 2003). More recently they are in the process of implementing their *"ten year project of life"* where together leaders and communities are planning their own economic and political development with the vision of a strong community in ten years. Furthermore, as a result of massive kidnappings in the region, families of victims began address the "root causes" of conflict, and *Corporación Vallenpaz* became a regional peace and development program operating in forty municipalities south of Valle and north of Cauca. The corporation[28] began to promote local forms of development in 2000 to provide peasants, indigenous communities and afro-descendants with an alternative mechanism to reduce social inequalities (Casasfranco, 2007).

In recent years, afro-descendant communities have been increasingly affected by displacement. In addition, as is the case of any irregular warfare, during competition youth become military targets of all illegal armed groups. Without sophisticated programs or economic resources, local communities came together to oppose these types of actions. For example, according to an interviewee:

"A group of women in the rural area of Buenaventura began an autonomous project because their territory was full of guerrilla's coca, youth drug consumption and by saying "this is not our life; this is not the way we live" they confront illegal armed groups. (…) Because this is an area of arms smuggling and coca fields they oppose to this use of their territories. They [illegal armed groups] *have checkpoints on rivers so women have to negotiate for the flow of food and that illegal armed groups stop retaining youth. They negotiate with the commander at that time* (Muñoz, 26.07).

All these initiatives have consolidated from bellow, but have had great support from international organizations and national and international NGOs. For example, Vallenpaz have received financial support from USAID, The European Union and the International Organization for Migrations. Also the Jesuit Service of Refugees for example, adopts a more humanitarian approach of assisting victims of displacement and accompanying local communities. Victims and others resist violence and engage illegal armed groups directly. Also, peace and development programs such as Vallenpaz adopt a more positive approach and work to overcome the "root causes" of violence by promoting development. However, violence has not decreased considerably and continues targeting local communities.

In addition, black communities have also worked to disseminate information about violence in their territories at the national and international level. *Palanque el Congal* is a member of the PCN that works in recent years to increase international awareness of the situation. In 2005 they promoted a Humanitarian Verification Mission

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[28] Many local peace initiatives have adopted the legal figure of corporations since as corporations they have more opportunities to access aid resources.

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in Buenaventura with the participation of governmental institutions, international organizations and other local communities.

All these different initiatives implemented by civil society to resist violence have had to work in a context of the constant struggle between illegal armed groups for territorial control. Interviewees also suggest that more recently, the increase of armed forces in the region has increasingly put civilians at risk. Although their hard work in confronting armed actors and promoting more democratic local governments and better local practices have been targeted by illegal armed groups, it would be inaccurate to conclude that because levels of violence have increased it is because CSWP is not working in Valle/Cauca. Therefore, it is not possible to establish a causal link between CSWP and a variation in levels of violence. The evidence suggests that there is a stronger correlation between competition between illegal armed groups for territorial control and the perpetuation of violence in Valle/Cauca.

Territorial Competition in Valle/Cauca

The evidence in this case does not refer to a single armed groups achieving control after a certain date. In this case, interviewees did not refer to a single illegal armed group controlling the territory but rather they make reference to a constant struggle during the last twenty years and to very short and localize victories of one illegal armed group over another. Although this was a traditional area of FARC and ELN presence, paramilitaries and more recently "new emerging bands" have been contesting the control over territory constantly. The constant struggle between FARC, ELN and paramilitaries has resulted in a great number of massacres, attacks against villages and massive assassinations.

The paramilitary offensive campaign to enter into the region, adds up to the recent military response to the increase of State Armed Forces by FARC and ELN. Such continuing struggle between armed groups had a great influence in the escalation of violence between 1998 and 2001 and continues to perpetuate high levels of violence. A number of characteristics explain the interest of illegal armed groups in gaining access to this territory. In addition to providing armed groups with fast ways of transportation through the Cauca River and the Pan-American road, access to Buenaventura means an open door to the Pacific Ocean for illegal economies. Such strategic corridors are optimal to grow and transport illicit drugs and to illegally acquire weapons (Echandía, 2006).

In the early 1990s levels of violence in Valle/Cauca were already significant, in part due to the competition between Medellin and Cali drug cartels, but also due to an offensive strategy implemented by both the ELN and FARC against paramilitary groups wanting to expand and contest their territories. In the mid 1990s guerrilla's control over the main corridor Cali-Buenaventura motivated drug trafficking networks to support independent "self-defense" structures. During late 1990s, FARC activity increased noticeably in 1997, and has increased since then constantly and continued increasing between 2000 and 2003. From 45 violent actions in 2001 they went up to 78 in 2002 and to 120 in 2003 in Cauca. In 2002, FARC committed a surprisingly orchestrated massive kidnapping in Cali of twelve *diputados* of Valle del Cauca. In 2007 FARC assassinated

eleven of them. This event became a critical juncture, not only for FARC's evolution, but also for the Colombian armed conflict in general.

Once independent "self-defense" groups were constituted as AUC in 1997, violence in the region started a new cycle of escalation. Paramilitaries began an offensive campaign against leftist guerrilla increasingly targeting local communities. With a clear offensive campaign, during this time, both, *Bloque Calima* and *Bloque Farallones* armed themselves and gained more influence. By 2000, AUC officially declares their intentions to advance from south of Valle del Cauca to north of Cauca and withdraw guerrilla out of the region (Garzón, 2005). By 2000, paramilitaries had the control of the flat areas (Jamundí, Pradera, Santander de Quilichao, Buenos Aires, Tuluá, Buga, Palmira and Sevilla) in addition to the urban area of Buenaventura.

In December 2000, two hundred AUC combatants attacked and occupied seventeen indigenous and afro-descendent villages around the Naya Valley[29]. At least 40 civilians were killed, 60 are still disappeared and hundreds decided to leave the area (PHRO, 2003). This paramilitary campaign had a tremendous impact on the levels of violence. The Armed Forces began a military campaign against all illegal armed groups as part of Uribe's DSP. However, such efforts could not stop a second attempt of paramilitaries from gaining access to the cordillera which coincides with the trends of massacres and IDP in the region. By April 2001 the Pacific and Calima Blocks began an offensive campaign towards the cordillera. Their objective was not only to defend big land owners from guerrilla attacks, but also to violently solve landownership problems (Garzón, 2005)[30].

The increase of levels of violence was a clear result of competition for territorial control. Before paramilitaries entered the region, indigenous communities were affected by FARC's control:

"Since 1970s FARC is attacking indigenous communities. For instance in Caloto, FARC territory, because any armed actor has to control territory. (…) If they do not control territory, they get killed by the competing party. (…) But it is not only military control, they have to control population too and avoid opposition. Therefore they have to kill indigenous leaders. The autonomy of cabildos[31] challenges the illegal armed actor's project to control territory" (Cortés, 25.07).

Pécaut (2003) refers to the levels of violence between 2000 and 2003 as an "everyday war" between paramilitaries looking to gain control over the strategic corridor running from Buenaventura to Tumaco (Nariño). As a consequence, the situation changed little even after President Uribe's plan to recover the military control of highly affected areas. However, this is a difference compared to the response to levels of violence in Magdalena Medio. In that case, the Armed Forces were unwilling to confront illegal armed groups, especially paramilitaries. But in Valle/Cauca, their increasing presence to recover the territorial control from the hands of illegal armed groups contributed to the increasing levels of violence.

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[29] Four of them located in Valle and nine in Cauca.

[30] A clear example is the event of the ranch El Nilo, occupied by indigenous people and sold to narcotraffikers. On December 1991, a group of twenty armed men killed twenty indigenous. See Masacre "Caloto" v. Colombia, Case 11.101, report Nº 36/00, Inter-Am. C.H.R., OEA/Ser.L/V/II.106 Doc. 3 rev. in 468 (1999).

[31] Indigenous political unites.

This analysis of the correlation between territorial competition and variation of levels of violence in Valle/Cauca suggests a stronger link between continuing competition for territorial control between illegal armed groups and the little change and recent increase of levels of violence. However, the analysis presented in this chapter so far, as in the case of Magdalena Medio results in a paradox when using Kalyvas' framework. Even in the midst of such perpetuation of violence, civil society in Valle/Cauca has been able to organize in several ways and confront illegal armed actors directly.

6. Rethinking the Link between Civil Society and Civil War

The empirical analysis shows that variations of levels of violence, based on the available data, are not explained by the constant activity of CSWP. Therefore a causal correlation between CSWP and less violence becomes weak. The controlled comparison between Magdalena Medio and Valle/Cauca suggest that Kalyvas' theory is a more robust explanation for variation of levels of violence. The increasing violence between 1998 and 2001 coincides more with the consolidation of paramilitary forces and their clear offensive campaign against leftist guerrillas. In Magdalena Medio levels of violence decreased dramatically after 2001 and such decline coincides with a concentration of CSWP. But, Valle/Cauca does not show such an evident decrease despite the strong presence of CSWP. The variation of levels of violence in these two cases reminds us that violence is used with a purpose. Nevertheless its benefits, perpetrators understand the costs of using indiscriminate violence when they gain some kind of control. However, such conclusion presents a paradox. Contrary to what Kalyvas predicts, neutrality and "fence-sitting" is possible even when territory is being contested. But what does exactly this mean for our understanding of civil society and its link with civil war?

Even during territorial contestation civil society continued to work for peace and to organize against the illegal use of violence. In the case of Magdalena Medio, the most violent group did not received strong support from local communities but instead they openly accused them to the national and international community. Human rights organizations, INGOs and NGOs mobilized, warned, denounced and firmly rejected the paramilitary project and abuses committed by all parties of the conflict. These peace initiatives emerged before increasing levels of violence. CSWP in the case of Magdalena Medio challenges Kalyva's prediction on how, during contestation, opportunity of association and trust shrinks. The case of Magdalena Medio is a clear example that, although risky, to "seat-on-the-fence" is an available option, even when civilians face the constant risk of being accused to be collaborators of the competing party.

Also, in the case of Valle/Cauca, where territorial competition lasted longer without any illegal armed group gaining considerable control, CSWP was able to organize and resist collaborating with non-state armed groups. The constant struggle for territory between guerrillas and paramilitaries and the little trust on the effective provision of public security by the State's Armed forces, urge CSWP to develop their own mechanisms to overcome violence, fight for their survival and look for economic alternatives. But how is it possible for civil society to work for peace and "sit-on-the fence" while the territory is constantly being disputed?

Not surprisingly, CSWP needs to recognize *de facto* failed control of the state and in some cases, engage illegal armed groups directly. In his interview, Valencia (2007) describes in detail how the NASA *Guardia Indigena* was able to free Toribio's mayor kidnapped in 2005: *"(…) about 500 or 600 guards, we walked deep into the jungle for four hours until we surrounded them* (FARC commanders)*, with respect we asked them to return our communeros.[32]They did not oppose because they saw we were determined. (…) They were left with no arguments"*.

Those organizations constantly denouncing both guerrilla activities as well as paramilitary violence against civilians are an organized form of "fence-sitting". The members of civil society recognize their actions as neutral and highlight the importance of maintaining such neutrality and to promote it among locals. Their organization and their ability of networking with other local, national and international organizations provide them certain level of trust among those that do not want to be part of the dynamics of violence. However, this does not mean that it is possible to blame both actors equally. During territorial contestation in Magdalena Medio, paramilitaries were the main perpetrators of violence against civilians. Condemns from the part of civil society were more directed against paramilitaries. Is this lack of neutrality?

Unfortunately, in the case of Colombia, illegal armed groups (and some times the Government too) use these claims as a proof of civil society supporting the "left". In response to civil society's claims against the main perpetrator, their lives are constantly threatened by paramilitaries or by the State itself. It is necessary to recognize that civil society's allegations demonstrate the lack of legitimacy of illegal armed groups' militaty victory. CSWP does not loose its neutrality after recognizing who exerts *de facto* powers. They just understand the logic behind violence. However, the analysis presented here does not argue that all segments of society that do not have a gun in their hands are neutral and I recognize that civil society has also a "dark side". Rather, this paper suggests that it is time to promote a meaningful dialogue between studies on civil society that works for peace and studies on civil war. Both need to understand the logic behind war and peace and include each other as important variables. To rethink the link between civil society and civil war in the terms proposed here, could lead not only to a better understanding of the dynamics of war, but also to the development of more coherent policies on the ground.

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[32] Political leaders

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