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Utopia in the Midst of Dystopia? The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, Colombia

Thomas MacManus and Tony Ward¹

Abstract

The Peace Community of San José de Apartadó is a self-governing community of peasant farmers ('campesinos') in Urabá, one of the regions of Colombia where violence by the State, leftist guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries has been most intense. It is based on a rejection of all violence and on autonomy from, and neutrality between, the State, paramilitaries and guerrillas. Drawing on interviews with community members by the first author, this paper considers how far the Peace Community has succeeded in establishing a radical alternative to the State legal and penal systems in pursuit of what could be called a 'real utopia' (Wright 2010).²

Introduction

Colombia is a society associated more with 'magical realism' than with 'real utopias', and the war-torn region of Urabá seems a singularly unpromising setting for a utopian project. We argue, however, that significant elements of a 'real utopia' can be found in the *Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó* (the 'Peace Community'), a grouping of rural settlements that refuses to take sides in the armed conflict that has raged in the country for over half a century. With no end to the violence in sight, the Peace Community decided to run its affairs independently of a repressive state and its brutal paramilitary allies, and of the

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² We thank David Rodriguez Goyes for his comments on a draft of this article.

violent opposing guerrillas. In taking the Peace Community as an example of a 'real utopia', we do not mean to suggest that it is by any means an ideal society, but rather that its creation of a peaceful, self-governing enclave in the midst of armed conflict is both a successful pragmatic strategy for survival and one that is guided by a utopian vision. If by a 'real utopia' we understand not a perfect realisation of an ideal society, but rather a vision of the ideal that provides real guidance under very imperfect circumstances (Wright 2010), then the Peace Community has a fair claim to embody a utopian vision.

This article does not attempt to provide a complete analysis of this unique social experiment. Our research on the Peace Community was part of a larger project on the resistance of civil society in Colombia and five other countries to the crimes of the State and of paramilitary organisations, so we were interested primarily in that aspect of the community's work and only incidentally in its social organisation, its economy, and what we would characterise as its autonomous, informal legal system (see also MacManus and Ward 2015; Ward and Green 2015). Our interviews with members and supporters of the Peace Community do, however, provide the basis for the following brief account of its history and of its informal legal system.

Colombian society is marked by over 100 years of multiple conflicts. The Colombian state has rarely exercised an effective monopoly of the organised use of force within its territory since colonial times (Palacios 2006), but peasant farmers have not been able to evade state interference to the extent that James C. Scott (2009) celebrates in his study of Southeast Asian uplands.

La Violencia, the complex and brutal civil conflict of the late 1940s and early 1950s, began a period of internal warfare that has lasted almost continuously until the present time, with portions of Colombian territory being controlled by guerrilla forces opposed to the State. In much of its territory, the State has never been an effective arbiter of land ownership disputes (Richani 2013), which further contributes to disorder. Nor has the Colombian state been able to maintain a criminal justice, social control presence. Expanding the reach of its challenged monopoly, the delivery of organised violence has been partially delegated to state-validated paramilitary forces, sometimes referred to as the *paraestado*, or para-state. The *paraestado* metes out its own vicious form of justice in the areas that the paramilitaries control, or seek to control. Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES) (2011) estimates that over 5,200,000 people were forcibly displaced in Colombia between 1985 and 2011. Paramilitary groups are the 'primary force responsible

for displacement' (García-Godos and Lid 2010: 491), which usually takes place in areas with fertile land or valuable natural resources (Hristov 2009: 76).

In response to the constant violence, communities have developed resistance in the form of a separation, or 'rupture', from all armed actors – including the State and its agents – which is inspired by, yet goes beyond, forms of neutrality recognised by international humanitarian law (Romero Ramirez 2013). The community has adopted and adapted familiar concepts of international law in extraordinary ways and has earned recognition of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights via protection orders³.

This paper charts the rise of the Peace Community and its principal tormentors – the State and its paramilitary agents – and discusses the emergence of a radical alternative to the State's legal apparatus.

Origins of the Peace Community

'They cut him up like a pig', the elderly man announced as the first author stood beside him in San Josécito (a small plot of land down the road from San José, from where the community have been displaced). He pointed to a picture of Santiago Tuberquia Muñoz, who was about 18 months old when he was killed by a joint military-paramilitary operation on Monday, 21st February 2005. The aftermath of this 'Operation Phoenix' compounded years of violence perpetrated against these *campesinos* and led to the establishment of the Peace Community:

In 1997, we began suffering violence ... we saw massacres, we saw a lot of torture, we saw kids being chopped up, we saw the rape of our women, we saw indiscriminate bombings, and this all was carried out against *campesinos*. After seeing all these consequences of violence, we came to San José. The town was all alone ... there are only two old people living there. So the farmers occupied the houses, we were 370 families, and that's when the first massacre occurred ... the 17th Brigade committed the first massacre with the paramilitaries, three people were killed. People were extremely fearful and lots of people left. They went to Medellín, or they went I don't know where. And then there was

³ See The Order of the President of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights of 9th October 2000; and see also the Orders of the Inter-American Court of November 24, 2000; June 18, 2002; November 17, 2004; March 15, 2005 and February 2, 2006, which have repeatedly called upon the Colombian state to maintain the measures.

another massacre [2005]. Five [in fact, eight, five men and three children] people were killed by the 17th Brigade and the paramilitaries, and even more people fled. That's when we, the people who decided to stay, met, and we started organising. Of course we were afraid, but I dunno, it's pride, we are going to resist. They are not going to take away our lands. So you can kill us but we're going to stay here ... we decided to sign an agreement that says we wouldn't participate with any of the armed actors, neither directly, nor indirectly. To be able to be outside of the conflict, and that's how the Peace Community was created. (Interview, Sebastián)⁴

Separating from the parties to the conflict necessarily disconnects the community from the apparatuses of the State. But in a region of developmental neglect in a country where a state government struggles to maintain order, government services are not missed as much as one would expect. As to whether they were interested in receiving health, education, and other services that are normally provided by the State, a member remarked: 'it doesn't really matter, because they've never fulfilled them anyway' (Interview, Enrique).

A refusal to cooperate with any of the competing systems of violence constitutes a challenge to sovereignty over the area. The community has suffered enormously at the hands of armed actors, and it reports that over 200 members have been murdered (interview, Sofia). In February 2005, eight people 'were killed by the paramilitaries and the army', including a 6-year-old girl and an 18-month-old boy (Interview, Agustín). In 2008, the Attorney General's Office investigated 69 soldiers for the killing. An army captain was arrested for his role in the massacre (Amnesty International 2008), and in 2010 he was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment (González Arango 2010). However, the Peace Community is still under threat from the military-paramilitary complex⁵. On 21 July 2014, a government soldier reportedly stated that 'the time has arrived for that son-of-a-bitch Peace Community, we are coordinating with the paramilitaries for the extermination of that son-of-a-bitch Peace Community' (Amnesty International 2014: 1).

The community leaders feel that the paramilitaries have filled a vacuum left by the State in their territory: 'there's a [paramilitary] control of the social,

⁴ The names of Peace Community members are fictitious. All quotations cited by first name only are from interviews with Peace Community members conducted by Thomas MacManus in November 2013, translated into English by a local (anonymous) interpreter.

⁵ Collusion between paramilitaries and state security forces is a well-documented feature of the Colombian situation (see, for example, Hristov 2009).

economic and political contexts here in the region' (interview, Enrique). In the absence of the State, the Peace Community has taken on the day-to-day running of their community based on newly conceptualised fundamental principles:

The principles that the peace community at San Jose Apartadó have are of great importance. These principles were created in 1997 and we saw that if we were with the army, or the paramilitaries or the guerrillas, that the others would kill us. If we were with the army, the guerrillas would come in, if we were with the guerrillas, the paramilitaries or the army would come in. (Interview, Enrique)

The principal 'law' of the Community is contained in two instruments adopted in 1997, the *Declaratoria* and the *Reglamento Interno*⁶. The *Reglamento* (Regulations or Code of Conduct) sets out (in numbered Articles and Paragraphs) some of the basic rules in force today, including a ban on alcohol, and the disciplinary process which interviewees described: a first breach of the rules results in a hearing 'to resolve the problem', a repetition of the offence leads to a second hearing and a final warning, and a third to expulsion from the community. The idea of expulsion echoes the principles of formal legal processes and may limit claims to a genuine utopian alternative. Furthermore, there are serious questions surrounding the efficacy of 'due process' in proceedings which result in such expulsions. Going beyond merely internal matters, the *Reglamento* also demands respect for the rights of the Community from the State and other armed groups. The Internal Council of the community has the duty to 'regulate [*regular*], represent [*representar*] and demand [*exigir*] the rights of the Peace Community before the competent authorities or before any armed actors' (Art. 9d) and to 'monitor respect for the Declaration of the Peace Community on the part of armed actors; in the case of a violation, a public denunciation shall be issued at national and international level' (Art. 9g); and the whole community is to respond to a violation of the rights of any of its members by any of the armed actors (Art. 10).

Commandeering international legal norms

Recognising that the persistence of the Colombian conflict is fuelled by issues surrounding land, and to discourage interference from the State, the Peace

⁶ Available on the Community's website: cdpsanjose.org

Community created a self-styled neutral zone which, Fr Alberto Franco (of the Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz, an NGO that supports the various peace communities and similar initiatives) argues, is ‘a small place that is identified, and has signs to label it, using the international humanitarian law principle of distinction of civilians in war’.

While their neutral status does not enjoy formal legal protection, a kind of recognition is extended to them in practice. Members and supporters of the Peace Community interpret a series of decisions by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights as recognising the humanitarian zones as an expression of international humanitarian law (Interview, Fr Alberto Franco, November 22, 2013). In fact, these orders do not accord the Peace Community as a body any formal recognition, but require the State to protect ‘a plurality of persons’ who are identified by their membership of the Community (IACHR 2002, para. 8). The community is nevertheless able to use these judgments as a source of legitimacy, and has won a degree of informal acceptance of its autonomy from the Colombian state. Even under the presidency of Álvaro Uribe Velez (2002-10), who was openly hostile to the peace communities, Mason observed:

Although the government is emphatic that it never formally agreed to the rules of the Peace Communities, informal practices by public officials in fact constitute de facto approval of their autonomy and independent authority. (Mason 2010: 21)

For example, local officials would ask for permission to enter community land. Other peace communities have received some formal recognition under Law 70 of 1993, which provides for collective ownership of land by Afro-Colombian communities; this in turn has been used by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights to persuade the Inter-American Court to make protection orders in their favour (IACHR 2003).

Communities across Colombia have emulated the peace community model (e.g. in Curvaradó) or have adapted alternative versions to suit their own distinct circumstances. CAVIDA (*Comunidad de Auto-determinación, Vida y Dignidad*) established a ‘humanitarian zone’ in 2001, making

creative use of international humanitarian law—it is based on the principle of distinction between combatants and civilians, a key theoretical tenet of international humanitarian law, which aims to protect civilians in conflict zones from becoming casualties of war. The idea is to demarcate a space designated solely for the civilian

population—similar to the Red Cross sign on a hospital. (Burnyeat 2013: 439)

A similar model is adopted by the ‘zones of refuge’ of the Naga river communities:

... a place inside the community that has signs and is identified as a place where they can all go in a time of conflict ... and it will be respected and that helps avoid possible displacement. And it also helps them make visible their commitment to being civil society in the middle of a conflict. (Interview, Fr Alberto Franco, November 22, 2013)

Some indigenous communities have adopted similar versions that are sensitive to their own cosmovision, called ‘humanitarian reserves’ or ‘areas of autonomous coming together’. Other communities had developed ‘areas of biodiversity’ to protect land: ‘... So even though they don’t have formal legal protection, there’s a kind of recognition that happens in practice ...’ (Interview, Fr Alberto Franco, November 22, 2013).

The Peace Community’s project is more radical than that of these various zones because of its ‘rupture’ with the State:

This ‘rupture’ is part of a profound, grassroots, all-or-nothing ethical stance, for the Peace Community is not just about civilian protection in the midst of a war zone. It has become the expression of an alternative life project, a refusal to participate in the capitalist system which contributes to the violence in Colombia. (Burnyeat 2013: 442)

There is, then, a distinctly utopian element in the Peace Community’s project:

So this is why our community has been formed, we believe that where death has occurred, life should flourish, we believe that amongst all the assassinations, the killings that have occurred, all the blood that has been spilled, that we should come together, we should construct a community that supports life. That we can flourish amongst all of the violence that has occurred and we can be an example for the entire world, of how life should move forward, in the face of all of the violence. (Interview, Agustín)

Although this ethical stance is not directly inspired by international humanitarian law in the way the more modest goals of CAVIDA appear to be, it has made equally creative use of international law as a source of legitimacy and protection.

International solidarity and ‘accompaniment’

To help maintain their bold experiment, the Peace Community enjoys ‘accompaniment’ from international organisations – for example, Peace Brigades International (PBI), Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), and Palomas de Paz (or Operazione Colomba) – whose physical presence in the villages significantly increases the political cost of any attack. The community also has sister cities around the world, including Maddison, Wisconsin (USA), three cities in Spain, and one each in Portugal, Italy, Luxembourg and Belgium:

Both national and international level sister cities have had huge advantages for us. They’ve allowed us to really sustain ourselves as a community and they’ve given us support that we’re not alone, and we think without these sister cities it would have been much easier for the government, together with the paramilitaries, to wipe us out, to destroy us. (Interview, Enrique)

... that’s what solidarity is all about, it’s joining together to defend people’s rights. We don’t feel alone ... we have an accompaniment to fight for our territory. The paramilitaries, the government, when there’s problems there, everyone goes to support the member of the community that’s been affected, and so if something happens we all go and we can be there for that person. We also have international accompaniment, and so when things get really hard, when there is a hard public order situation in the region, we have that confidence that we are going to be supported and we are not by ourselves, that we have that solidarity. And the people who aren’t part of the community, when something happens they tend to just get out of town. (Interview, Daniel)

The government of the Netherlands donated the money to buy the land that San Josécito, the hub settlement, stands on (Interview, Isabella); the private ownership of the property provides further legal protection from State intervention.

As a result of this non-violent ‘preservation’ of international laws, the formal state has been all but excluded from their affairs and the Peace Community have to manage traditional, ‘street crime’ internally.

Internal law, state law and autonomy

When asked about the presence of crime within the community, a resident replied:

Internally we are extremely autonomous, we have our own laws and we have our own internal structure, so if someone from the community commits a mistake regarding our process, we look at how to deal with that, but crimes? Crimes, no. Maybe differences regarding land lines or something like that, but crimes, like abuse or accidents... no, I don’t think so. I guess maybe at the beginning, when the community was just formed, when there was still the consumption of alcohol, but we have the principle that says that we don’t consume alcohol within the community; that helps. No, I don’t think so. I think in this aspect we’re doing fairly well, the people are pretty conscientious, aware, a farmer population and we’re able to look more at the impacts of the conflicts, of the conflicts in our region. And crimes? No, I don’t think so. (Interview, Enrique)

Another member was somewhat less sanguine:

No, it’s not always easy, there are some people who follow the rules and there are some people who don’t. The youth want to go out and have a little party, or go and have something to drink and have alcohol and... it’s not easy, and in the community we try to teach them that these are the rules and whatnot, but that doesn’t mean that there aren’t people who might go to San Jose for the afternoon and have some alcohol. (Interview, Sofia)

Drinking alcohol might be thought of as wrong but not as a ‘crime’. It may be that Enrique’s reply meant simply that nothing came to his mind that he would call a ‘crime’, even if some incidents – like one that was mentioned in conversation of a woman beating her child with a hose – would be crimes according to the Penal Code. Crime, as Louk Hulsman (1986) famously argued, has no ‘ontological reality’ – but a beating does have ontological reality, and

whether the Community had an effective way of responding to such incidents, we do not know.

What is the origin of the Community's principles? Where do they come from? What happens if they are breached? It may seem that we have already answered these questions: the principles come from the Declaration and Internal Code of Conduct of 1997. In terms of positivist legal theory the Community's acceptance of the validity of these documents as sources of binding norms could be called the *Grundnorm* of its autonomous legal order (Kelsen 1949). However, the documents so prominently displayed (for outside consumption) on the Community's website were mentioned only twice in interviews with community members. The only interviewee who gave them more than a passing mention, Ximena, began by using an organic metaphor to describe the role of the principles in community life:

The principles, to us, can be related to the roots of the tree. It's allowed us to create ideals for our struggle and the principles are the roots that allow us to survive amidst the conflict and so many problems that we see. We've seen pressures from all parts of society, but the roots of our principles are to maintain our activities and to move forward as a community.

Only in response to further probing did she mention a written document:

Thomas: But where do the actual principles come from?

Ximena: Where did they come from? They didn't come from the president, or the armed actors, or government institutions, they came from us [...] One by one we developed these different principles through a series of meetings and assemblies and then everyone agreed to them. Everyone sat down and signed the agreement, we've all signed that we're in agreement that these ideas came from us.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, a leading scholar of unofficial legal systems, points out 'the meaning that Western culture attributes to *writing* as a ceremony and to the *written product* as expression of commitment' (Santos 2002: 107). The act of signature (stipulated by Article 1 of the *Reglamento*) exemplifies this use of ceremonial writing. The danger of such written acts of commitment, Santos writes, is that the signed document becomes an 'impersonal fetish' alienated from the individual who signed it. In community members' rhetoric, however, the emphasis is not on written or spoken commitment to the rules but on the

importance of the principles to the survival and daily life of the community. As another member expressed it:

These are the fundamental rules of our community, they help to keep us together, they help to hold us together as a community, many communities have been created on a national level, but without the principles that held us together. And they've been broken down or torn apart by the guerrillas, or by the paramilitaries, or by the government. (Interview, Enrique)

Nicolás explained that the ban on alcohol was introduced a few months after the Community was founded, after one member killed another in a drunken fight at a party.

Nicolás: So this has been an issue for us from the beginning and it continues to be an issue, that there's no alcohol in the community, that there are people like ____, who from time to time drink and so we need to figure out how to deal with that. If there's some sort of sanction, or if it's something that's ongoing, if it's a repeated case, then the assembly needs to decide in the face of this grave situation how we're going to react as a community.

Thomas: What kind of sanctions can you apply?

Nicolás: It's mostly work. A day's work, two days' work, of doing hopefully community work, something that benefits the community. Something pretty simple.

For more serious cases, the disciplinary procedure was described in a way consistent with the *Reglamento*:

The person is talked to ... three times, and if in that three times the person isn't willing to make a commitment to not continue that activity then they're removed from the community. Only one person has left the community, because of illicit crops ... we had to tell the person to leave, that they couldn't be a part of the community anymore ... illicit crops have brought us too many problems, the government was using that as a way of taking away people's land, taking away community land and it's not just something that we can accept. (Interview, Mateo)

In talking about their 'rupture' with the State Community members took pride in their autonomy but also criticised the State for failing to fulfil its obligations:

Regardless of the rupture, the breakdown we have with the State, regarding the services that they provide, we have alternative education, the internal processes that we have work, to collect the garbage, and if you think about it, this is the same thing we've done since the beginning. The mayor here we've asked for education, for health care, for improvements on the roads, for garbage pickup. We've been asking the government, regionally, nationally, for so long to fulfil their obligations with the civil population, but it doesn't really matter if we're in rupture or not, because they've never fulfilled their obligations to begin with. And so for us being autonomous works pretty well, everyone makes it function. (Interview, Enrique)

This ambivalence also extends to state criminal justice: 'We don't really believe in the justice system. We're not against the State – there's a difference. What we're asking is that they fulfil the Constitution' (Interview, Agustín). The hoped-for constitutional rule includes a prospect of retributive justice against criminals such as the former president of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe Velez:

Sebastián: Some people talk about forgiveness, but I don't agree with that. Someone who's done so much, how are we supposed to forgive them? We live just over here and then there are 290 sets of remains, sets of bones. Bones that were sometimes thrown in a hole, sometimes thrown wherever. Who did this? Uribe did this.

Thomas: What should happen to Uribe?

Sebastián: He should be stuck in jail. (Interview, Sebastián)

Another member, Matías, hoped 'that they stick [Uribe] in jail until he dies'. The rejection of reparations in their current form⁷ was seen as an important matter of principle:

... the money that they receive is a [pittance] compared to maybe what they could deserve and there's often conditions that are attached, that you can't talk about it again, or you can't make for the demands on it. There are other ways that reparation can occur, but that's not acceptable. (Interview, Nicolás)

⁷ Under the Colombian Victims and Land Restitution Law (Ley de Víctimas y de Restitución de Tierra, Law 1448, June 2011), individual victims are entitled both to material and to moral reparations. The law also establishes the Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation to ensure the right of victims to collective reparations.

The participant continued to outline that reparations are not enough in any case, and that there is a truth seeking element in the refusal to be 'paid off':

... we looked for a more integral approach to reparations, that we know who committed the crime, who was responsible for that kind of crime to be committed. On a higher level, why was the crime committed, and that there's a trial, that the people are said to be guilty, that there's a legal process that says that they're guilty and it's not just economic. (Interview, Nicolás)

Here we see a reliance on the state legal apparatus, again suggesting the temporary nature of the current rupture. The Community also fear that reparations have been used as a means to undermine their solidarity:

I think the government's attempts to destabilise, they're ready to wipe out the community, the government has used different tactics to divide people. Some people might get a house, some people might get some food, some people might get some money. (Interview, Nicolás)

Despite claims of autonomy, it appears that the Peace Community are operating under two normative regimes, the formal legal structure of the State, and the informal internal principles. They are at pains to cut the State out of everyday life; for example, independent contractors installed the electricity infrastructure for the Community so that they wouldn't have to depend on unreliable state services (Interview, Enrique). They resist the building of roads:

The construction of roads would generate like an infiltration, a way to really penetrate the zone, that we don't feel is positive, that it would damage the *campesinos'* culture, our way of life, as well as helping the other interests that would destroy the lifestyle that we have. No, we don't want roads that would be very negative for the *campesinos'* lifestyle. (Interview, Enrique)

The Community needs an income to offset the lack of state welfare provision. Part of this comes from charitable funding for infrastructure projects but another important source of revenue is the sale of cacao to the British cosmetics firm Lush Ltd. In 2011, Lush Ltd. took their 'risky' first shipment, 25 tonnes for

£50,000, and the 10th shipment was contracted late 2015 (Interview, Lush Ltd., 2015). To export cacao to the UK, the community has to engage with the state legal system to the extent of applying for an export licence (facilitated by Empresa Cooperativa del Sur del Cauca or COSURCA, a cooperative that exports fair-trade products). They also have to make contracts that will, in the event of a dispute, be recognised as binding by the courts.

There are also instances when the Community's values and the State's laws are congruent, but are still considered to be at odds. A good example of this is state and Community attitudes to military service:

Luckily we're able to generate our own laws and so community members don't have the obligation of doing their military service, of using weapons, because we know, we know what a weapon is for, you don't pick up a weapon to defend someone, you pick up a weapon to kill someone. Weapons are used to kill and we're very clear about that, that's why many of us have declared ourselves as conscientious objectors. When I was 18 [in 2000] I was picked up twice and they tried to force me to do my military service and both times I said 'no', no I'm not going to give them my time, I'm a displaced person and I'm not going to give my time to the State to do that. I'm a conscientious objector and I know weapons are used to kill ... If you want to be a guerrilla member, a paramilitary, or in the army, that's your decision, but you need to leave the Peace Community. We have very clear internal principles on that. (Interview, Enrique)

Knowingly or otherwise, Enrique relied on the spirit of Article 18 of the 1991 Colombian Constitution guaranteeing freedom of conscience, which the Constitutional Court has interpreted as implying a right to conscientious objection (Corte Constitucional 2009). The state relied on part of Article 216, 'All Colombian citizens are obliged to take up arms when public need mandates it in order to defend national independence and the public institutions'. Some years after the attempt to recruit Enrique, the Constitutional Court came down in favour of his position: Article 18 will trump 216 if the objections are considered 'deep, fixed, and sincere' (ibid, headnote and para. 5.2.6).

Discussion

When Peace Community members talk of a 'rupture' between the Community and the Colombian state, they are not adopting a strategy of 'ruptural

transformation' in Wright's (2009, 2010) sense of an overt attack on the State led by class-based parties. Such a strategy is closer to that of the leftist FARC guerrillas, whose path the Peace Community rejects as emphatically as it does the State. (At the time of writing, however, the FARC and the government have reached a deal that will require approval by referendum.)

Rather than aspiring to 'ruptural transformation' the Peace Community is, in Wright's terms, an example of 'interstitial transformation'. Within the 'interstices' of the State and the capitalist economy, the Community has created new social relations that embody significant features of Wright's 'real utopias,' subordinating state power to a civil society which democratically controls the means of production (Wright 2009: 268-9). Rather than confronting the State head-on, the Community seeks to ignore it as far as possible.

Ximena's use of an organic metaphor, that of a tree whose roots enable it to survive in a harsh environment (see above) chimes with Wright's use of ecological metaphors to describe 'interstitial transformation'. Successful interstitial transformation resembles 'a complex ecological system in which one kind of organism gains a foothold initially in a niche and eventually out-competes rivals for food sources and comes to dominate the environment' (Wright 2009: 213). Wright is, however, quite sceptical about the prospect of interstitial alternatives out-competing the State or the capitalist system – and rightly so. To extend the ecological metaphor, we might think of small mammals in a world dominated by dinosaurs. If some catastrophe wipes out the dinosaurs, the mammals will inherit the earth; but while the environment remains as it is, the best the mammals can realistically expect is to flourish in their own little niches. Similarly, the Peace Community members thought that their values and principles – the 'roots' of the community – would enable their way of life to survive, we heard nothing to suggest that they thought they were paving the way for a comprehensive transformation of society.

The third model of transformation described by Wright is a 'symbiotic' one, which reflects the idea that 'bottom-up social empowerment within a capitalist society will be most stable and defensible when such social empowerment also helps solve certain real problems faced by capitalists and other elites' (Wright 2009: 240). Although Wright says very little about any 'other elites' besides capitalists, we would suggest that the Peace Community shows a degree of 'symbiosis', not with the Colombian state or the capitalist system but with international law and the transnational institutions, particularly the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, that aspire to enforce it. The Peace Community and its allies help to solve the problem of the impotence of

international law in the face of paramilitary violence. Through the system of 'accompaniment' it provides a kind of 'bottom up' policing that formal transnational organisations cannot provide. At the same time, it confers on international law a legitimacy that it arguably does not deserve, particularly given the Inter-American Court's unwillingness to recognise the Community as anything more than an aggregate of individuals.

In this appeal to legal principles (a feature of many of the civil society organizations in our larger study) we can see another kind of utopianism, which consists simply of taking legal ideals seriously. A state which fully and impartially meets its obligations to its citizens, and imprisons its former Presidents for their crimes, is a kind of utopia, though not perhaps one that will appeal to penal abolitionists. The cause of human rights arguably represents a kind of utopia, filling the gap left by the apparent failure of other internationalist utopian visions (Moyn 2010).

The Peace Community, united against a common set of enemies, report low levels of crime internally but may have a narrow definitional boundary for crime and focus on the breaches of the *Reglamento*. Internally, the Community reject state interference, and specifically the Colombian criminal justice system, in favour of informal sanctions such as 'community labour' or even – *in extremis* – exile. These non-penal forms of the Community's sanctions system may be seen as purely pragmatic, in that the Community do not have the capacity to incarcerate, and do not support the view that the Community is against imprisonment *per se*; neither do their calls for the imprisonment of their oppressors. But, as a principle-driven community, its informal sanctions are designed to benefit the community through contribution to the work load or by the removal of members that make the settlements a military target (such as the expulsion of growers of drugs crops): it is not punishment of the individual that is the focus but the smooth working of the Community as an entity. Should there be a serious crime committed in the community, it is unlikely that they will be able to deal with it internally and likely that the State would step in.

The ultimate goal of the Peace Community is not to remain in a permanent state of autarky but to enjoy the benefits of a legitimate state. That is a very modest kind of utopia, and as Colombia inches its way towards peace, we can only hope that it is not entirely devoid of realism.

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