

# THE FARC-EP: BEYOND THE RIFLES, “REACHING THE HEART” OF THE COLOMBIAN PEASANTS



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Colombian peasants*

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July 2017

In memory:

of my father Alvaro and my uncle Julio,  
who would have really appreciated these lines,

of Alfredo Correa de Andreis  
and Jorge Freytter Romero,  
source of inspiration for many critical scholars,

of those who have died  
in the longest conflict of Latin America  
with the hope that someday,  
we, the survivors of the war,  
can see each other without fear,  
without hate.

## Abstract

The FARC-EP have developed several strategies in rural areas under their control as part of their strategic plan towards the taking of power. These strategies can be considered as part of a general tactic of reaching the heart of the peasantry which includes the way the rebels approach rural communities resolving immediate needs of the population, the development of a rebel governance system and the creation of an ideological and cultural apparatus, altogether to develop a counter-hegemonic struggle against the regime. Several theories and narratives have been recovered by interviewing seven representatives of the FARC-EP in Havana, Cuba, within the framework of the peace talks between the Colombian government and this guerrilla, to provide the reader with a better understanding of this phenomenon.

### *Keywords*

FARC-EP, Rebel governance, Hegemony, Rational choice, Reaching the heart, peasant support, rebelliousness.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my special gratitude to the peace delegation of the FARC-EP especially to Ivan Marquez and Carlos Antonio Lozada who gave me the opportunity to approach them in this important historical moment in Havana, Cuba. Special thanks to Pablo Atrato, Isabella San Roque, Hermes Aguilar, Walter Mendoza, Camila Cienfuegos, Victoria Sandino and Edison Romaña for their testimonies. A very special acknowledgement to Victoria who advised me to choose the most experienced guerrilla fighters in rural interventions and to Isabella San Roque who practically was the person in charge of my accommodation and logistics for the development of this research. I really appreciate as well the technical advice of Boris who taught me some skills at using cameras.

I express my thanks as well to Manuel for his hospitality in Havana and to my son and daughters for their patience in my occasional absences. I would like to express a special acknowledgement to the Colombian artist Gustavo Matíz who made the two beautiful drawings of this work and to Ricardo Vaz who made an important contribution to this work improving the use of English.

This research was supported by the advice of Gerard Verschoor and Gemma van der Haar from Wageningen University who have been more than supervisors, becoming my friends and colleagues. I really thank you for the knowledge you have shared. Future challenges about Colombia, peace and rural development could be undertaken by the new research team which has been born as a progressive and critical support to Colombian peasant communities.

Ellos son un pedazo de mi patria.  
 Hacen de la ladera infértil, graneros del país.  
 Con palancas de arbustos, con hachas y  
 machetes viejos, con sus abuelos,  
 sus hijos, sus mujeres, hacen parir de la tierra  
 verdes racimos y esperanzas verdes.  
 Ellos son la sustancia de los surcos.  
 Sus músculos son el nervio de las plantas,  
 Su copioso sudor el invierno del tiempo.  
 Y la vida del labriego traducida en precios.  
 Van creciendo sus cultivos como sus ilusiones.  
 Le cantan a la tierra, al sol, al agua.  
 Le cantan a la preñez de sus mujeres.  
 Al advenimiento de los nuevos hijos.  
 Al buey, a los caballos viejos.  
 A la nueva cosecha,  
 para que sea grande y colme sus anhelos,  
 porque su patria es como ellos: generosa.  
 Viven en míseras chozas, junto a las fuentes de agua.  
 Llevan los pies descalzos,  
 y en sus manos un pedazo de pan duro para el vecino enfermo.  
 Ahí van con su nostalgia a cuestras.  
 Hoy por mí, mañana por tí,  
 como si la naturaleza lo quisiera así ...  
 ¡Ellos son un pedazo de mi patria!

They are a piece of our homeland.  
 From the infertile hillside, they make barns of the country.  
 With levers of brushes, with axes and  
 old machetes, with their grandparents,  
 their children, their women, they made the land give birth to  
 green bunches and green hopes,  
 They are the essence of the furrows.  
 Their muscles are the nerve of the plants,  
 Their copious sweat is the winter of time.  
 And the life of the peasant translated into prices.  
 Their crops are growing like their ilusions.  
 They sing to the land, to the sun, to the water.  
 They sing to the pregnancy of their women.  
 To the coming of new children.  
 To the ox, to the old horses.  
 To the new harvest,  
 That it be big and satisfies their desires,  
 Because their homeland is like them: generous.  
 They live in miserable shacks, near to the water sources.  
 They have bare feet,  
 And in their hands a piece of hard bread for the sick neighbour.  
 Here they go with nostalgia on their backs,  
 Today for me, tomorrow for you,  
 As if the nature would want it like that  
 They are a piece of our homeland.

Poem of the FARC-EP founder Jacobo Arenas to the peasants

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## Introduction

***“Como Don Quijote, sin temor que me derroten,  
que el pueblo se nos una, que la verdad se toque,  
o es que tienen miedo que los pobres hagan bloque,  
adquieran conocimiento y en un choque los derroten”***

*(Like Don Quijote, without fear of being defeated,  
may the people join us, may the truth is touched,  
or are they scared that the poor make a block,  
acquiring knowledge and in a strike, they will defeat you)*

Lyrics of the song: “Yo apoyo los dialogos” with the Cuban group  
Cuantas claras and Alexandra Nariño and Boris Guevara from the FARC-EP

What would happen if the reader discovers one day that almost all the information he/she has heard from the mass media about terrorist groups are false or at least, incomplete? Or not entirely true? What would happen to the Colombian society if one day all the citizens wake up and discover in the news that the armed group that they have known for decades as a group of *devils*, is a legal political party which would like to govern their country? This possibility is now a reality in Colombia.

In last years, the Colombian government and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo, FARC-EP* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People’s Army), one of the oldest guerrilla groups in the world, were discussing in Havana, Cuba, with the purpose of ending the largest social and armed conflict in Latin America by the implementation of a peace agreement.

After sixty years of an armed conflict in Colombia, just as I was concluding this work, on the 26th of September of 2016, both actors of the conflict signed a final agreement in Cartagena concluding this large and violent episode. One year before, on the 23rd of September of 2015, a partial agreement regarding transitional justice was signed as well, it being the most important step after almost three years of peace talks in which the Colombian government had accepted *-de facto-* the political status of the guerrilla movement, recognizing that the group labelled as *terrorist* since 2001 was a political actor. And on the same day of the signature of the agreement and with the same intention, the European Union decided to remove the FARC-EP from its list of terrorist groups.

With these new steps, a stage of implementation of the agreement has already started, trying to improve the democracy in Colombia, specially implementing important transformations in the Colombian rurality. These are contained in the first point of the agreement, entitled *Reforma Rural Integral* (Comprehensive Rural Reform), and other important achievements regarding political participation, illegal drugs and victims of the conflict. But the fact that the political status of the FARC-EP has been recognised opens a new scenario to broadly portray the rebels from a distinct perspective.



Nevertheless, despite the commitment of both parties of the conflict towards a political and negotiated solution to the war, and the hopes of those rural communities that live in battle zones, it seems that the strong war propaganda from the right-wing leaders has led to a considerable amount of Colombians opposing to the current signed deal. Spreading a huge misinformation campaign through social networks and mass media, those leaders have propelled the idea that the peace agreement would lead the country to a situation of injustice, in which the rebels would not receive any punishment for their crimes and instead of that, they would receive salaries and seats in the parliament. They also argued the ridiculous idea of a possible “homosexualization” of the Colombian society and other fallacies, which have been spread mainly by not catholic churches and their faithful followers as consequence of the inclusion of the gender perspective in the Havana’s agreement. As a consequence of this misinformation campaign, the limited knowledge about the armed conflict and the misconceptions of what the FARC-EP have done in the countryside, Colombian people — mostly urban citizens far removed from conflict areas— rejected the peace agreement in the last referendum of the second of October, leaving peasant communities in a *limbo* stage and delaying for a while the implementation of the peace agreement.

In the recent past, the Colombian society has known an official history which has mainly highlighted the violence generated by the rebels as a product of their armed struggle, while overlooking other activities developed by them in rural areas. Thus, kidnapping, robbing, *pescas milagrosas*<sup>1</sup>, battles and other rebel actions were more stressed in the mass media and in the official history, than those practices traditionally developed by the rebel organization in different rural areas. Another mistake committed by the official historians is to depoliticize the rebels and show them as an “ahistorical phenomena”, separating “the behaviour of the group from the social and historical conditions that precede the conflict” (Mampilly, 2011, p. 67).

Most of the previous analysis about the FARC-EP, the “mainstream” discourses and media, state that the rebels only use their relative power, first to make profitable business and second to recruit people, especially young men and women —if not children— to strengthen their “criminal” structures and thus their illegal business. This was the official version, at least until the signature of the peace agreement in Cartagena.

This official history has been criticised and marginally contested by several historians and intellectuals who have produced a huge literature about the armed conflict from a critical perspective, and who have recognized, among other things, the political character of the Colombian guerrillas. To cite some of them, Miguel Ángel Beltrán (2015), —for many years in prison accused of being member of the FARC-EP and recently released after demonstrating his innocence—, Alfredo Molano (1994), Darío Fajardo (1979), Renan Vega Cantor (2002) and Jairo Estrada (2001), who were members of the Historical Commission in Havana, Cuba; international scholars like James Petras (2001) and James Brittain (2010) among others; activists and non-governmental organizations that

<sup>1</sup> It is a term to refer to a well-known practice of the FARC-EP rebels which consist in stopping the cars in the highways of the east of Colombia in order to take the money and goods of the drivers to financially support their struggle.

have written extensive documentation about the armed conflict like the *Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz*<sup>2</sup> (Inter-church commission of justice and peace), the *Centro de investigación y educación popular, CINEP*<sup>3</sup> (Center of research and popular education), the Association Minga<sup>4</sup>, the Committee of Solidarity with Political Prisoners, FCSP<sup>5</sup> and international NGOs like Justice for Colombia<sup>6</sup> and International Action for Peace<sup>7</sup> among other organizations; and of course by the guerrillas themselves, who have produced interesting and valuable historical documents<sup>8</sup>.

For instance, one of the most complete and “controversial” definitions of the FARC-EP, written by James Petras (2001), who identifies the FARC-EP as the “most powerful and successful guerrilla army in the world”, reveals the political character of these rebels:

It [the guerrilla] is a modern guerrilla army, linked to a mass peasant base with a 'modernist' leadership who envision the modernization of the economy and society through a mixed economy, a strong state welfare and a regulatory regime (p. 106)

And James Brittain (2010) also makes a very detailed summary of the historical development of the FARC-EP showing several characteristics of these rebels. Furthermore, there is also the point of view of their own founders: Manuel Marulanda Velez (1973) with the *Cuadernos de Campaña* (Campaign books), Jacobo Arenas (1972) with the *Diario de la resistencia de Marquetalia* (Diary of the Marquetalia resistance) and Ciro Trujillo (1974) with the *Páginas de su vida* (Life's pages), give us their personal experiences in the process of the development of the communist guerrilla. The latest ones are very fascinating documents, if the reader wants to go in depth into the FARC-EP's world by hearing the voices of these peasant leaders who turn into guerrilla commanders. An important issue to highlight is that the FARC-EP can be understood as an *armed expression of the peasant movement*. Actually, Brittain (2010) strongly remarks that “the insurgency was shaped, organized, and remains led by the peasantry” (p. 47).

The report written by the UNDP<sup>9</sup> in 2011 entitled: *Informe Nacional de desarrollo humano 2011. Colombia rural, razones para la esperanza* (National report on human development 2011. Rural Colombia, reasons for hope), states that there are two kinds of rural conflict: agrarian conflict and armed conflict, and it also identifies five different types of the Colombian agrarian conflict: a) conflict for the land between small farmers or poor peasants and big landowners; b) conflict between big investors and multinational corporations and small, medium and big national landowners; c) struggle of the indigenous peoples for access to the land; d) struggle of the black communities for the defence of their territories and e) the latest conflict due to the peasants'

<sup>2</sup> <http://justiciaypazcolombia.com/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cinep.org.co/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.asociacionminga.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.comitedesolidaridad.com/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.justiceforcolombia.org/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.actionpeace.org/>

<sup>8</sup> To see the most known documents written by the FARC-EP see: <http://www.farc-ep.co/biblioteca/libros.html>

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Development Programme.

displacement by the armed conflict (PNUD, 2011, p.187). So, one can say that these multiple types of agrarian conflict are strongly connected to the armed conflict, since it has been developed more in rural areas than in the cities, and because of the existence of a strong conflict of interests between stakeholders.

### *Brief history of the FARC-EP*

If one examines Colombian history before the development of the guerrilla movement, one can see that the first peasant struggles were violently repressed by the state. The well-known case of the “massacre of the *bananeras*” in 1928 may be the most terrible example of this Colombian doctrine in which peasants have been seen as enemies of the elites in power. In that episode, the army was sent by the conservative government of Miguel Abadía to repress a peasant strike, killing thousands of peasant workers in banana plantations belonging to the multinational United Fruit Company, currently Chiquita Brands International Inc. According to historians and traditional oral histories, there were almost two thousand deaths (Calvo, 2008). After that, the struggle of the Colombian peasantry continued being framed by the confrontation between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party in the historical period known as *El bipartidismo*. These two traditional parties have been decisive in the perpetuation of the conflict in Colombia ever since. On the 9th of April of 1948, the leader of the Liberal Party, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, with a more socialist approach, was assassinated in Bogota, setting off a new stage of recrudescence of violence. This stage resulted in thousands of murders in different parts of the national territory, but it was mainly concentrated in some departments like Tolima, Valle and Cundinamarca. At that time, paramilitary groups usually called *pájaros*, started killing peasants belonging to the Liberal party with the connivance of the Conservative government.

Afterwards, state violence was answered by peasant mobilisation. Peasants were organized into guerrillas controlled by the Liberal Party and the illegal Communist Party that was created in 1930. Those guerrillas were known initially as peasant self-defence forces, and at a certain point of their history they were working together, coordinating armed actions against the government. In 1964, after a reorganizing process, the Communist Party and armed peasants created the FARC-EP, with a Marxist-Leninist ideology (FARC-EP, 2007). In the meantime, another expression of the popular resistance, composed mainly by academics and intellectuals influenced by the Cuban revolution, led the creation of the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional, ELN* (National liberation Army). Both rebel groups have struggled for agrarian reform among other social transformations, however the FARC-EP —thanks to the origin of their fighters and their leaders— have had more influence among the peasantry, while the ELN has had more influence in trade unions and universities.

In the beginning of the 1980s, a new armed actor appeared in different regions with the aim of combatting the guerrillas. This was a state policy to defeat the revolutionary movement that threatened state power. New paramilitary groups, with similar practices to the earlier versions of those *pájaros* of the the 40s, started growing not only with the economic support of big landowners,

drug traffickers, mainstream politicians and some multinational companies, but also with the foreign and active support of international intelligence agencies. These new groups pursued the elimination not only of the guerrillas themselves, but also of the strong peasant movements and social organizations in the cities that were struggling for human rights and better living conditions. The government in many of these cases had a proven direct role and the Colombian army was also associated with several massacres of peasants and the killing of political leaders (GMH, 2013)<sup>10</sup>.

A new political party called *Union Patriótica* (Patriotic Union), was created in the middle of the 1980s between some leftist leaders, social organizations and the FARC-EP, in the framework of the peace talks between the government of Belisario Betancourt and the guerrilla movement. The Patriotic Union, made up of thousands of peasants, workers and members of the guerrilla, won almost four hundred positions in local administrations and fourteen seats in the parliament. The movement also had two presidential candidates assassinated in the later part of the decade. The *dirty war* against this party was clearly an extermination plan by the Colombian regime<sup>11</sup> called *el baile rojo* (the red dance) (Campos, 2003). It involved about five thousand assassinations over a period of two decades, and the Patriotic Union was almost annihilated.

At the beginning of the XXI century, the government and the FARC-EP were sitting again around the same table in the Caguan region, trying to achieve a peace agreement. With more than twenty thousand fighters in various regions of Colombia and a big influence among the peasantry, the rebels had been confronting the army more forcefully than in previous years. Thousands of peasants were displaced to the cities and also to neighbouring countries due to the complex conflict among several armed actors like the guerrillas, paramilitary bands, drug trafficking bands and the army. Finally, towards the end of the government of Andres Pastrana, the peace talks were broken off and the war continued.

In the following period of the Alvaro Uribe Velez's government, the war was enlarged thanks to the growth of the military and economic support from the US government, which improved the quality and the military capabilities of the Colombian army. The subsequent government of Juan Manuel Santos continued increasing the war budget until it reached 21.5 billion of Colombian Pesos (COP) in 2013, which is close to 60.000 million COP per day, (17 million Euros per day<sup>12</sup>)<sup>13</sup>. But increasing the military budget was not the only strategy used to break down the guerrillas. Uribe's government also increased the repression of social movements. Hundreds of peasants, students, intellectuals, workers, and social leaders were prosecuted by the government under the false accusation of being members of the guerrilla movement<sup>14</sup>. 7,500 political prisoners, most of them peasants, were imprisoned on the accusation of being rebels, and today the Colombian prisons

<sup>10</sup> See as well, for the connection between the army and extra-judicial executions: Florez (2014)

<sup>11</sup> Regime is a popular word that the conservative politician Alvaro Gomez Hurtado (among others) used for the structure of the power in Colombia. He was killed by the "dark forces" in 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Exchange rate used: 1 Euro=3500 COP

<sup>13</sup> For more information see: La República (2012).

<sup>14</sup> See a description of a false accusation of a peasant as a guerrilla commander in "El comandante tartamudo de las Farc" (The stutterer commander of the Farc) (Cortés, 2013)

harbour near 9,500 political prisoners. Not only that, during Uribe's time in office, extra-judicial executions known as *false positives*<sup>15</sup> were increased. Thousands of innocent civilians were killed by soldiers and army officials who demanded a reward from the government, which gave them about 1.500 Euros for each guerrilla fighter killed (Evans, 2009).

But it was not enough; the Colombian government also strengthened the media campaign against the FARC-EP as a war strategy. From that perspective, Colombians were bombed with hundreds of media messages depicting the rebels as the main problem of society. This war propaganda encompassed *non-sancta* strategies designed by the army's advisors, which included fabricated guerrilla attacks, car bombs and assassination attempts against political figures<sup>16</sup>. Somehow a *Shock Doctrine*<sup>17</sup> was applied to the Colombian society together with a neoliberal agenda and numbing the population with fear of the *big enemy of democracy*.

Meanwhile, the rural policies of Uribe's government continued with the traditional conception of development practiced by previous governments, reinforcing these policies against the peasants' interests and in favour of big land-owners —Uribe himself being one of them—, multinationals, and private companies.

Nowadays, looking at the Colombian elites, one can suggest that most of their big incomes and wealth have been acquired by speculation on the prices of the land and real estate, as well as the financial markets, but not in the traditional capitalist scheme in which the bourgeoisie controls and expands the production of goods. Actually, looking at the four richest families in Colombia, Alejandro Santodomingo, Sarmiento Angulo, Gillinski y Ardila Lulle, two of them, Sarmiento and Gillinski, control some capital shares in the financial markets; while Ardila Lulle has an important participation in agribusiness, with Incauca and other agro-projects. Sarmiento controls one of the most important newspapers, El Tiempo, while Ardilla Lulle has his own TV channel (RCN), and other additional mass media companies<sup>18</sup>. Estrada (2015), speaking about the development of the Colombian economy in the last three decades, asserts:

(...) it has produced new re-accommodations among the factions that conform the power block, consolidating the hegemony of financial capital, coupled with the reinforcement and concentration of land ownership, in a context of the open insertion of the Colombian economy into the world capitalist economy, which has led towards a growing of the trans-

<sup>15</sup> False positive is a category created by human rights defenders to speak about the practice of the Alvaro Uribe's government in which poor young people and peasants were assassinated by the official army to cover a reward offered by the defence Ministry.

<sup>16</sup> To cite only one example, the assassination attempt of the former parliamentarian German Vargas Lleras, nowadays vice president, was spread in the mass media like a FARC-EP's action. The former director of the political police DAS who accused the FARC-EP in that moment is currently in prison convicted for various crimes, including the assassination of the sociologist and academic Alfredo Correa de Andreis (Semana, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> The shock doctrine is a theory developed by Naomi Klein who identifies that the neoliberal agenda has not been implemented democratically over the world, instead of that, she has proved that in several cases, after (or while) a disaster either natural or a generated disaster, a collection of neoliberal policies have been implemented without having enough resistance by the population due to the consequences of the disaster (Klein, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> El Heraldo (2016)

nationalization and des-nationalization<sup>19</sup> of the economical processes. The accumulation by dispossession that has been a feature throughout this historical process, has become the predominant practice. (p. 15)<sup>20</sup>

Thus, there is a situation of conflict between the classes in power and the subaltern classes in which land ownership is one of the factors that strengthens this contradiction. The conflict continues to this day, with peasants also continuing their political struggle for the right to landownership, without there being any concrete solution to their problems offered by the state. They have created several organizations, unions, cooperatives and associations, combining the defence of human rights, the development of productive projects for their communities, the creation of alternative media, and the strengthening of the national organization of the peasantry. Alongside the peasant movement, the FARC-EP have been talking with the government about different means of achieving peace, the first issue being agrarian reform, the age-old struggle of the Colombian peasants.

In the framework of the conversation table, the rebel delegation wrote a *hundred minimum proposals for rural and agrarian development for democratization and peace with social justice in Colombia* (FARC-EP, 2013). Many of the objectives of the Colombian peasantry are contained in these proposals and were proposed by the peasants at the rural forum organized by the United Nations in Bogotá in December 2013. This was one of the goals of the peace talks, but the final signed agreement contains only a part of these demands, and the rest should be achieved as a result of the continuity of the peasant struggle in the upcoming years, in which the FARC-EP, for sure, would be a political actor with greater influence in the peasant movement than nowadays.

### *The FARC-EP and the agrarian program*

One of the most important aspects to consider when speaking about the FARC-EP and agrarian reform is the *Programa Agrario de los guerrilleros de las FARC-EP* (Agrarian Program) which was proclaimed the 20th of July of 1964, in the middle of the military aggression in the Marquetalia region against the so-called independent republics controlled by peasants in resistance. Basically, the document describes in its introduction the violence exerted against the peasant movement. It also explains the extreme conflict between big landowners, the Colombian local and national elites, and the poor peasants. In this document, there are eight main points that describe how the agrarian reform proposed by the FARC-EP would look like. These points are concrete proposals, like the implementation of an agrarian revolutionary policy which includes redistribution of land, technical support, infrastructure development and legalization of the property deeds of small farmers. It also defines that productive lands would be reserved from the land distribution of this agrarian reform, and states a list of social policies to be implemented to benefit rural communities. The program

<sup>19</sup> Estrada is referring to the process of selling public goods and public companies to multinational corporations that produces both the trans-nationalization and des-nationalization of the economy.

<sup>20</sup> Translated by the author.

considers as well the protection of the peasant economy and the participation of social organizations across the national territory.

The other main document to understand the general program and strategy of the FARC-EP is the *Plataforma de un Gobierno de reconstrucción y reconciliación nacional* (Platform for a government of national reconciliation and reconstruction), which defines the guidelines and policies to be developed by a revolutionary government. These policies are not only focused on agrarian issues, but also include the political solution of the armed conflict, the change of the military doctrine, the consolidation of national democracy, development and economic modernization, social investment, land reform, efficient management of natural and mining resources, changing of the foreign affairs of the Colombian government and solving the problem of drug trafficking.

### *The problem*

Despite the positive consequences of this historical moment in which a peace agreement was possible, one of the challenges and one of the main worries for activists, academics and social leaders in recent years, is how to portray the real dimension of the actors involved in the social and armed conflict. Colombians have been immersed in a strong media campaign and war propaganda that has depicted the subversive group of the FARC-EP as their main problem. As Brittain (2010) has pointed out:

The state and monopolized media outlets have over-reported certain aspects of the FARC-EP revolutionary project and greatly under-reported others, if they are addressed at all. This is not to say that some mediums neglect important information: rather, most reports are structurally skewed, inaccurate, or manufactured (p. 170).

Thus, how can we explain to the new generations that the conflict had several complexities that cannot be simplified as the mass media have done for decades? How can we deal with urban imaginaries and narratives about the conflict and its actors that are different from those imaginaries and narratives appropriated by rural communities? How can we achieve a lasting peace if we, as Colombians, cannot recognize our past in order to avoid the return of the conflict in the future? To help solving these questions, in the framework of the peace talks in Havana, a Commission of the Historical Memory was created. Twelve historians with different perspectives created a collection of historical facts in order to explain the causes of the Colombian conflict. As a result of this commission, the report entitled *Contribución al entendimiento del conflicto armado en Colombia* (Contribution for the understanding of the armed conflict in Colombia) was published. This report contains the “origins and the multiple causes of the armed conflict, the main factors and conditions that have contributed to the prolonging of the armed conflict and the most noticeable impacts of the conflict on the population” (Leongómez et al., 2015, p. 2). Nevertheless, there is still the need to recover additional accounts to paint a better picture of this reality. To give some examples: stories

of victims, victimizers, peasants, soldiers, guerrilla fighters, and the no less important stories of bankers, journalists, and politicians among other silent protagonists of the conflict, have to be recovered.

However, despite these works, it is very remarkable to see how for many years the information about the armed conflict spread by the mass media has been starkly dissimilar to these historical documents, including facts reported and discovered by those scholars, activists and the protagonists of the conflict. The average citizen is more used to believe in manipulated TV news or newspapers—which seem to be more war propaganda than impartial journalist work— than in academic papers or personal testimonies. On the other hand, there is some kind of disdain for anecdotes of the people who have suffered the most from the conflict in the countryside and those important accounts from the actors of the war. Mass media were not too interested in interviewing the rebels, it seemed that interviewing a soccer player was more important than interviewing an actor of the conflict, especially those ones belonging to some left-wing organization, legal or illegal. Only alternative journalists with a sadly marginal coverage have tried to tell other narratives to somehow break down the *mediatic wall*. Actually, one of the most impressive achievements of the rebels, in recent years in the framework of the peace talks, was the development of a communicational team which has created, among other products, a Youtube news program with relative success, showing from their own perspective what was happening in the peace talks, the news that the traditional media did not want to cover.<sup>21</sup>

These stories, discourses, narratives and in general all the “mainstream” information we have heard about the FARC-EP, in Colombia and in other countries, for the past decades, are incomplete and most of them are completely far from reality. Most of these narratives about the FARC-EP speak about violence, fights, illegal economy, terrorism, and so forth, and they seem to be more of a product of a detailed program of *anti-rebel*’ propaganda than a serious analysis of reality. Nowadays, after almost four years of peace talks in Havana, and once the agreement was achieved, some traditional media outlets decided that looking at the daily life of the guerrilla was relevant and in the past months, several videos and reports have been developed by those media, showing another face of the rebels and contradicting their former reports.

Despite these new stories, there is still the need to broadcast other dimensions of the rebels, like the social encounters, interventions and experiences that the FARC-EP have had in rural areas and communities. Experiences in which they have spread their thinking and developed what we can call *rebel governance*. Petras and Morley (2003, p. 102) quoted by Brittain (2010) define these interventions like *socio-political practices* with this reflection: “The strength of the FARC is based on the interplay of ideological appeals and the resonance of its analysis and socio-political practices with the everyday reality of peasant life” (p. 211)

Conflict resolution, protection of the environment, productive projects, infrastructure development, health campaigns, social and peasant organization are some of these socio-political

<sup>21</sup> To see this news program, see: FARC-EP (2016). An interview to the communicational team of the FARC-EP (Cortés, 2016b) was done by the author for the alternative media *Investig’Action*



policies which are named in this work like *interventions*. Brittain (2010) as well, gives an account of such practices in the chapter seven of his book: *Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia: The Origin and Direction of the FARC-EP*. He explores the topics: *infrastructure, health campaigns, construction of schools, environment, indigenous relations, gender and conflict resolution among others*, showing us that there are more interesting things to tell about the FARC-EP than those mainstream tales.

The conflict must then be re-interpreted in a different way and from a critical perspective in which actors and realities are more complex than those stories we have heard from the war propaganda and traditional mass media. Discovering these hidden experiences regarding the guerrilla interventions on rural communities under their influence or control would be a good tool for a better understanding of the armed conflict in Colombia and for the country's prospects for peace. Those myths about the FARC-EP have to be evaluated, mainly because they do not represent the current reality for some rural communities, for whom the guerrilla represents a different truth.

### *The purpose of this work*

Eventually the acknowledgement of these interventions will serve as a source to recognize ideologically the political status of the insurgence. However, I am afraid that this task is a very hard one since in Colombia most of its population have learned to hate the FARC-EP in recent decades. Naturally, this work does not want to ignore the consequences of the conflict or as one of my university's colleagues suggests, it does not want to clean the FARC-EP's image, they can do it themselves. This work then is only trying to recover hidden stories to complete somehow the historical memory, and to show other aspects regarding the Colombian rebels. Furthermore, it is important as well to recognize those experiences developed in rural areas in a time of war by the rebels, if we want to understand how the peasant life in those areas, in a implementation stage in the upcoming years of the peace deal, will be shaped by those former experiences. Those previous experiences could be constructive developments that would serve to build peace.

The similar work written by Brittain (2010) focuses on understanding the revolutionary character of the guerrilla. In one of its chapters, it explores social interventions like those discovered in this work; so, this research could be seen as complement of his important work since it attempts to understand more deeply the mechanisms and strategies developed by the rebels to interact with peasant communities. Moreover, it has several additional experiences and anecdotes that show us similar interventions by hearing the direct voice of the rebels in Havana, Cuba.

This work basically is a research that studies the relation between the guerrilla FARC-EP and the rural communities which live in areas under rebel control. So, first of all it is necessary state that rural communities are defined by this work as those communities who live in rural areas but also in small villages with farming as a dominant activity. In other words, those peasants who are holders of small or medium pieces of land or houses in small villages; workers who sell their labour to big plantations and to other small holders; landless peasants who perform different jobs in a region or in a village, like management of small businesses. It also includes those who have formal jobs but

are nevertheless part of the rural community. Due to the size of the Colombian rural areas, one can detect that in some cases a small holder can own a piece of land of about twenty hectares, while others in other regions own only one or two hectares, so it is difficult to define who is a small holder and who is not, since there are variations on the prices and on access to land depending on each region of the Colombian countryside.

To introduce the research questions to be addressed, there is a statement that could summarize the main motivation of these insurgency's interventions. It was told to me by Jairo Fuentes, a war prisoner from the ELN: "We have to reach the heart if we want to reach the head of the people". I heard again a similar statement in Cuba from the voice of the commander Walter Mendoza: "masses have to be won over with the heart, people<sup>22</sup> have to be reached with concrete and real activities, I mean, with behaviour...". These phrases associated with *reaching the heart and the mind of the peasantry* can summarize the main intentions of the rebels in being involved with peasant life; that is why I used it as part of the title of this work. Based on this statement, the general research question of this research is: ***what are the key strategies of the "reaching the heart" process developed by the FARC-EP?***

To help answering this main question, we focus on four specific questions. First, several rebel narratives are explored to identify: ***which interventions have been practiced by the rebels of the FARC-EP in rural areas under their control to gain peasant support?***

Based on the theoretical perspective of rebel governance and on the different interventions developed by the rebels, the question we explore is: ***what are the characteristics of the rebel governance system of the FARC-EP?***

Exploring the implementation of the nearly successful war propaganda against the rebels and identifying some characteristics of the behaviour of the FARC-EP in rural areas, one could argue that some interventions could be partially explained as a contested mechanism or counter-hegemonic tactic to locally confront the hegemony of the Colombian elites. An explanation then will be suggested in this work to answer the question: ***how is the counter-hegemonic struggle led by the FARC-EP in rural areas?***

Finally, based on the interviews (of members of the guerrilla) we try to answer the question: ***what are the FARC-EP's reflections about their interventions, and what are their expectations about the peace agreement and its implementation?*** These questions are addressed with the purpose of connecting the past with the future, the former interventions in rural areas with the perspective of a peace building stage in which the rebels would try to keep working on the same areas and with the same rural communities. Perhaps they will try to somehow preserve their former political and ideological influence, their organizational structures and their strategies to reach the hearts of the peasantry.

<sup>22</sup> In this sentence people has the meaning of a regional or ethnic group, or much better the subaltern classes.

### *Mixed approaches*

Hypothesizing, the concrete approach of the FARC-EP to *reach the hearts* definitely includes two main aspects: the first one is the process of **rebel governance** which involves three strategies: *the implementation of selective incentives* which are co-created with the rural communities' participation and that should be enjoyed by both actors, —recognizing the FARC-EP as an actor who lives and shares the territory—; *the development of a system of rebel justice and conflict resolution*; and the *capability of policing* the population. And the second aspect is an **ideological and political work** which is developed to sustain the armed and political struggle against the state, and as a counter-hegemonic tactic by creating a *rebel's local hegemony* in rural areas. Both avenues, rebel governance and the creation of local hegemony are dialectic mechanisms which contribute to each other's development. In other words, *effective rebel governance* can induce local hegemony either by demonstrating good capacity to govern the society or by using these strategies (selective incentives, conflict resolutions and policing) to engage peasant support. And a successful political, cultural and ideological work would help to improve, modify or abandon rebel governance practices by taking into account their participative character as described by the rebels.

Recalling the metaphorical statement of the rebels of *reaching the heart* of the peasantry, one can say that revolutionary practice is not a simple task, and leaving aside the idealistic and romantic meaning that the statement can convey, the FARC-EP's interventions have had very structured intentions:

The **first one** is to politically organize rural communities. The FARC-EP, as the other rebel organization ELN, have the dream of taking political power in Colombia and to be the government, the "ruling class". This is their main goal: *la toma del poder* (The takeover of power). To achieve this goal, it is absolutely necessary to create a large army that can fight on equal footing against the official army while increasing ideological support from the population through ideological strategies. These strategies could serve as well to strengthen their self-organization, empowering rural communities as a counter-hegemonic movement that politically supports their armed struggle by creating a large, but clandestine, political movement.

A **second** intention is that health campaigns, infrastructure development, productive projects, justice management, conflict resolution, social organization, cultural activities, among other pragmatic interventions, could be interpreted by the population as the agency of the guerrilla that somehow improves their living conditions, or in terms of the aforementioned theory, "selective incentives", that can solve, even if temporarily, several troubles they face in their communities.

The **third** intention is that, as a consequence of the improvement of the quality of the life of the population, they can provide for themselves goods and services needed to pursue the war, (food, transport, accommodations, logistics, among others); and

Finally, the **fourth** intention is to prove somehow that their leadership's model or *rebel governance system* is a good alternative for those communities, either as a present demonstration of governance capabilities or as a model for a future government led by the rebels.

### *Warning*

Social sciences research presents the researcher with the challenge of maintaining neutrality with respect of the object of study. Avoiding the labelling of this research, done by an activist, as *partisan* could be a big challenge. In any case, this project starts off with a clear idea about the FARC-EP. For the author, like for many Colombians, national and international researchers, and of course, for the peasants who support the guerrillas, they are not *terrorists*. And to be clear, this work starts with the cognizance that the FARC-EP was a rebel armed group that has led an organised rural rebellion for many decades in Colombia. On top of that, I am not going to argue whether the FARC-EP have finally managed or not to reach the heart of the peasantry, as the title of this work might suggest; this is something that a poll, a successful revolution or the results of future elections with the FARC-EP as legal political party will begin to demonstrate. But dear reader, if you are the kind of people that find difficult to believe in the political character of the FARC-EP, please allow me to challenge your mind with additional arguments in the following lines.

Yet my main fear is that a work that attempts to describe a historical reality (or at least close to the truth) ends up converted into a partisan work which will be read by the same leftist readers that are already used to looking at the conflict from a critical perspective. For this public, this work could still be interesting; however, it is my interest as well that this document could be read by those people who have been shielded away from these hidden voices and who have unintentionally accepted the hegemonic, official version about the armed conflict. This hegemonic version has painted the armed actors in a simplistic and alienating way in which there are only two colours: black and white; two kinds of actors: the good and the bad ones, angels and devils, heroes and anti-heroes, soldiers and *guerrilleros*<sup>23</sup>.

Of course, I am not pretending to forget all the consequences of a war in which the FARC-EP have committed excesses and crimes. However, an unimpassioned understanding of the war makes us realize that the crimes produced in the fog of war, by whatever actor, cannot be partially judged and shown to the population from the opposite perspectives, since in that case we would improperly conclude that there are good crimes and bad crimes. For example, killing guerrillas is good while killing soldiers is bad. Indeed, this was how it was shown by the mainstream media.

With these stories then I do not try to convince the reader that the FARC-EP's interaction with civilians and populations in the countryside has been perfect, in order to create utopian and idealist narratives about the rebels. I only try to tell unknown stories and anecdotes of this actor that were uncovered in the interviews and that can show the reader a different reality. So, contrary to conventional categorizations done by the mass media and their powerful and wealthy owners,

<sup>23</sup> The word *guerrilleros* means guerrilla fighters. In this work use both exchangeably.

that refer to the insurgency as terrorists, drug traffickers, kidnappers and so forth, based on information sources of government officials (like the Colombian army and official institutions), the narratives and anecdotes that this work discovers are told by the FARC-EP protagonists in Havana, Cuba. These stories show the reader the other side of the coin of the conflict and the other side of the FARC-EP that could provide an additional perspective to define a critical position in peace times. These anecdotes go “beyond the rifles”.

### *Data and methods*

This project consists of two parts: the first one is a descriptive research since it details interventions of the FARC-EP in rural areas and with rural communities, and the second part is an explanatory research which explores possible theoretical explanations to the questions formerly addressed. The methodology proposed was a qualitative research based on primary and secondary data. Primary data was recovered during the two months’ period fieldwork in July of 2015, when the peace talks were taking place in Havana, Cuba, and is based mainly on the interviews to seven guerrilla members who were involved in the development of social interventions in peasant communities. I was not able to access a larger number of FARC-EP members since it depended on the direction of the peace delegation and on the availability of the fighters with this kind of experiences. In-depth semi-structured interviews in Spanish to relevant members of the guerrilla FARC-EP were carried out to recover these stories and anecdotes. These interviews were recorded by two video cameras in the places defined by the FARC-EP’s peace delegation, attempting to recreate a comfortable environment that could minimize the psychological pressure of the video camera and making sure that they had a high self-confidence that would allow them to delve into details, chronological aspects and specific issues. A short documentary with a summary of those stories told by the interviewed rebels will be developed as for a complement to this work; this kind of feelings and facial expressions that are too difficult to express in words in a written document can be seen easily in film.

Secondary data was requested to the peace delegation and is composed basically of pictures, videos, internal e-mails and internal documents, webpages, books and general bibliography. As a result, this research did look at evidence such as videos, pictures and internal documents concerning the aforementioned interventions and policies. These narratives confronted with this evidence also, could have given us the necessary reliability. Unfortunately, due to different reasons regarding the war conditions, they were not able to make pictures or videos of what they have done in the past. Thus, there is a possible lack of validity in some data collection due to two factors: the first one is that some experiences cannot be told with high level of detail or cannot be verified in the field. This factor is related with ethical and security matters since there are possible threats against those communities involved with the FARC-EP or against the civilians with high degree of involvement with the rebels. The second factor concerns the fact that some of these experiences do not exist yet or have disappeared due to the armed conflict. Further research could be carried out to recover more

evidence, for instance, interviewing peasant leaders, or visiting some places in which these interventions have taken place, which would be more accessible in the upcoming peace-building stage.

With regard to ethical issues there are two main aspects: firstly, the fact that the FARC-EP, the object of study of this research, at the moment of the field work, were in the list of terrorist groups declared by the European Union (European Union, 2015). On one hand, it was not an expressed prohibition in the international policy that forbids the access to this kind of organizations in the framework of a research project. On the other hand, due to the peace talks between the Guerrilla FARC-EP and the Colombian government, there is *de facto* recognition of the political status of this organization as I have stressed before. Furthermore, some Latin American governments, as well as the USA and the Norway governments, have been involved in the peace talks. Some international NGOs, civilians' organizations and scholars have also been following the developments in Havana and the future of the Colombian conflict. The second ethical issue is associated with the need to guarantee the lives of those people directly or indirectly involved with the different forms of organization that the FARC-EP have implemented. In that sense, I assured the interviewees that I would be careful with the details provided.

### *The outline of this work*

This work is organised as follows: the **first** chapter explores the concepts used in this work to get a more comprehensive understanding of the problems at hand. Several scholars were reviewed to look for possible approaches to understand the called *act/art of reaching the heart* and the *rebel attitude of the peasants*. After that, it explores the concepts of *hegemony* and *rebel governance*, followed by an explanation of the *organizational structure* of the rebels.

In the **second** chapter, the strategies implemented by the FARC-EP as rebel rulers are analysed. It is shown what the FARC-EP have practiced within rural communities, and based on the narratives, the *variety of forms to approach rural communities* by the fighters of this insurgency. Afterwards, it is described the *characteristics of the counter-hegemonic struggle* of the rebels in rural areas which have so much to do with these social interventions and with the theories explored. Finally, it is explored the *rebel governance practices* developed by the FARC-EP to make a conclusive model of the approach put in place by the rebels.

Chapters **three, four and five** show some interventions developed by the FARC-EP, described as *conflict resolution strategies*, *social welfare programs* and those interventions addressed to develop a *local hegemony apparatus*. Being integral parts of the rebel governance system, they are described mainly by the voices of some rebels who were members of the peace delegation of the FARC-EP.

Before concluding, some interesting reflections about these interventions and the expectations from the current peace talks, expressed by the rebels' voices, are presented in chapter

**six**, to comprehend how they have lived through this historical moment. A final seventh chapter contains the conclusions of this work.

### *Future developments*

For future research initiatives, the purpose should not be only to focus on what has happened in the countryside, but also what would happen in these areas, with these communities, in a peace-building stage. The traditional cultures, values, daily activities, and political conscience could change. An alternative peasant culture could emerge from these regions but it would be also threatened by other peasant cultures in other regions dominated by other values, daily activities and political ideas of, for instance, criminal bands, drug traffickers and neo-paramilitary groups, who would have a new open space to move into, control and impose their way of thinking. What would happen to the natural resources in areas formerly controlled by the FARC-EP, which in a stage of post-conflict could be commodified, affecting not only nature but also local communities? Several researches should be developed in rural areas in order to support and document the new social processes that will be (or are currently) emerging.

Let me start by exploring how peasant support for the rebels can be understood.

## 1 Conceptual framework

***“Que los clarinetes suenen, y los platillos repiquen  
con los sonidos que indiquen a los fusiles, que truenen  
y con su coro se llenen los tímpanos de la historia  
sembrando en la memoria el mensaje justiciero  
del Bolívar guerrillero que nos da la fe y la gloria”***

*(Let the clarinets sound and the cymbals ring,  
with the sounds that signal the rifles to fire  
and with this chorus fill the eardrums of history,  
planting in the memory the just message  
of Bolivar, guerrillero who gives us faith and glory)*

Anonym poem of a fighter of the FARC-EP

In this chapter, some theories are explored to explain several concepts. First there is an approach to the act/art of “reaching the heart” of the peasantry. I use the term *act* combined with *art* in the sense that reaching the heart is an action but also it is a difficult task. And because of that, perhaps we can consider it as a delicate art. Secondly, I present a Gramscian theory to understand the struggle for the hegemony as one of the tactics to gain peasant support. A third concept explored is rebel governance, which presents the different strategies commonly used by rebel rulers to exert local power. Finally, a sketch of the organizational structures of the FARC-EP is shown which is important to understand the way in which the rebels interact with peasant communities.

### 1.1 Understanding the act/art of reaching the heart

Nowadays, with the perspective of a peace-building stage, where the rebel fighters have already put aside their weapons, as well as with the possibility of an end to the traditional persecution of social leaders and movements by the government, peasant people in some rural areas express their anxiety about living without the influence of the FARC-EP. This was openly said by some peasant leaders. A peasant from the region of Sumapaz expressed this feeling with a bit of melancholy: “The *cordilleras*<sup>24</sup> will be abandoned; we are not going to see the *muchachos*<sup>25</sup> anymore”. But, how can that be possible? Are there any peasants who sympathize with the Colombian guerrillas? Is there any kind of peasant support to the FARC-EP? In contrast to the *mainstream* narrative about the general disdain towards the guerrilla in Colombia, the answer seems to be *yes*; but how can it be understood? Several scholars have explored this question from different perspectives. This section

<sup>24</sup> Mountain chain

<sup>25</sup> Colloquial expression: people belonging to the guerrillas.



recovers these perspectives in order to explain why peasants go on to become rebels and how peasant support for a revolutionary project is achieved.

### *I will rebel if you pay me*

Mason (1996), in his paper: *Insurgency, counterinsurgency, and the rational peasant*, describes two kinds of group-individual behaviour that have to be taken into account in order to understand the relationship between guerrilla movements and civil population. The first one is the behaviour of the insurgent group (or revolutionary leader) towards the population, which is more linked to the act of *reaching the heart*; and the second one is the behaviour of a group (or individual) from the population towards the insurgency or the act of *having the heart reached at*. What does a group (or revolutionary leader) have to do in order to conquer the minds (and hearts) of the people? And what does a group (or individual) need to do in order to support the rebels? Mason explains the political peasant response towards an insurgent group in terms of a rational choice. Based on the book of Leites and Wolf (1970), he argues that the response from a peasant towards the insurgency (or towards the regime) is mediated by a rational choice in which peasants consider their support for the rebels (or for the regime) as a coin or currency, to be exchanged for some benefits for themselves. In his viewpoint, political support from an individual peasant to the rebels can be expressed as a mathematical function in the following terms:

$$V_r = U(X_r) + U(Y_r) + U(Y_g) - T_r - U(S_g)P_g$$

Where,  $V_r$  represents the value gained by the individual for supporting the rebels;  $U(X_r)$ , the utility derived from the excludable benefits provided by the rebels;  $U(Y_r)$ , the utility derived from the non-excludable benefits provided by the rebels;  $U(Y_g)$ , the utility derived from the non-excludable benefits provided by the regime;  $T_r$ , the cost to the individual of the supportive behaviour;  $U(S_g)$ , the individual expected cost of reprisals for supporting the regime and  $P_g$ , the probability of being punished by the regime (Mason, 1996, p. 68).

He also highlights that “non-elite preferences for one side or the other may be reflected in the price they demand for their support” (p. 71). In other words, what this means is that peasant endorsement depends on how cheap (or expensive) being involved in tasks to support rebelliousness would be.

Despite the apparent *exactitude* expressed by this mathematical model described by Mason, in the field one can identify that peasant behaviour is not as quantifiable and as rational as he thought. Of course, I am pretty sure that this model could have been used as a tool for the counterinsurgency war developed by the Colombian government and the USA against the guerrillas. Nevertheless it has some shortcomings if one wants to understand the behaviour of peasant communities or individuals towards the rebels. An anecdote told by the FARC-EP’s member Carlos Antonio Lozada, who is the commander of the well-known urban front *Antonio Nariño*, can explain

that being revolutionary is not as clear-cut as this kind of models would suggest. In the framework of the peace talks in Havana, he was in a meeting with a military officer discussing the process of withdrawal of explosive artefacts in some regions in Colombia as a way of de-escalating the conflict. During the break, the officer approached him and told him that he had been struggling against the FARC-EP for many years, especially against him, and that after decades of war he had not been able to understand how the guerrilla managed to convince students or young people from the cities to become rebels without paying them. He confessed his admiration for this process of recruitment and asked Lozada how it was possible to have this civilian support. He answered in a very sarcastic way: “you cannot understand this, because with your way of thinking it is impossible to understand the act of being revolutionary”.

With this answer, Lozada is refusing any rational choice in terms of currency as Mason’s model argues; actually, the official indirectly suggested to him that a payment had to be offered to someone to have his/her support —which lends support to my thesis that this model was used by the official army and their American backers. Despite the traditional mainstream idea that suggests that the guerrilleros in Colombia are forced recruited and receive salaries, one of the most admirable achievements of Manuel Marulanda’s army was convincing their future fighters to belong to the guerrilla without paying them anything. In this case is very important to point out that this mainstream idea does not fit with the results that the guerrilla has had over time. It is very unlikely that a movement of this kind would survive for more than 50 years in a war by only recruiting fighters in a forced or coercive manner. Based on a rigorous research, Gutierrez (2004) explores some features of the FARC-EP regarding participation of fighters in the rebel ranks: no payment of salaries, prohibition of personal appropriation of loots by the fighters, severe surveillance over fighters, lifelong membership, egalitarian access and distribution of goods among rebels, strong moral rules and voluntary recruitment, among other aspects that can show some of the policies used by the FARC-EP to guarantee the commitment of their members to their political project.

### *We are peasants, we are not money-lovers*

Taking into account the limited resources of a rebel group, if we compare the capability of the rebels to pay a salary to their fighters to that of the state, not to mention the drug lords and paramilitaries, the guerrilla, —suggests Lichbach (1994) quoting Holstrom (1983)—, are in a *less favourable position* than the regime when it comes to offering a payment. “The ability of revolutionary movements to offer bribes or coercive incentives is negligible compared to the ability of their opposition to do the same” (p. 391). By the same token, quoting Osanka (1971, p. 411) Lichbach argues: “guerrilla leaders have been traditionally reluctant to (engage in a bidding war) because financial incentives are always subject to outbidding by the enemy” (p. 391). Gutierrez (2004) suggests as well that in the Colombian case, the paramilitary groups used to offer stronger incentives to their members than the rebels offered to their own (p-58). But looking at this possible competition between the regime and the guerrilla, one has to recall that the FARC-EP have been for decades the only powerful actor in several

areas. Actually, in some regions, they have not had a rival, since the state only exists there through its military presence. Guerrilla commander Isabella San Roque points this out in her interview: “In those regions where the state is not present, or is present only through military actions, or public force, or through repression, or where there is no institutional presence, we are very strong”.

Lichbach (1994) also criticises this rational choice theory saying that under normal circumstances of a rebellion, “rational peasants will never rebel” (p. 387). There are so many challenges and threats against those who want to make a rebellion-revolution that a rational decision would never be to become a rebel. Gutierrez (2004) also questions, “How can we offer credible explanations of why individuals are committed in collective actions extremely expensive and risky?” and carries on: “...joining to the FARC-EP is not like taking any other job. A job in the FARC does not substitute a legal employ (...) the FARC offer the minimum and demand the maximum” (p. 59) The maximum, as it is written in their statutes, is “until the success of the revolution” (FARC-EP, 2007).

The question addressed by Lichbach (1994) in his paper, “what explains the logic of collective action rather than collective inaction?” (p. 387) is also important to understand how peasants become rebels or support them. He explores this issue with the theory of *selective incentives*, in which basically something must be given to one person (or group of people) by the rebels in order to guarantee their support, gain their loyalty or simply as solidarity gesture. In the words of Lichbach, a selective incentive is “anything that motivates people (for example, prestige, altruism)” (p. 417).

Scott (1977) is also very aware of the reality that peasants usually pursue more immediate needs than strategic and future achievements: “Seldom have they fought for the triumph of a revolutionary theory *per se* but rather for the vital and tangible stuff of subsistence: bread, land, relief from taxes” (p. 291). Although this theory is also in the frame of rational choice, Lichbach considers that an ideological support must be provided together with selective incentives in order to be successful in a competition for the “hearts” of the peasantry.

### *Our nature is to rebel*

Thus, another kind of tactic has to be used by guerrillas to achieve peasant support. Therefore, this kind of political imaginaries, utopian, revolutionary or idealist discourses, combined with *revolutionary behaviour* are useful to achieve peasantry’s hearts. Nevertheless, it does not mean that other kinds of selective incentives —not only in terms of money— can additionally be used to attract followers and sympathizers, as I will explain later.

Leaving aside for a while this kind of utopian imaginaries and revolutionary ideals, I will continue discussing Mason’s (Leites and Wolf) model. Firstly, the model basically contradicts traditional explanations of peasant behaviour described by some scholars. Van der Ploeg (2009) for instance, in a more qualitative way, describes the nature of the peasant’s resistance as the “peasant principle”, which is an “emancipatory notion” that entails several notions that he describes as: “The hope that through hard work, cooperation, joint actions and/or over struggles, progress might be

wrought; surmounting difficulties in order to construct the conditions that allow for agency; it carves pathways into the future” (p. 274), among other definitions. Being, in some sense, more radical, Lichbach (1994) says:

...the market’s diffusion creates new social strata that are particularly prone to revolution, (...). Whatever the specific mechanisms involved and whatever the roots of those mechanisms, peasant struggles are rebellions against the market's destabilization of peasant communities. Rural upheavals are violent reactions against the relentless commercialization of agriculture, which causes the disintegration of formerly cohesive social units. In short, capitalism and imperialism make peasants revolutionary (p. 384)

In the same way, Van Der Ploeg continues his explanation of peasant behaviour with the concept of “peasant condition”, like: “the struggle for autonomy that takes place in a context characterised by dependency relations, marginalisation and deprivation” (p. 23) Therefore, one might suggest that the traditional peasant with this “peasant condition” could be considered as a natural follower of the rebel movement or any other alternative that somehow tries to improve his/her living conditions, since this condition can be seen as an objective circumstance that could support rebelliousness. In a similar manner, Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) define the peasantry in class terms:

... (the peasantry) affected as much by the economic and political structures which constrain them, as by the forms of their own consciousness (= how they view themselves). Both these processes are regarded by us as inseparable, as a dialectical unity: how peasants view themselves at any given conjuncture is, of course, in part due precisely to the nature of the economic and political structures which constrain them at that point. In these terms, the peasantry is viewed as neither pre- nor postmodern but as a highly modern social class, a catalyst for anti-systemic change and a dynamic force in an on-going modernization process. In short, they are perceived as engaged in a struggle to create a more just and better form of society, in which they are freed from oppression and in control of an economy that secures for all members of the society a livelihood and a decent standard of living. (p. 91)

Thus, peasant behaviour, as established by these scholars, is far from being considered uniquely dependent on currencies (or payments) as Mason’s model would suggest. In terms of the Marxist approach expressed by Petras and Veltmeyer, peasants are a revolutionary class and their commitment to social change is more natural than that of urban inhabitants. It is not a coincidence that most of the revolutionary movements in Latin America and in the world, from China to Nicaragua, from Vietnam to Colombia, were developed with the support of peasant masses. With the same ideas, Skocpol (1982) expresses that “Whether peasants become revolutionary or not depends as much on the interests and capacities of their class opponents as it does on the interests and capacities of the peasants themselves” (p. 354). However, this is not a sufficient condition, as

being peasant does not guarantee support to a revolutionary project, but peasants, especially in more 'cohesive' or more 'remote' communities, tend to be relatively immune to bourgeois hegemony, and thus probably more prone to treasuring their own culture and way of living, and supporting a rebel project that they feel would defend these values.

Petras has also pointed out that their *own peasant consciousness* plays an important role in the act of being a rebel. However, Skocpol (1982) is not so convinced by the idea that the peasantry can rebel without any external influence. Actually, she suggests that such a revolutionary movement has to be led by "urban-educated middle-class people" (p. 358). But quoting Selbin (1993), Brittain (2011) stresses the "legacy of revolutionary activity that has undoubtedly influenced the socio-political culture of those living within its borders" (p. 128). Thus, ideology has a special place in the development of guerrilla movements whose function is to combine the rebel nature of the peasantry with the continuous political work developed over time by revolutionary organizations.

Furthermore, Skocpol (1982) makes a summary of different approaches to understand why peasants become revolutionaries. Exploring arguments from Migdal (1974), Page (1975), Scott (1977), and Wolf (1969), she compiles different perspectives and compares them. There is a discussion for instance about what kind of peasants are more prone to supporting a revolutionary project. For Scott and Wolf, landowners with small properties are more likely to become rebels or rebel supporters, while for Paige those who are landless are more impressed by rebel discourses (p. 353).

Scott (1977) on the other hand, is more allied with the idea that culture and social values strengthen the peasant tendency to lean towards rebelliousness:

That the social values of the peasantry are pre-capitalist may give its rebellions a quality of tenacity and moral cohesion — in the sense that the struggle to restore or defend customary rights may evoke a more passionate commitment than the struggle to create a new order (p. 271).

Scott has explored this issue in depth, making a link between the cultural background of the peasants and the distance to the urban centers, stating that:

The capacity of the peasantry as a class to develop a distinctive and resistant culture rests not only on this long tradition of class conflict but also on its geographical and cultural distance from hegemonic institutions at the center. Being in this respect a peripheral class, the peasantry has had the autonomy, the tactical room to develop its own informal networks, its own local norms, and its own distinctive way of life, which serve to insulate it from the cultural and organizational life of the center" (Scott, 1977, p. 289).

However, Scott's ideas need to be put in the actual context. In his initial analysis, almost four decades ago, he overvalues the isolation of the peasantry from the market and the technology, which makes

it more independent than the proletariat (p. 276), and this is a special feature that supports its rebelliousness. Moreover, in a more radical fashion, he considers in his ancient analysis that one of the threats of the “traditional moral economy” of the peasantry is the “intrusion of a commercialised market economy” (Scott, 1977 p. 281). However, one can see how the consequences of neoliberal policies are nowadays constraining the development of rural communities, precisely because the dependence on advanced techniques and technologies, and the impossibility of making a living only by consuming their own production. Actually, one can see how part of the struggle of the Colombian peasantry and of the FARC-EP has been the breaking of the current isolation of peasant communities, either by constructing roads or by generating connections with the urban markets. Indeed, one example of the consequences of this isolation is the immersion of poor peasants in the coca crops’ economy, which is more profitable than traditional crops.

Scott (1977) also paid much attention to the “local orientation” of the peasants, that “may well be the source of their radical action” (p. 281). At least in the Colombian case, it seems that this contradiction between remaining local and becoming, I would say, *globalised* is not as relevant as presented in the Scott discussion. As I stated before, there is a strong need among the peasantry, and frequently stronger among young population and the new generations, to have access to the urban culture and all the “advantages” it brings, like internet access, the use of smartphones, trademark clothing, among other things that are unavoidably seen by the more traditional peasantry as threats to their culture.

Finally, Eric Wolf, as described by Skocpol (1982), realizes that a “full range of social-structural and political issues must be taken into account to explain peasant-based revolutions” and explores, among other issues, the contrast between “conservative and radical forms of village solidarity” and the influence of imperialism, which could be factors as well in the decision to support rebel causes or not (p. 360).

### *No one likes to be repressed*

Mason (1996) additionally recognizes factors that are associated with strategies of repression from the regime, destined to produce fear in a society. In fact, he does include a variable to express the consequences of repression and criminal acts done by whatever actor of the war (p. 68). There are peasants that became guerrilla fighters as a way to survive from paramilitary persecution, and also others made this decision as a way to take revenge against a forced disappearance of parents or relatives. However, Mason’s model suggests that coercive measures like assassinations of guerrilla fighters or supportive civilians can be used by the regime to increase the population’s fear and reduce the support for the rebels. In practice, this is not as common as the model suggests. Sometimes the *spirit of the revolution* is stronger than the fear produced by the repression, and he

recognises this in his conclusions: “Coercive strategies are more difficult to apply effectively and, if applied imperfectly, can increase the level of nonelite support for the rebels and shift preferences in favour of the rebels” (p. 79). One of my interviewees was a woman who was captured and tortured by the regime many years ago, also raped on several occasions, and her response after being free again was to continue in the guerrilla, although a “rational behaviour” would have been to leave the rebel ranks.

By the same token, Mason (1996) concludes his paper highlighting the opposite behaviour that can be found in such situations of reprisal: “The result is that civilian nonelites, motivated by the same desire to survive the conflict regardless of who wins, may look to the rebels as the one group that can offer them protection from indiscriminate government violence” (p. 80). It is explained later that for acquiring this support, the rebels of the FARC-EP have created their own structure of social organization which can, ideologically and politically, face these challenges regarding regime repression.

### *A strong dilemma*

In the frame of “rational choice” theories, another approach to take into account in order to understand how peasant support for the rebels can be achieved, is the Catch-22 dilemma. A Catch-22 dilemma is defined as “an unpleasant situation from which you cannot escape because you need to do one thing before doing a second, and you cannot do the second thing before doing the first”<sup>26</sup>. In other words, it is a situation in which a moral dilemma exists and the person has to make a decision in difficult circumstances. To give an example using a hypothetical situation, if a peasant does not want to support the guerrilla and its project for a new society (agrarian reform, new democracy and so on) he/she will not see his/her dream of owning a piece of land (for instance) and he/she will remain poor; but if he/she supports the guerrilla it is highly possible to end up being punished by the state or murdered by paramilitary gangs or the legal army itself, and then the peasant will not enjoy this new society or fulfil the dream of owning a piece of land. Based on this theory, seemingly such a difficult decision has to be made by peasants.

### *Human beings are moved by emotions as well*

Some of the guerrilla fighters I met in prison used to describe the guerrilla as a “family”. In particular, for those who became fighters when they were around 14 years old, the guerrilla represents something more than a group of people with weapons on their backs. Beltran (2016) recognises this feature and remains distant from the theories of rational choice. In his more recent work, entitled *Las FARC-EP (1950-2015): Luchas de ira y esperanza* (The FARC-EP, struggles of anger and hope), Beltran also explores the possible causes and theories to explain people’s support for the rebels,

<sup>26</sup> Catch-22. 2016. In . Retrieved on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, from <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/catch-22>.

especially for the FARC-EP's rebels. He is more allied with the idea that the sociology of emotions is an additional approach to understand peasant support for the Colombian rebels. Quoting Ferran (2008), he explains that "the functions of the emotions would consist in orienting in the world motivating our actions and founding in these actions cognitive acts" (p. 62).

Like Gutierrez (2004), who expresses that "people enrol to the guerrilla due to a variety of motivations in which strictly material motivations do not always appear" (p. 60), Beltran recognizes different possible motivations. Following these ideas, he explores the dimensions of individual motivations of belonging to a rebel group, and puts forward an interesting concept: "neither only coercion, nor pure conviction" (p. 55). Realistically this expresses that not all the motivations are associated with beautiful dreams of freedom and social justice, but also demystifies the forced recruitment theory. Consequently, he classifies these motivations in the following groups: economic injustice, injuries inflicted by state repression, family histories, and emotional and ideological motivations. Each of these possible motivations does not exclude any other, which means that one member of the movement could be inspired by one or more of these factors.

Several stories of dozens of FARC-EP's members in prison are collected in Beltran's book, showing this variety of motivations. From escaping from paramilitary persecution, to making a living by selling services to the guerrilla, from fleeing from extreme poverty conditions to joining the guerrilla because of having fallen in love with a fighter. A narrative that is interesting to highlight in his research, which could be useful for further arguments, is that one of the interviewees speaks about the participation in "spaces of political socialization" (p. 128), and another tells him about the course of the "Pioneers"<sup>27</sup>. Both were spaces where the ideological and political education was addressed to the peasants as a process of recruitment of new supporters. However, Beltran instead focuses only on the human motivations for belonging to the FARC-EP as a guerrilla fighter, but being a fighter is not the same as being a supporter, sympathiser or simply a follower; motivations and emotions could be different and of course the level of commitment could be extremely different since in most of the cases the first one could be in a more fragile and dangerous situation than the others.

In a recent speech of Juan Carlos Monedero, an active member of the political party Podemos in Spain, in a Mexican university, he, like Beltran, recalled a statement of the renowned Latin-American writer Eduardo Galeano (2014), who used to say that we are "seres sentipensantes" (feeling-thinking beings). Monedero claims as well that "any thought in our minds, before, is a feeling" and remarks that "without feelings it is not possible to reinvent democracy. With cold formulas and decrees, with frozen formulas, we are not going to win the heart of the peoples"<sup>28</sup>. He concludes that they —Podemos— learnt this from the Latin American struggles, suggesting that this kind of passion is needed to reinvent a political agenda for progressive movements in the world.

But this was not the only thing what Monedero said. There is an additional reflection that is worth pointing out to conclude this section, and it concerns the transformation of feelings into

<sup>27</sup> This was a traditional communist school for children organized by the Colombian Communist Party decades ago.

<sup>28</sup> To see the speech, see the reference: Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios (2016).



political praxis. For him, the process must pass through five stages of proceedings: to **be hurt**, to **know**, to **want**, to **be able to** and to **act**. The first one, to be hurt (or to feel hurt or to realize the pain), is the initial condition before questioning the status quo. It is the situation in which those people who are suffering realize that they are having pain for their own reality, and this is something important because not all people are aware of their situation or simply think that such a difficult condition is normal. The second one is to know, which is the process in which people, realizing their constraints and the pain from being in a situation of exclusion, whatever its kind, start asking questions to understand the reasons behind this situation. The third stage is to want, because it is not enough to understand the problem and to know what the causes of such a situation are. It is essential to want a change, to feel the need for a change. The fourth one, as it was described by Monedero, is to be able to, for if people are unable to change their condition they cannot advance to the final fifth stage which is to act. So far people have felt the pain, have learnt what is happening, have desired change, have been able to have the power to change the reality and finally, people have started changing their conditions through the politics which is the arenas of the to act.

The way the rebels of the FARC-EP have occupied an important part of the life of some peasant communities in Colombia—in some cases they have had political and ideological influence in specific territories for more than 50 years—, represents a fact that cannot be diminished. In some places, it is possible to find villagers who have relatives in the guerrilla, sons, daughters and also a history of ancestors who joined the rebel group. The revolutionary ethos is very common among some peasant families and communities, “my father was member of the communist party, my husband is in prison for rebellion, I am member of the communist party and my daughters too” was told by a peasant woman in the region of Sumapaz many years ago. So, the strong relation with a history of struggle and with the protagonists of the peasant rebellion strengthens the sentimental value of the political aim of the rebels, with agrarian reform being the central issue.

## 1.2 The struggle for the hegemony

Additional factors that shape peasant responses towards the rebels are age, gender, culture, religion, territory and of course what peasants have in their minds (and in their hearts). Why has rebelliousness been more fruitful in some regions than in others? Cultural factors and a culture of struggle tradition, for instance, are very important as well to understand peasant behaviour towards the rebels. As I said before, being a peasant is not a sufficient condition to become revolutionary, or rebel. There exist some characteristics of a region’s population and a special ideology, sustained through a long and dedicated work by those who want to keep a specific region under specific conditions, either to support the left-wing rebels or to support the right-wing reactionaries. Being rebels or supporters of the rebels depends not only on the objective conditions of subaltern classes, but also in the political context in which the struggle arises.

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian communist, very well known for the work he developed as a political prisoner, explores and defines the concept of *hegemony*. Hegemony in Gramsci's terms explains how a ruling class can have a very high influence in the minds, in the *common sense* of the population which is reached through several cultural interventions. Education, arts, music, television, religion and institutions, among others, have a very important role in how the ruling class or the elites determine (or try to determine) human behaviour, in general with the purpose to obtain the acquiescence of the subaltern classes. As Scott (1985) states: "It is in fact the pervasiveness of ideological hegemony that normally suffices to ensure social peace and to relegate the coercive apparatus of the state to the background" (p. 316)

Gramsci advances the Marxist-Leninist concept of superstructure and develops an important reflection about the cause-effect relation between base and superstructure. More specifically, the traditional and orthodox Marxism describes the superstructure as all of this kind of ideological apparatus that supports a production model, but which is generated by the production model itself. It means that the base (a production model which includes the division of labour, forces and relations of production among other concepts) generates a defined superstructure. In that sense churches, schools, rules, rituals, traditions, mainstream ideas, the state and all kind of institutions in a society are established with the clear purpose to maintain the economic base of the production model, and consequently to support the ruling class in power.

Thus, in capitalism, —like in other production system— these institutions are established to ensure the approval of the economic model by the population, either by coercion or by consent (or by both). In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (in the compilation of Forgacs, 1988) develops five important improvements of this theory. The **first** one is that *there is no a one-way causal relationship between base and superstructure*. Indeed, for him and for other Marxist scholars, there is a bidirectional relation that suggests that the superstructure also produces and maintain the base (infrastructure). The **second** one is *the identification of two elements of the superstructure: civil society and political society*, the first one ruling through consent and the second one ruling through coercion. However, the two are not always moving in the same direction or agreeing on the same objectives. What this means is that in some cases it is possible that the civil society (the rest of the population that accepts or not, with certain degree of homogeneity, the rules of the political society) could contest the political society (state institutions). The **third** Gramscian element is that *the superstructure does not always support the base*, which means that is possible that in some societies a production model could coexist with a superstructure that does not support it. To understand this, there are examples in some Latin-American governments in which a capitalist base remains with a progressive government whose institutions support another kind of production model, like the so-called *socialism of the XXI century*. The **fourth** one is that Gramsci highlights the importance of understanding that *a counter-hegemonic struggle can be possible not necessarily after dominating the base or after controlling the production model* —which would be achieved as consequence of a revolutionary process— but also by contesting the hegemony of the ruling class in the arenas of capitalist society. Finally, he introduces as a **fifth** element, the concept of *historic bloc as the unity*

*between the structure (base) and the superstructure* which is a political moment in which all the political forces (or at least the majority of them), political means, ideas, elements, institutions, material forces and the like pull together to pursue the same political dream.

With this Gramscian theoretical background one can suggest that peasants' support for the rebels can be seen as a consequence of a counter-hegemonic struggle, in which the main actor that develops and creates strategies for this struggle is the rebel organization and the social organizations around it. These organizations support its political project and can act more overtly than the rebels. Nevertheless, we cannot say that the only actor that constructs hegemony is the leading rebel group and the population is a passive actor that receives this cultural influence. Actually we have to recognise that peasants as well might have agency in this process, either by spreading all the elements of the hegemony or by their own inherent behaviour as social class. The latter was described by Scott (1985) as the *everyday forms of peasant resistance*, stating that: "The concept of hegemony ignores the extent to which most subordinate classes are able, on the basis of their daily material experience, to penetrate and demystify the prevailing ideology" (p. 317). He also criticises the extreme reductionism of some Marxists that portray the ideology as a mere product of the economic base, and suggests:

... the economic givens are crucial; they define much, but not all, of the situation that human actors face; they place limits on the responses that are possible, imaginable. But those limits are wide and, within them, human actors fashion their own response, their own experience of class, their own history (Ibid, p 42)

With this in mind one can identify that songs, poetry, documents, community spaces, communitarian work and social interventions, among other products generated in the framework of a revolutionary struggle, are ideological tools meant to build a rebel hegemony opposed to the regime hegemony. Civil society versus political society as Gramsci would suggest. So, counter-hegemonic struggle, can be understood as this engaging political work in which the rebels in their condition of leading political group, try to imprint their political ideas in the population's *common sense*.

### 1.3 Exploring rebel governance

In this section, an exploration of the theories regarding *rebel governance* is done. Some scholars are reviewed to define what kind of strategies are commonly used by rebels to develop their armed struggle and to control areas, which can be assumed like a kind of parallel government.

*We are the government*

One of the traditional adjectives used by the official army and the Colombian elites during decades of intensive war propaganda against the FARC-EP, when referring to those places under rebel control, was to call them *ungoverned places*. Actually, the most famous adjective was stated by the conservative leader Alvaro Gomez Hurtado, who when referring to the region of Marquetalia in the sixties spoke about “independent republics”. To contest these frequent statements about rebel rulers, which are common not only in the Colombian political fauna, Mampilly (2011) suggests that arguments like: “only state actors may engage in governance” (p. 40), cannot be accepted. Other scholars have approached this issue from a mere legal perspective, not taking into account that rebels can also exercise governance. Furthermore, he recognises that “internal warfare fragments political authority” (Kalyvas 2006; Fearon 2007 in Mampilly, 2011, p. 50) and creates spaces that challenge the sovereignty of the state in specific areas. Thus, the aliens or rebels in a specific territory can construct their own sovereignty, replacing the role of the state by the role of the rebel group at governing.

The most interesting and repeated element found in the rebels’ interviews in Havana, when speaking about what they consider themselves in *their* regions, is “we are the *government*”. This phrase involves the cognizance of being the group of people that exerts power in those rural areas and that exercises the functions (or some functions) of the state. However, the term *government* involves special features that are more structured and specialised, and thus escape from the scope of a rebel group. To be more meticulous, Tilly (2003), defines government as a “bounded organization that has the authority to make laws and regulations and the ability to enforce adherence by exercising control over the means of coercion within a defined territory” (p. 9), while Mampilly (2011), stresses that *governance* could be better used to explain this process of holding power in areas controlled by rebels (p. 4). In this manner, he declares that governance is “a more encompassing phenomenon than government” and suggests that a rebel governance system “refers to not only the structures that provide certain public goods but also the practice of rule insurgents adopt” (p. 4).

He also affirms a clear definition of *control* as “the ability of a rebel group to exert its power over a defined territorial space and to induce collaboration from the civilian population living within this area” and defines three kind of zones of control: areas under insurgent control, areas under divided control among the state and the insurgents, and areas under state control (p. 59). So, there is a need to gain consent or a certain legitimacy from the population in order to have a governance project. This legitimacy could be achieved by emulating the functions of the state and in some cases, as I have pointed out, there is no need to emulate the role of the displaced state since traditionally the state has been absent. Later on, this term *stateless zones* will be explored in this specific case.

*What kind of services are offered by an effective governance system?*

Mampilly (2011) recognises as well that rebel governance involves several practices or interventions developed and/or provided by the insurgents, like the provision of security and social services like health, education, food access; the “allocation of land and other resources” to improve the living conditions of civilians and the regulation of the local market, the resolution of civil disputes and other conflicts, among others practices (p. 4).

However, so far it is not clear what the role of rebel governance is for rebels who are fighting for the assumption of the power; would not it be enough to fight against the official army and destroy their institutions in the main cities? Why is governing important for rebel organizations? This is something significant to stress, because it can be a specific characteristic of rebel groups that sets them apart from other illegal armed groups. To clarify it, Mampilly (2011, p. 12) recalls that Mao Tse Tung states the “importance of developing appropriate governing structures accompanied by a prolonged period of political mobilisation among the peasantry”. But these governing structures do not need to be composed only by rebels. Actually, recalling Che Guevara’s book: *Guerrilla Warfare*, Mampilly emphasizes “the need to establish civil organizations that would administer the liberated zones and win over population, bringing them over to the rebel cause” (p. 13). These civil organizations are seen by him like those that can conciliate the tension between domination and hegemony, between coercion and consent.

Then, reminding Gramsci, it is important to remark as well, that governing is not only the act of imposing rules on the governed community. Essentially, a mixed system that uses certain degree of consent and coercion would be needed. Thus, rebel governance can be viewed not only like this kind of apparatus that provides goods and services and a system of conflict resolution, but also one that provides ideological spaces that can generate consent from the population. Or in other words, an apparatus that contributes to the creation of an hegemony useful for the political project of the rebels. It is worth clarifying that this creation of hegemony by rebel groups has also a revolutionary aim. This is something that other armed groups, like the paramilitaries in Colombia do not pay so much attention to; essentially, all their efforts in terms of cultural and political activities are addressed to sustain the *status quo*, the elite’s hegemony, and not to change it.

To complete the approximation to the concept of governance, Mampilly (2011) defines it like an *evolutionary process* and an *interactive process* (p. 15) in which the rebels have to explore the governed population in all of their dimensions in order to shape their governance strategies, and also in which the rebels could be influenced by the same environment around them. This environment is shaped not only by civilians but also by other actors like religious institutions, rival militias, humanitarian agencies, international organizations, neighbouring states and private corporations (p. 16). That is why in the same country, different developments of the guerrilla war and different levels of consent from the population towards the revolutionary project can be found. In other words, the heart could be achieved by different ways, using different strategies and their respective success varies from place to place. A very good example of this fact is that one of the causes of the failure of Che Guevara in Bolivia could be the misunderstanding of the Bolivian culture.

Guevara tried to use the same strategies carried out in Cuba regarding the relation of the guerrilla with peasant communities, but this simply failed in Bolivia.

### *What is an effective rebel governance system?*

Mampilly (2011) claims there are three capacities that must be fulfilled by any insurgent group to clarify if they are exercising *effective governance*. The **first** one is the development of “a *force capable of policing the population, providing a degree of stability that makes the production of governance functions possible*”, the **second** one is the development of a “*dispute resolution mechanism*”, to find solutions to the common conflicts among societal groups, and finally the **third** is the “*capacity to provide public goods beyond the security*”, like health and education systems, food production and supply and infrastructure, among other social interventions.

Additionally, he refers to the “three core functions of modern government: security, welfare and representation” (p.62) which include the three capacities mentioned above. The last one, which was not mentioned yet in the former paragraph, refers to the *creation of a body of representation* that could legislate and represent the population (Wickham-Crowley, 1987 in Mampilly, 2011, p. 62), and which can be considered as a **fourth** capability of an effective rebel governance.

He also remarks that a rebel group could create democratic and participative mechanisms in which the opinion of civilians can be taken into account by the rebels in decision making processes, but he highlights as well that it is not a necessary condition for the possible success of the rebel governance, since we cannot rule out that “autocratic practices” might also be successful at conducting effective governance (p. 17). Being the rulers, as Mampilly continues, implies as well gaining *legitimacy* among civilians, something that can be achieved through developing “consensual relationships with civilian population” and highlights that “this relationship, based on mutual and unequal exchange, relies on a combination of coercion and consent that over time can produce an informal social contract that can render an insurgent government a legitimate authority” (p. 53). But legitimacy could be also achieved by providing public goods as part of a broader program to generate support for the rebel regime (p. 54). So, a **fifth** element of an effective rebel governance system is *the development of an ideological apparatus* that can serve to confront the ideological challenges regarding *creation of consent* among population.

### *Other perspectives*

Van der Haar (2013) prefers to use the term *parallel governance*, which is interpreted like “those situations where two distinct sets of institutions exist, associated with competing political agendas, usually between the states and their competitors”. However she highlights that parallel government includes as well “accommodations and mutual adjustment” (p. 98), which implies a mutual recognition between the state (regime) and rebel institutions. Going in depth, she explains as well

the concept of *institutional multiplicity*: “In situations of institutional multiplicity, different claims to authority and regulation exist that are expressed in distinct sets of rules, offers of public goods, sources of legitimation, enforcement mechanisms and, sometimes, administrative procedures” (p. 99).

A third concept explored by Van der Haar is *hybrid political orders*, which is a form of “functional complementarity” and “does not necessarily involve political contention or competition” (p. 99). Van der Haar suggests as well that “parallel governance implies that boundaries between the different sets of institutions need to be defined and some modus of articulation needs to be developed” (p. 100). And to conclude, she gives a more detailed definition of what could be a comprehensive approach of rebel governance including the subversive character of the rebel groups:

Parallel governance is a form of institutional multiplicity in which moral and political contestation is a crucial feature of the way the different sets of institutions relate. With parallel governance, we refer to governance organised and sustained as part of strategies of resistance to and critique of the state (p. 101).

So, in this part she is denoting and recognizing the ideological dimension of rebel governance, which, as it will be explained later, has been occupying an important role in our specific case, the FARC-EP.

## 1.4 The FARC-EP as a political movement

Based on the FARC-EP’s experience and considering them as political movement, I will explain how they have shaped their organization in such a way that multiple sub-organizations were developed with the purpose of pursuing their strategic plan, which is fundamental to understand the act/art of reaching the heart of the peasantry. For the purposes of this work, what is important to highlight first of all is that despite the traditional discourse in the mass media, the guerrilla movement does not want all their followers to become guerrilleros. Actually, for a revolutionary organization, several political and organizational spaces for different levels of commitment must be created. Thus, the FARC-EP has created simple but efficient structures that are illustrated in Figure 1.1.

The concentric circles in continuous lines represent all the structures of the FARC-EP movement. This representation highlights the fact that being member of the guerrilla implies being member of both the Colombian Clandestine Communist Party (known in Spanish as PCCC) of the FARC-EP and of the Bolivarian Movement (MB). Furthermore, it shows as well that not all the members of the MB are members of the PCCC. Actually, the foundational document of the MB (FARC-EP, 2000) points out the need to create a huge movement in which several sectors of the Colombian society could have a place. This implies understanding the MB as a social movement and not as a political party. Furthermore, the diagram shows that not all the members of the PCCC are guerrilleros or militia. On the other hand, the dotted cloud below represents the social legal

organizations that overlap and interact with the FARC-EP structures, which means that some members of social movements are members of the FARC-EP as well, in one of the three structures, but in a clandestine way.

Brittain (2011) similarly defines the structure of the insurgency in these words:

The organizational structure of this insurgency is based around a hierarchical chain of command made up of a multi-person leadership deeply connected to the countryside. The highest level of leadership within the FARC-EP is the Secretariat of the Central High Command, composed of seven members (p. 109)

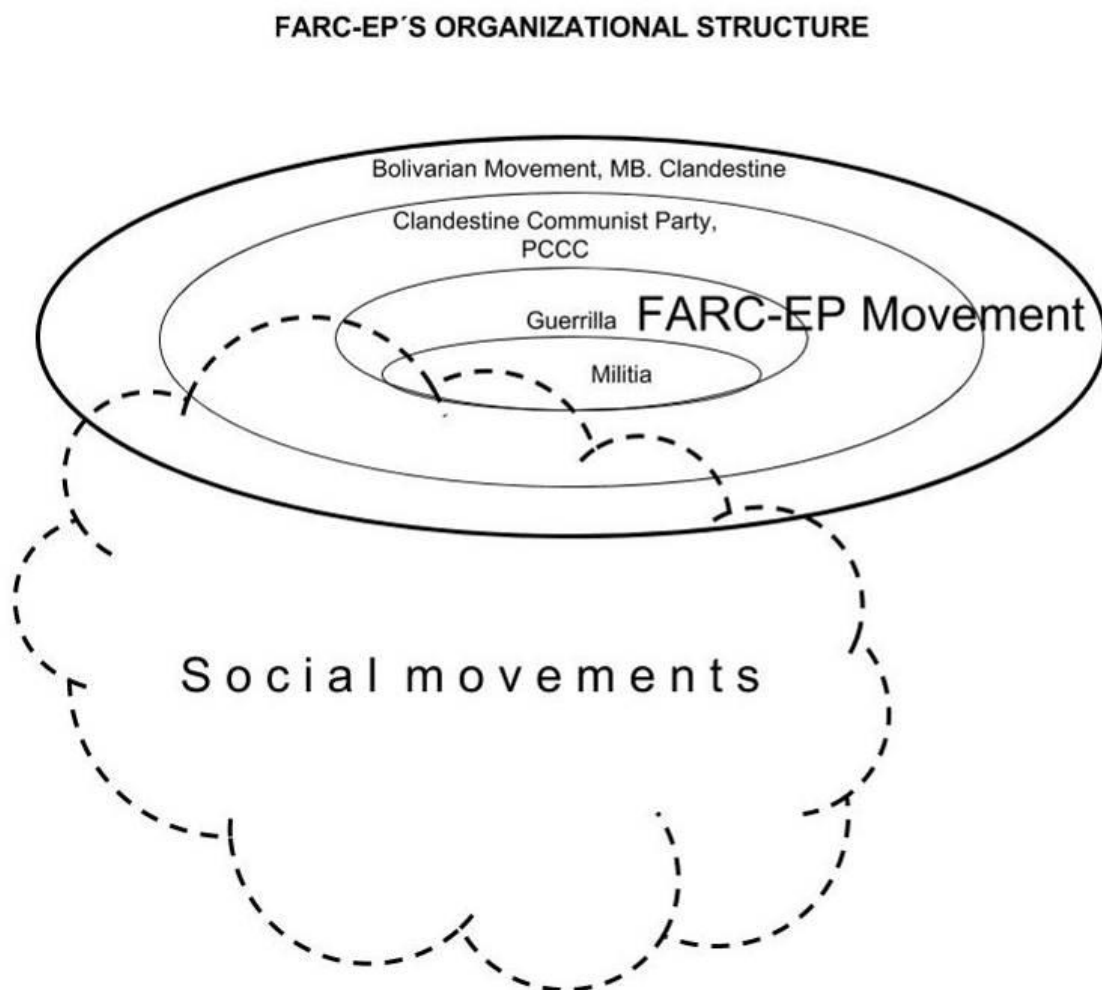


Figure 1.1 FARC-EP's organizational structures and relations with social movements

He also suggests another model to explain the FARC-EP's structure (figure 1.2.). Using lines, he shows the possible relations between different structures of the rebel movement. Contrary to the model presented by the present research, Brittain sees the FARC-EP in the centre as the main structure with connections with the other substructures but keeping the relevance of the combatants and the



secretariat. However there would seem to be a lack of understanding of the FARC-EP as a movement in which all the structures could be considered like strategic tools to develop their political and armed struggle, and they are as important as the structure in the centre of Brittain’s diagram. Additionally, Brittain’s model does not take into account the interaction with peasant organizations which, as it is demonstrated later, is fundamental to understand the political tactics of the FARC-EP.

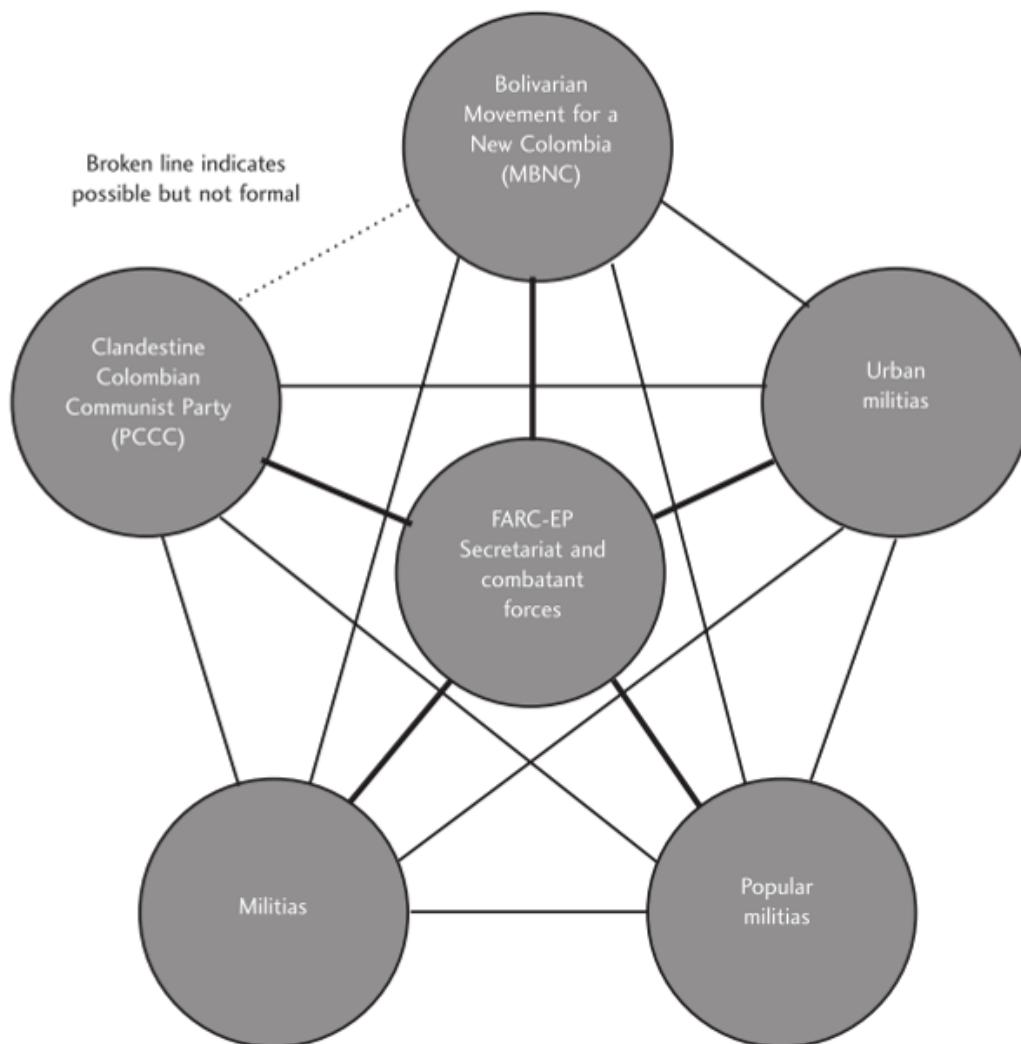


Figure 1.2 Brittain’s model of the FARC-EP’s organizational structure. Brittain (2011)

So far, what is important to highlight is the fact that the FARC-EP’s structure has challenged the traditional, orthodox Marxist structure for a communist revolutionary movement in which the “normal” order is from the inner circle to the outer circle as follows: Communist Party, Popular Army and the Popular Front. Mao Tse-Tung was one of the revolutionary leaders who were insistent in the need of this kind of organization for the revolutionary struggle, known as the *three weapons of the revolutionary war*:

A well-disciplined Party armed with the theory of Marxism-Leninism, using the method of self-criticism and linked with the masses of the people, an army under the leadership of such a Party; a united front of all revolutionary classes and all revolutionary groups under the leadership of such a Party -- these are the three main weapons with which we have defeated the enemy" (Tse-Tung, 1949)

However, learning from their own history and based in their own experiences, the FARC-EP set up a different organization, —as it is described in the diagram—, in which each guerrilla fighter is also member of a clandestine cell of the PCCC, with all the rights and duties of the other civilian members of the PCCC. They also defined that the secretariat is the maximum body of direction of the Party. These features are important developments if we compare to other revolutionary organizations in the world in which not all the fighters are members of the leading party, and not all the members of the central committee are combatants.

To give additional information, Brittain (2011) stresses that "65 per cent of its formal members coming from the countryside or rural-based municipalities — 12 to 13 per cent composed from various indigenous groups — and the remaining 35 per cent from urban sectors of the country" (p. 110). Quoting Petras (2013), he highlights as well the composition of the rebel ranks "the current FARC-EP membership is dominated by subsistence peasants and small producers, it has grown to incorporate indigenous populations, afro-Colombians, the displaced, landless rural-labourers, intellectuals, unionists, teachers, professionals, doctors, lawyers, priests, and sectors of the urban workforce" (Brittain, 2011, p.111). For now, it is impossible to make an estimation of the amount of members that belong to all of these structures of the FARC-EP, but the Colombian government suggested recently a conservative number of 17500 members<sup>29</sup>. But the real number should be much higher.

Furthermore, in figure 1.1, the concentric circles are contrasted with the unshaped cloud to show somehow that the level of organization of the FARC-EP is more structured than that of the social movements, which in several cases are unconnected and do not share the same dreams and goals among themselves. Once a social organization and its members (or some of them) are part of one of the structures of the FARC-EP, they become more structured and organized than before.

<sup>29</sup> El Espectador (2016).



Figure 1.3 Two “clandestine” members of the MB in front of the police, posing for the picture with a poster that contains the name of commander Raul Reyes, who was killed in 2008 in Ecuador. The poster states: “Commandant Raul Reyes, to his memory our flag”. (Viva, Candelaria y Gonzalo, N., 2014). Re-printed with permission of the authors.

The levels guerrilla, militia and PCCC have their own statutes, which set the rights and duties and define the function of each structure, while the MB does not have statutes as their *Carta de reunion* (meeting letter) expresses: “The MB is a wide movement, without statutes, without regulations, without discriminations except for the declared enemies of the people” (FARC-EP, 2000). In the same document the FARC-EP designate one of their members of the *Secretariado*<sup>30</sup> (secretariat) as the leader of the MB, as well as establish that a *Consejo Patriotico* (patriotic council) formed by 100 Colombians must be created in a “democratic process of selection”. One could suggest that most of the civilian supporters of the guerrilla belong to either to the PCCC or to the MB, both with a clandestine character due to the need to preserve the lives of the activists. The interviewees in this work do not speak so much about that, however most of the people used to believe that the guerrilla is made up of only guerrilla fighters, but in practice the amount of followers and supporters could far exceed the amount of the fighters. That is why they prefer to use more often the term *movement* in order to refer to themselves in informal spaces. A very great surprise is in store for this sector of the Colombian society who hates the FARC-EP and believe that they are a marginalised organization, when they become a legal political party.

<sup>30</sup> *Secretariado* is the group of the more relevant commandants delegated as the direction of the FARC-EP.

## 2 The FARC-EP governing

***“¡Aquí las únicas putas, son las putas FARC!”***  
*(“The only fucking thing here are the FARC!”)*

Jaime Garzón

This was the answer of the journalist and comedian Jaime Garzón<sup>31</sup>, then *alcalde menor*<sup>32</sup> of the locality of Sumapaz in Bogota, a place of historical agrarian struggles and where the FARC-EP had had a huge influence, to the question from the Bogota’s mayor: How many brothels (*casas de lenocinio* in Spanish) are there in Sumapaz? He did not want to insult the FARC-EP, rather he wanted to highlight that there was no other institutional presence in the region besides the rebels. According to what I was told by Edison Romaña, Garzón was a close friend of some of the FARC-EP’s commanders including Miller Perdomo and Romaña himself, and he used to go to the guerrilla encampments to speak with the rebels about political issues. At a certain point Garzón was very committed to a mediation process to obtain the freedom of some people kidnapped by the FARC-EP. Due to his work as a mediator, and his proximity with the rebels, he was assassinated by paramilitaries in 1999, right when a new attempt at peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP had started in the Caguán region. While Garzón’s famous quip might sound fiery or even threatening, for the Colombian culture it represented another common joke by the comedian, who was always very critical of the status quo. But what is important to draw from this answer is that it illustrates what has happened in the Colombian countryside. Namely, the state has not been there for many years and this vacuum was filled by the rebels in many regions. This is something important to stress before speaking about the rebel governance of the FARC-EP.

In this chapter, I start by making an account of all the possible ways to approach peasant communities by the rebels, followed by a description of the counter hegemonic struggle of the FARC-EP, which contains both a brief description of war propaganda strategies of against the insurgency and the application of Gramsci’s theory to interpret the way the rebels have developed their ideological struggle. Finally, a third part explores how the FARC-EP have governed, with the support of the peasants, the areas under their influence, explaining some of the main characteristics of their approach.

### 2.1 Approaching the heart

#### *Utopia exists*

<sup>31</sup> A very entertaining biography of Garzón can be found in Izquierdo, Germán (2011).

<sup>32</sup> A mayor of one of Bogota’s 20 localities.

To start, in order to understand the act/art of approaching the heart, it is key to remark that the FARC-EP is mainly composed of peasants, who live in peasant regions and speak to peasants in the terms used by peasants. I use this almost tongue twister to show that one can easily identify in the speeches of the commanders how they use a common language and traditional, or popular, expressions to be understood by any peasant and by the members of their own ranks<sup>33</sup>. They are basically peasants trying to conquer the hearts of the peasantry.

Taking into account the organizational considerations about the FARC-EP explained in section 1.2 that were intended to clarify how they are structured, the act/art of approaching the heart is now further explored. It is crucial to say that the weakness of the rational choice models is that they do not take into account how peasants that support the guerrilla really believe in revolution. In fact, for both Mason (1996) and Leites and Wolf (1970), arguments about reaching the hearts and minds of the population are irrelevant for this kind of analysis (p. 79). Yet for those peasants the dream of a *New Colombia* as said by one of the most popular slogans of the guerrilla: “*Por la Nueva Colombia*”— is highly possible and it is not irrelevant; they really believe in the possibility of winning the war and creating a New Colombia. Quoting Selbin (1993), Brittain (2010) recognizes as well the influence of political culture in feeding this dream:

The cult of the heroic revolutionary has produced in many places a popular political culture of resistance, rebellion, and revolution, which has little to do with the state structure itself but more the hearts and minds of those in struggle throughout Central and South America (p. 58)

In the same fashion, he highlights the creation of a specific “revolutionary ethos”: “By constructing a support base, extensive geographical breadth, and an expanding ideological model of emancipation, the FARC-EP has proven the ability to move its revolutionary ethos beyond the countryside” (Brittain, 2010, p. 30).

But to complete the picture there is a strong element among the peasantry which is the permanent victimization of the landless. Over and over again, several peasant families have faced for many years the dispossession of their lands by paramilitaries and big landowners in different ways, either by killing their relatives, or by displacing huge communities and their social leaders, or by using threats to force them to sell the land at cheap prices. So, for these people rebelling seems to be the only way out.

So, how can we account for this factor that is more related with future but higher payments as the rational choice theory suggests? How can we measure in this model the hope for the success of the revolution, the land for the tiller and other big dreams, or at least the dream of a small piece of land to live in peace? The currency-oriented model does not take into account cultural beliefs and

<sup>33</sup> I suggest the reader to have a look at the following document which is the transcription of a speech of a member of the secretariat who was explaining the concept Democratic centralism to the guerrilleros. Notice the pedagogic level of the speaker: FARC-EP (n.d.).

legends of some groups of people which have been spreading for many years in many regions. How can rational choice explain the belonging of various members of one family to the guerrilla, something which is very common in the FARC-EP? A simple example is the history of a family in Bogota<sup>34</sup> whose 6 members are guerrilla fighters and/or *milicianos*<sup>35</sup>. The father, the mother, three young sons and one young daughter became members of the guerrilla after the Caguan peace talks. One of the men died in a combat, both parents and one son were put in prison (now they are free) and the other two continue in the FARC-EP, with the youngest son being a current member of the rebel peace delegation in Havana. This could just be an anecdote, but what is essential to point out is the fact that the ideology and dreams of specific groups of the population play a very important role in creating conditions for the support of rebelliousness.

Beltran (2016) for example, has shown that in some cases being born in families or communities under guerrillas' influence has been a powerful inspiration to support or to become a rebel of the FARC-EP (p. 139); Mampilly (2011) speaks about that in terms of a "collective identity of the insurgents" (p. 56). The spread of values, beliefs, feelings, discourses, stories and a specific culture over time provides communities with general behaviour guidelines, which in turn conditions the response towards the rebels or towards the regime. In the Colombian case, it is well established that the Communist Party and the communist ideology has had an important influence in some rural communities. In fact, it is more likely to find someone affiliated with the Communist Party in the countryside than in an urban factory.

Similarly, Beltran (2016) uses the term "foundational myth of the FARC-EP" (p. 140) to speak about how narratives about the rebels are crucial to connect people with the revolutionary cause. Thus, the aggression of Marquetalia on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 1964 by the national army with the USA's support, in the frame of the LASO plan (Latin America Security Operation), has been useful for the rebels to tell the new generations and the peasants around them "when", "why" and "how" the heroic resistance of 48 peasants gave birth to the FARC-EP as an insurgent group. "The legend of Marquetalia is still shared by everyone from the countryside to the café – a legend that details how Marulanda proved incredibly resourceful in taking on US/Colombian forces" (Alejandro and Billon, 1999 in Brittain, 2010 p. 13). Beltran (2016) also declares that this traditional discourse was also improved by the rebels with the passing of the time, in which they included other elements and analyses from left-wing debates, trying to achieve national and international solidarity (p. 127). Furthermore, Beltran explores the power of storytelling among combatants and population to illustrate the history of struggle of the rebels, showing that the role of these stories is to "reduce the complexity" and give "sense of the world to understand their capabilities (or inabilities)" (p. 138).

<sup>34</sup> I cannot give the names but it was a history that I knew when I was in prison at the same moment with one of the members of this family. His father and mother were also in prison at the same time, all of them accused of rebellion. After some months both parents were released due to their age and bad health conditions.

<sup>35</sup> *Milicianos or milicia* (militia) are an additional kind of membership role in the guerrilla. They are less armed than the guerrilleros, most of the time with a hidden pistol or a handy weapon. They carry out only logistical tasks, and occasionally political and organizational missions. It should not be confused with the term *militia* used in some academic papers to designate paramilitary or right-wing armed groups. The FARC-EP have used this term as one of their structures.

With this kind of narratives, the ideological and political education has been possible among peasants in several regions.

Thus, solidarity, community, cooperativeness, struggle for the land and other values, social imaginaries and specific narratives have been spread in some areas (with shortcomings and difficulties) by the guerrillas, and conversely, other values, collective imaginaries and narratives can be found in regions controlled by paramilitary groups, drug traffickers and gangsters or simply without any other influence. The regions of Sumapaz or Tolima for instance, have had traditional left-wing followers among rural communities, and the response of their members is more likely to support rebelliousness than the response of other communities like in some regions of Boyacá, which are known for a more traditional and conservative behaviour. Victoria Sandino, a commander of the rebels interviewed in Havana, expresses how some regions have been traditionally influenced by the FARC-EP:

There are places where the guerrilla has been historically there. In my area, which is the centre of the country, the guerrilla has been since their origin, even we learn a lot from the community because we can find elderly people that were in the time of Marulanda, even in Marquetalia, or in the Davis<sup>36</sup> -I am speaking of the 50s. It was a long time ago, and they were part of the resistance; then there is a strong recognition towards the organization.

The dream of agrarian reform is also included in their speeches towards the peasants. Most of the utopia of the peasantry has been used by the FARC-EP as part of their political program. The agrarian program contains the demands that would represent a true land reform. So, this political program is part of the discourses exposed in their political schools of the peasant masses. The cadres in charge of the educational campaigns in rural areas are used to explaining to the peasants the benefits of their political program, describing post-revolutionary scenarios and feeding the dreams of the peasantry.

### *Addressing the immediate needs*

If we look at the reprisal factors explained by Mason (1996, P. 72), blocking the food supply to a region, bombing roads and bridges, capturing innocent peasants as suspected rebels, selective assassinations of social leaders, among other practices in Colombia, instead of increasing the peasants' loyalty to the regime, those measures have been a powerful argument for the rebels to acquire support, to justify their struggle and to increase peasant struggle and peasant organization. Far from being a few isolated cases, this is apparently rule. Victoria Sandino, recognises this: "...People

<sup>36</sup> Marquetalia and the Davis are historical milestones of the struggle of the FARC-EP. To see more about this history, check the book written by one of the founders of the rebel group, Ciro Trujillo: *Páginas de su Vida, 1949–1953*, (Trujillo, 1974).

feel that this is the organization which defends them, that represents them, which is responsible for what they have now and which has protected their lives”.

Thus, there exist different strategies to recruit guerrilla fighters and supporters in which both persuasion (through organization) and coercion play a role. Nevertheless, in general, persuasion seems to be more useful and smart for any revolutionary project. Leites and Wolf (1970) recognise the importance of both methods in achieving peasant support: “Thorough organization and effective coercion can enjoin or engender particular modes of behaviour of the population, notwithstanding popular preferences that would lead to different behaviour if a purely voluntary choice could be made” (p. 149).

Ideological support from the population through persuasion is then achieved from the initial contact with these rural communities. As Hermes Aguilar, a commander of the FARC-EP explains: “...we start asking people what the needs of this community are”. Opposite to the traditional narratives that the guerrilla arrives in a community in a violent way, the way of approaching people has to be very creative and respectful with communities. Walter Mendoza explains this in his interview: “There is no a guerrilla commander in the world that can go to a village and say to the people: “in few minutes I need all the population somewhere”. It cannot be done”. It contradicts as well the description of a uniform behaviour of the rebels when approaching communities described by Mampilly (2011), in which there is a stage of struggle for military control before the building of a governance apparatus starts and that, in most cases, the first step taken by the rebels to create this apparatus is the creation of a force capable of policing the population and a mechanism of regulating disputes (p. 63). But could we consider approaching communities as a first step towards building such an apparatus? Hermes Aguilar explains the role of their *explorations*, telling us one of the possibilities of approaching a community, which he refers to as “solidarity”:

The organization<sup>37</sup> has a tactic named *explorations*. When you enter in a new terrain that you do not know, you have to make an analysis of the situation of the community, you are going to find people with dental problems, with serious health issues, and before anything else they will ask you to help them. Then in the guerrilla we have people trained in nursing not only for the fighters but also for the civilians. Problems of malaria, “amoebiasis”<sup>38</sup> and yellow fever. (...) It is the same with dentists and physicians we have, we make a schedule and we tell them which day we can visit that community. This is solidarity.

This seems to be a very ancient approach that was defined as rebel policy by the founder of the FARC-EP himself: “we raise and support the immediate and fundamental demands of the masses, which by virtue of our activity are in the fields like us” (Marulanda, 2003, in Brittain, 2010, p 15). So,

<sup>37</sup> He and other guerrilla members speak about the FARC-EP using the term *organization*. In other cases, they use indistinctly the term *movement*.

<sup>38</sup> Stomach illness produced by Amoebas, very common in Colombian villages without an adequate water treatment for human consumption.



this is also an important characteristic of the FARC-EP's behaviour, they have tried to look for the demands of the peasant population, and it does not matter if those demands come from landless peasants or from small holders. Thus, it is identified in the Colombian insurgency that they are not focussed on a specific subgroup among the peasant population with specific demands, resolving the debate between Scott, Wolf and Paige described in the section 1.1. Rather all the peasant support is considered welcome by the FARC-EP and then specific struggles can be born according to specific circumstances of the peasantry in each region. So, in reality, it is a more malleable approach than the one summarized by Skocpol.

Petras (2001) has also argued that "the resistance of peasants and landless workers is not to modernization per se, but to a particular form of it" (p. 99). In our case, the FARC-EP's experiences can show that there exists a strong demand for modernization in the countryside<sup>39</sup>. Petras also recognises that:

Although the FARC has protected —and continues to defend— underdeveloped rural producers tied to small-scale production, its leaders and programme is nevertheless directed toward introducing modern agricultural techniques and marketing strategies (p. 109)

The identification of leaders is also an important task among guerrilla commanders. They interact with the communities, persuading some of their leaders of these communities, as Walter Mendoza describes:

We always start looking for the leaders, the president of the "junta comunal" (Communal board), of the "consejo comunitario" (communitarian council) the "gobernador del cabildo" (the governor of the indigenous community), I mean the leaders of the social organizations.

Camila Cienfuegos, a young guerrilla fighter, narrates how she was working in a community, approaching them through the children, but not to recruit them as the mass media propaganda would have Colombians believe:

I had the opportunity to work in an area for 4 years and it was an enriching experience. I started working with children, approaching them to teach them how to create things with paper, making cards... How to make crops in the school's garden, in the houses' backyards. How to make subsistence crops<sup>40</sup>, how to make it with better techniques. Then with the things they have within their reach, to make organic compost, (...) we also made hand crafts with coffee seeds, and *chocho*<sup>41</sup> seeds. Their parents made a micro company and they used to sell those products in close-by villages.

<sup>39</sup> These modernisation goals for rural development can be seen in: FARC-EP (2013).

<sup>40</sup> In Spanish, she said *cultivos de pancoger*.

<sup>41</sup> Chocho seeds: *Erythrina rubrinervia*

Despite their Marxist and communist ideology, and faraway of traditional imaginaries that define the guerrilla as atheist and anti-religious movement, the well-known commander Edison Romaña speaks about religion and how they deal with these issues in approaching communities:

In our documents, it is said that we respect all the religious beliefs independent of what they are. We support them, encourage them. This anti-religion idea is the propaganda of the oligarchy, of the army, of the public forces, that we are atheists or that we do not believe in god. Everything that is good for the development of our society is very welcome for us, (...) we agree with them on several principles, solidarity, fraternity, harmony... They are values that are common to the Catholics, to the Protestants and to us.

Actually, Colombian journalist Jaime Garzón who was assassinated by paramilitary bands, did a remarkable and funny interview with a catholic priest who is a member of the FARC-EP<sup>42</sup>. This reveals that being religious or not is not an important question for the FARC-EP's rebels, which in my point of view is also an ideological tactic to approach communities in a huge Christian and believer society, with almost the entirety of the population believing in God.

### *Reaching the mind*

Ideological support can be achieved by the guerrilla in different ways. First of all by raising political awareness, not only through political education, but also through the practice of social resistance and social struggle; and secondly by the everyday interaction with populations, where the way in which guerrilla members relate (and behave) to population is essential for achieving support. I remember a commander of the FARC-EP in prison, who was used to emphasise in his traditional morning speeches to his comrades, that “each square meter around a guerrilla fighter is the reflection of the FARC-EP's behaviour” and so, he always pushed his comrades to behave as revolutionaries. This means that daily interactions are fundamental to recreate social imaginaries in favour of (or against) the rebels.<sup>43</sup>

These so-called political-ideological actions that represent the act/art of approaching people are put in place to strengthen community support and individual support. And as Lichbach (1994) has said: “the selective incentives solution implies that material self-interest drives peasant struggles” (p. 392), so approaching peasants, as the *farianos*<sup>44</sup> have told us, requires looking at the material needs of the population. Additionally, for the FARC-EP, this peasant support is not only an

<sup>42</sup> Garzón, Jaime (2011).

<sup>43</sup> In some cases, it is noticeable how mistakes caused by some guerrilla members in some regions were useful for its enemy to increase successfully its propaganda against the guerrilla. In most cases the guerrilla commanders have explained this erroneous behaviour as either mistakes that were not part of the guerrilla policies, and they did not want to damage or to generate excesses with civilians.

<sup>44</sup> *Farianos* is a common term used by them to refer to the militants or the fighters belonging to the FARC-EP.

important tactic in order to grow the movement but also to survive as a rebel movement. Recruitment of new guerrilla fighters is as important as persuading communities to be politically, ideologically and logistically supportive.

The expected support of the peasants can be either active or passive. Active support has to do with those activities like peasant (social) organizing, active participation in meetings, leadership, political education, contribution to the self-organization, rebel governance and so on, practised by civilians who support the *political agenda of the FARC-EP*. Most of the active supporters are members of the PCCC or the MB and are involved in helping the rebels in tasks like transportation, purchase of food (*remesas*), food supply, accommodation, surveillance and supplying information, transporting new contacts and new members under safe conditions, transport and production of guerrilla's supplies like fatigues, boots, and materials, including war materials such as explosives, munitions and weapons, among other important tasks. These tasks are also delegated most of the time to the militia (*milicias*), who are very committed to the political agenda of the rebels. Passive support involves those activities practised by civilians to help the guerrilla, but without political commitment. It means that those passive civilians for the most part are mobilised either by the remuneration for their services or by coercion. Some of these activities can be fulfilled by those with active commitment as well, but it does not mean that they are done any less efficiently. Sometimes commanders must delegate some functions to anyone who is able to do something, regardless of how deep their commitment to their political project is. It is a pragmatic question that does not have to do with political goals.

In most cases, peasants in rural areas who support the rebels believe in their political project, but they have also some kind of compensation in political or economic terms. The fact that supporting the rebels could be a way to become a peasant leader, or to develop some skills which would not be possible otherwise (political and leadership skills) makes this decision more attractive. In the same way, the fact that by supporting the guerrilla a peasant can sell some agricultural products or animals (livestock) to the guerrilla fronts at a very favourable price is also an attractive argument.

Looking at the intervention of the FARC-EP in rural areas, we see in the FARC-EP's behaviour that not all the actions have been directed to give private goods to individuals or communities. Perhaps we can consider that making a good deal among members of one community under a violent conflict could be interpreted as a selective incentive that is not material. Or the cleaning of the Atrato river (as it is shown later) could be seen as a selective incentive addressed to a specific community as well.

Furthermore, there is another advantage for the rebels in making a combination of selective incentives and ideological-political work. In conditions of competition for the "heart" of the population, ideological education is important to persuade peasants, as Lichbach mentions:

The reason is that competition makes ideological appeals relevant- peasants must pay attention to the different appeals. The success of one side rather than the other will help to

define the national agenda and hence affect the peasant's personal situation and his or her local community (p. 412)

He also recognizes that the remoteness of a rural community could be an additional factor to increase the level of rebel support: “When they are far removed from the regime they can use selective incentives to convert the apathetic to the involved, the non-activist to the activist” (p. 412)

It is crucial to notice as well that the FARC-EP have developed very important work regarding gender equality. Brittain (2010) suggests that “by empowering women in the insurgency, the FARC-EP indirectly empowered women in her community. Both men and women, through their interactions with women in the FARC-EP, were faced with their own prejudices (and abusive relationships) at home” (p. 193). Some anecdotes shown in this work in the following chapters could better clarify their approach in the struggle against the *macho* culture of Colombian society. Some of those accounts are related with preventing domestic abuse of women in rural communities, family planning education, and women participation in social and productive projects, among others.

Finally, hypothesizing, a selective incentive can be useful to start approaching a peasant community, as it is said by the interviewees, with the purpose of organizing the community. This in order to achieve more attractive and powerful selective incentives (like the promise of the “land for the tiller”) through a process of raising awareness using ideological and political resources, and creating collective action for peasant upheavals.

## 2.2 Counter-hegemonic struggle of the FARC-EP

### 2.2.1 The construction of the enemy

From the beginning, I have been stressing how a distorted image of the FARC-EP has been created through specific strategies of manipulation led by the elites, with the overt support of the mainstream media. Even though the main objective of this work is not to undertake an in-depth analysis of this manipulation, I found it important to show some ideas, reflections and new arguments regarding this issue. It is important to distinguish these mechanisms in order to better comprehend the upcoming chapters, but also to introduce new elements to the current debate about the real dimension of the FARC-EP in peace times.

#### *Making the elite's fears and interests the population's fears and interests*

Most Colombians believe that the guerrilla FARC-EP is a terrorist group, and this is not a surprise. After a very expensive and aggressive media campaign developed in the past decades, the guerrilla has been shown to society as the most dangerous and the foremost problem in the country.

Especialmente durante el gobierno de Álvaro Uribe, las FARC-EP fueron “reducidas” a un grupo criminal y cartel de drogas. Se les presentó en el espacio público como el principal problema que tenía que ser resuelto sin pensar en los costos que esto implicaría. En realidad, el gobierno actual del presidente Juan Manuel Santos invirtió en 2013 cerca de 26 millones de euros al día en el sector de la defensa (Datosmacro.com, 2016), incluso cuando las negociaciones de paz con las FARC-EP ya habían comenzado.

El espacio público en Colombia ha sido dominado por las familias más ricas que poseen los principales medios de comunicación. Un informe realizado por el proyecto *Monitoreo de Medios* demostró que el 57% de los medios de televisión, radio, internet y prensa impresa son propiedad de solo 4 familias (monitoreodemedios.com, 2016), quienes no solo poseen empresas de medios sino también otros tipos de negocios. Estas familias han ejercido una gran influencia sobre los asuntos políticos y económicos del país, por lo que se han convertido en uno de los principales enemigos de cualquier gobierno progresista y de cualquier cambio estructural o democrático, y por supuesto de una revolución armada. Durante décadas, estas empresas de medios, a través de diversas campañas de medios, han difundido la idea de que las FARC-EP son criminales puros, ignorando por completo su carácter político.

De hecho, Mason (1996) resalta que una de las estrategias para interrumpir el proceso de conversión de los *no-élites* a *apoyadores de la guerrilla* es a través de “diseminación de información creíble pero falsa” entre la población civil. Los análisis de medios diseñados y creados por estas empresas de medios en Colombia han difundido información no verificada pero creíble que sugiere que los guerrilleros son terroristas, violadores, secuestradores y traficantes de drogas, reduciendo sus objetivos políticos a meros discursos y retórica<sup>45</sup>. Es posible, por supuesto, reconocer la violencia perpetrada por los rebeldes en diferentes formas durante estos años de guerra, pero lo cuestionable es que esta violencia es amplificada por los medios de comunicación, reduciendo a los rebeldes a actores puramente violentos. Una de las ideas principales que se han difundido sobre las FARC-EP es la “pérdida de sus ideales”, y muchos colombianos repiten como loros que “las FARC-EP han perdido sus ideales”. En realidad, algunos académicos como Paul Collier, también han depoliticizado la lucha de las FARC-EP, presentando no solo estos argumentos sobre la pérdida de sus objetivos políticos sino también afirmando que solo existen intereses económicos entre los rebeldes<sup>46</sup>.

Historias difundidas por algunos sacerdotes de la Iglesia Católica en el siglo pasado, que mostraban a los comunistas como personas que comían niños por el desayuno o el reciente episodio al inicio del siglo XXI en el que los medios de comunicación difundieron la imagen de una mujer aparentemente asesinada por la guerrilla mediante el uso de un collar explosivo<sup>47</sup> son solo dos ejemplos de este tipo de historias que refuerzan imaginarios erróneos sobre ciertos actores, especialmente los rebeldes. Ambas historias, por supuesto, eran falsas; pero se difundieron de tal manera que décadas después otros colombianos —sin importar cuán académicamente calificados sean—, continúan contando a otros la misma historia con los mismos y nuevos detalles que los hacen parecer hechos veraces. Como he declarado, la sociedad colombiana es una “cultura rasada” por la manipulación de los medios que ha llevado a un mayor temor a la insurgencia y a cualquier otro

<sup>45</sup> Para ver un ejemplo: Seeker Daily (2015)

<sup>46</sup> Un relato muy detallado de estos argumentos y otros interesantes contra-argumentos fue escrito por Gutiérrez (2004).

<sup>47</sup> Para ver cuán grande fue el impacto de este hecho en la generación de una mala imagen de las FARC-EP en medio de un proceso de paz en Caguán con una noticia falsa véase: Semana (2000).

progressive and transformative project than the repression of the castes in power and the impact of their economic policies” (Cortés, 2016).

### *The war propaganda against the FARC-EP*

The Belgian historian Anne Morelli (2010), rescuing an ancient document written by Lord Arthur Ponsonby (1991), describes and actualises the ten principles of the war propaganda which can be helpful in understanding the process of demonization of the FARC-EP by the elites in power in Colombia. These are the ten principles:

The first principle is called ***We do not want war***, and it is associated with the idea that in general both actors reject the responsibility as active actors in the war. It happens mainly with the actor who strongly controls the mass media, who poses itself as the legitimate power and who has the possibility to broadly spread its concerns and perceptions about the conflict. ***The other side is solely responsible for the war*** is the second principle, and has the purpose of avoiding the commitment of the regime, spreading an image of a defensive actor which is surviving the attacks of the enemy, in this case the rebels. The third principle is ***The enemy has the face of the devil***, and basically is to portrait the enemy or the enemies as devils or monsters, portraying them in such terms to the population, which in turn relate to their cultural or religious traditions and beliefs. So, the strategy is associating the enemy, either the leader of the group or the group itself, to specific terms with the purpose of generating fear among the population.

To understand how these three principles have been implemented in the Colombian conflict, we should look at the past decades. For the purpose of this reflection, I will focus on the eight-year period of the government of Alvaro Uribe Velez. This period represents not only the zenith of the huge mediatic campaign against the FARC-EP, but also the time in which the Colombian government was more questionable than ever in recent times. In that period, one can see how the FARC-EP was portrayed as uniquely responsible for the war, while the Colombian forces were shown in a defensive light. Actually, the most recent official number of the victims of the armed conflict ascend to the number of about 267.000 victims, and if we ask someone in the street, they will tell us with absolute certainty that these were murders committed by the FARC-EP. However, people do not recognize that, as the report *Basta ya* of the *Grupo de Memoria Histórica, GMH* (2013) tells us, the guerrilla has not been the main source of casualties, the paramilitaries have in fact been the biggest source of deaths among the civil population. The FARC-EP, after their inclusion in the list of terrorist groups by the USA in 1997 and by the European Union in 2002, were treated in all official speeches and mass media reports like a terrorist organization. Of course, as product of the armed conflict, many victims in different situations were produced by this actor, but the question is: why did Colombians not hear the complete history? In fact, it seems that despite the evident and deliberate cruelty of the paramilitaries, nowadays they have a better image among public opinion than the guerrilla.

The fourth principle ***We defend a noble cause, not our own interest***, is related with the aim of presenting the war as something necessary to pursue a higher goal for society and not to protect the interests of the elites in power. Recently I stated that:

Alvaro Uribe created an apocalyptic discourse to smartly manage the fear of Colombians and made it hegemonic, turning the fear and the natural hatred of the elites towards the FARC-EP and shaping the common sense of a big portion of the Colombian society. (Cortes, 2015)

Thus, discourses of freedom and democracy start fuelling the speeches of traditional political leaders, presenting their interests as the interests of the rest of society. In fact, opposite to this propaganda, “the guerrillas represent a material threat to Colombian administrations, the maximization of profits for foreign-based enterprises operating in the country, and domestic economic beneficiaries” (Brittain, 2010, p. 42), and because of that, this inconsistent image of the FARC-EP needed to be created.

Actually Scott (1985) has remarked as well that “a hegemonic ideology requires, by definition, that what are in fact particular interests be reformulated and presented as general interests” and suggests that an “effective instrument of consent” should meet two criteria, the first one being that any interest defended by the elites has to be presented as the interest of subordinated classes and second, that a portion of this interest has to be offered to the population to keep the social order (p. 337).

In Colombia the Uribe government launched a strong campaign for the defence of democracy, named *democratic security*, in which Uribe cleverly reduced his political project in easy terms to be understood by anyone —something that has traditionally been difficult for the left—, which includes the creation of the political paradigm of the three eggs: security from democracy, investor confidence and social cohesion from freedom (Cortes, 2015). These are beautiful words that cannot scare anyone but that entail a concept that would ensure that Colombians would hear as frequently as possible the word “security”. So, people started feeling that security was a superior value, even more important than freedom and social inclusion.

The principle number five, ***The enemy systematically commits cruelties, our mishaps are involuntary***; six, ***The enemy uses forbidden weapons***; and seven, ***We suffer small losses, those of the enemy are enormous*** have a bigger basis on the development of the war and basically the idea is to show that on one hand the enemy are committing excesses and violations of International humanitarian law while the regime has been respectful and does not violate human rights. On the other hand, it means to show that the enemy is losing the war, exaggerating the amount of rebels killed, captured and demobilised. One of the most evident strategies of Uribe’s government was to inflate the number of demobilised fighters to the point that Medina (2011) suggested that with this statistics the government had defeated the FARC-EP three times over.

The last three principles are addressed mainly at the level of the feelings and beliefs of the population and generating support for the cause by invading cultural and religious spaces. In order,

these principles are: eight, **Artists and intellectuals support our cause**; nine, **Our cause is sacred** and ten, **All those who doubt our propaganda, are traitors**. In Colombia there was a huge campaign by journalists who supported (and continue supporting) the political project of the right-wing government of Uribe. However those journalists were more opinion makers and official members of the propaganda against the rebels than rigorous, impartial professionals. Actually, those who attempted to confront the thesis propelled by the government were severely attacked and prosecuted. To cite a few cases, Carlos Lozano<sup>48</sup>, the director of the *Semanario Voz* of the legalised Communist Party and Holman Morris (*El Tiempo*, 2009) a freelance journalist, were described as supporters of terrorism because of their coverage of the armed conflict and their critical opinions. While others, like the sociologists Miguel Angel Beltran and Lilianny Obando, were imprisoned for their role as historian and human rights defender respectively, and the politician and left-wing parliamentarian Piedad Cordoba, was dismissed from her seat in parliament. So, during that time, any dissent of the theses of Uribe's government was considered as treason. So, taking into account this continuous situation of prosecutions against social leaders and intellectuals, many academics and artists preferred to hide their political opinions. Alvaro Uribe was also very smart in connecting his political project with some members of the Catholic Church, but mainly with Christian congregations. It was very common to see Uribe in Christian churches speaking to thousands of their followers explaining his "three eggs", and receiving the blessings of evangelic pastors.

### *Advertising creatives constructing devils*

In recent years, the propaganda against the rebels has improved quantitatively and qualitatively thanks to the support of new advertising strategists who have made strong efforts to shape the perception of the Colombian audience towards the rebels. Jose Miguel Sokoloff is a good example of this kind of contemporary *propaganda developers*, who has designed—in his own words—"successful" campaigns against the FARC-EP. Described as an "advertising creative", he has worked with the Colombian ministry of defence, helping the government demobilise guerrilla members. According to the Mullen Lowe Group Creative Council webpage, his work "has led to the demobilization of over 17,000 guerrillas to date"<sup>49</sup>; a statistic that has been strongly criticised by Medina (2011)<sup>50</sup>. Resorting to dubious arguments but with an emotive speech, and using the *story telling* method in TED (Sokoloff, 2014), Sokoloff states his opinions about the rebels and tells his audience in a perfect English—most of the times only possible for those from the upper classes, who have had the possibility to study abroad—, these typical ideas about the FARC-EP. A considerably modified and distorted history of the Colombian conflict was presented by Sokoloff in his speech. He suggests, among other inaccurate facts, that the FARC-EP have been responsible for

<sup>48</sup> La Tercera (2008).

<sup>49</sup> <http://mullenlowegroup.com/team/jose-miguel-sokoloff/>

<sup>50</sup> Carlos Medina criticises these statistics spread by the Colombian government in which the total number of guerrilla fighters seems to be more than three times the real size of the rebel group.



more than 220.000 victims, and suggests that the rebels are “as much prisoners of their organization as they ones they hold hostage”. The first statement could be interpreted as the lack of detailed reports about the Colombian conflict in his library which, as I wrote before, shows that most of the victims of the conflict were produced by the Colombian state and paramilitaries and not by the guerrillas. And secondly, it is also evident that he did not dig deeply into the large existing literature that demonstrates the fallacy of the forced recruitment strategy of the FARC-EP. It is clear that a real understanding of the FARC-EP is impossible from a comfortable seat in an urban office. “Falling in love is strictly forbidden in the guerrilla” is another message spread by this defence minister contractor which could be very powerful to convince naive audiences, but hardly credible for a guerrilla group where forty percent of the combatants are women, and thus with a chance of such relationships that is higher than in regular forces. It is difficult to imagine a member of the secretariat keeping watch over combatants at night to prevent any kind of expression of love! All of these ideas are designed down to the last detail and convey this kind of misinformation that recreates a distorted image of the conflict’s actors. “Advertising is still one of the most powerful tools of change that we have available” asserts Sokoloff at the end of the video, and I agree, that is why we cannot let advertising creatives tell our Colombian history!

To give an additional example, Claudia Gordillo and Bruno Federico (2014), with the documentary “Apuntando al corazón” (“Aiming at the heart”), illustrate how the manipulation of the Colombian society by the Colombian elites has been important in creating an aversion towards the guerrillas while increasing support for the official army. Advertising campaigns developed by the army and presented in the documentary were addressed to “clean-up” the battered image of this institution while destroying the image of the FARC-EP. Using the well-known “peripheral route” (Perloff, 2003, p. 129), the advertising creatives designed several products of propaganda to *reach the heart* of the audience. One of these, a short play designed to be used by the soldiers in the roads in order to create a trusty atmosphere between civilians and soldiers. The idea was that the soldiers guarding the highways should show their right hands with the thumb above (a very common Colombian gesture to say everything is good, “todo bien”) with the purpose of changing the perception of civilians towards the soldiers and spreading the idea that the roads are safe thanks to the presence of the army. It is clear in this example the intention to manipulate the audience, since the simple gesture does not show the complexity of the conflict and appeals more to human emotions than to rationality. This campaign was directed to take advantage of the fear of the urban population driving on the roads by showing another face of the soldiers, maybe a different face than has been seen by rural inhabitants.

These examples show as well the high government expenditure on the fight against the rebels in terms of propaganda, not only addressed to civilians to reduce their support to the FARC-EP but also to the fighters to produce their demobilisation from the rebel ranks.

Renán Vega Cantor in Leongómez, E. P. and others (2015), as a member of the historical Commission, has produced a very detailed document about the USA involvement on the armed

conflict<sup>51</sup>. This historian pays special attention to the anti-communist propaganda, which reflects the media strategy to create fear of the communist project, stereotyping the communist rebels as “villainous, barbarians, savages and enemies of God, of the homeland and of the law”. This has created “a counter insurgent hate that justifies the violence practiced against these enemies not only by the state but also by individuals” (p. 5). Gutierrez (2003) quoted by Brittain (2010) also recognises the role of the USA in the counter insurgency campaign:

An intense disinformation campaign organized by the U.S. government is being propagated by all the corporate media, (...) whenever there is an incident, they immediately blame the rebels. They become the judge and jury with a single mouse click, long before any evidence has been gathered. (p. 172)

Opinion polls have also been spread with the purpose of manipulating public opinion and to create prejudices about the FARC-EP rebels. If you carry out an opinion poll only calling people in the cities whose interaction with the victims and with the armed conflict is uniquely through newspapers and TV reports, you will not have accurate responses. In a recent opinion poll carried out by the newspaper *El Tiempo*<sup>52</sup> the following question was asked: “Do you have a favourable or unfavourable opinion about the FARC?” About 11% of the population have a favourable opinion, which means that about 3 million of Colombian adults would have a favourable opinion towards the rebels. But the report also highlights the fact that during the time of Alvaro Uribe’s government no more than 4% of the respondents had a favourable opinion of the rebels. What would you do, dear reader, if you lived in a country with a “terrorist” group which has been attacked furiously by the state, not only an attack against those with weapons on their backs but also against those who sympathise somehow with the rebels, and you had to answer this question over phone: “Do you like the FARC?”? Of course, this kind of questions would not have accurate answers! On one hand because the poll was addressed only towards those who live in the main cities and have phones and no one in the countryside was asked, and on the other hand knowing the precedents and the fear produced by the campaign against the FARC-EP, hardly anyone who sympathises with the rebels would respond with a favourable opinion towards them.

The report of the newspaper also recognizes that there is an increase of the favourable opinion towards the guerrilla, which can be understood as consequence of the peace talks developed in Cuba. At the beginning, two years ago, when this research started in my mind, lots of Colombians were against the peace talks with the guerrilla FARC-EP, and a strong campaign led by right-wing ex-president Alvaro Uribe was launched, incorporating the frame idea that a “castro-

<sup>51</sup> The report about the USA’s meddling in the Colombian conflict and their anti-Communist propaganda can be seen in the chapter authored by historian Renan Vega Cantor in the report of the Conflict Historical Commission entitled: *La dimensión internacional del conflicto social y armado en Colombia, injerencia de los estados unidos, contrainsurgencia y terrorismo de Estado*. (The international dimension of the social and armed conflict. USA’s meddling, counter insurgency and State’s terrorism). (Leongómez, E. P. and others, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Herrera, Camilo (2016).

chavista”<sup>53</sup> project of socialism would go take over the Colombian government. And even more ridiculously, it labelled the current president Juan Manuel Santos, one of the members of the traditional Colombian wealthy castes and a former defence minister under Uribe, as a communist leader and conspirator belonging to the FARC-EP. These basic but unreliable statements show that an anti-Communist propaganda was starting again. Surprisingly, Uribe has somehow been successful and many Colombians in social media really believe that the well-known neoliberal president Santos is a communist leader of the rebel ranks.

### *The problem of the FARC-EP's isolation*

In concluding this chapter we should also recognise the FARC-EP's own weakness. It is clear that the FARC-EP has not been successful in their communicational strategy, in part due to the isolation produced by war conditions, and in part due to the failures of their own conception of propaganda.

Manuel Marulanda, the founder of the FARC-EP, certainly recognises this failure in his own words:

But I believe that we have had an enemy, the worst of all of our enemies. Do you know what it has been? I do not speak about the army, or about the pajaros<sup>54</sup>, I do not speak about the liberals. I speak about the isolation of this struggle that is worse than bearing hunger for one complete week. (Salgari, 2013, p. 81)

And Brittain (2010) quoting Rochlin (2003) expresses the lack of acceptability of the FARC-EP in the cities:

...the most profound debility of the FARC has been the group's failure to cultivate meaningful popular support outside its enclaves in the countryside. The rebels have not attracted a measurable following in cities, where the vast majority of Colombians reside (p. 185).

However, there has been a dramatic change in the way they are communicating their ideas in the framework of the peace talks, thanks to the possibility of putting more professional cadres developing their communicational struggle. Now this traditional isolation seems to be smaller than in the past, and new challenges regarding political communications are being embraced by the rebels.

<sup>53</sup> This is to mention the Cuban and the Venezuelan governments of Castro and Chavez respectively, both socialist projects.

<sup>54</sup> In the time of the early violence the term *pajaros* was used to designate the paramilitaries belonging to the conservative party.

### 2.2.2 The FARC-EP's local hegemony

Currently, after almost 4 years of peace talks and with a signed agreement, the end of the armed conflict (at least between the biggest guerrilla group and the State) is in sight and the FARC-EP would become one of the political parties in Colombia in the coming months. They would have to be presented by those traditional media as the new emergent political party with all the guarantees, and the legal army –paradoxically- will have to protect them against the radical rightist armies, frequently called paramilitary groups or emergent criminal gangs.

Nevertheless, a big percentage of the Colombian civil society is still not prepared to accept this new reality, especially those who live in the cities. We have heard discourses of hatred against the guerrilla for many years, and so much people have learned to hate the guerrilla, although most Colombians have never been direct or indirect victims of this armed group. Indeed, the Report *Basta ya* of the *Grupo de Memoria Histórica, GMH* (2013), shows that the guerrillas' victims do not exceed the 17% of the total amount of targeted assassinations between 1981 and 2012, the paramilitary groups being the biggest murderer of the civilians. Another interesting piece of information is that only the 2.3% of the forced disappearances have been committed by the guerrillas, with 83.9% committed by the official army and paramilitary bands (p. 36). An interesting aspect to consider as well is that the majority of the victims as a result of the armed confrontation have been in the countryside or in rural villages, where a minority of the population in Colombia lives. So, as many people say, the armed conflict has not been felt in the cities.

#### *Local hegemony as a tactic*

In struggling against this social reality which rejects their political project, the FARC-EP have done their patient political work in those areas under their control with the purpose of confronting — within their possibilities—, the elites' hegemony. To do that, the rebels have responded with modest but effective ways of achieving *local hegemony* among rural communities in which the *general hegemony* or the *elites' hegemony* seems to be ineffective. This struggle for the hegemony has taken place throughout the country with the purpose not only of winning the war against the guerrillas, removing any social support to the rebels, but also to create a “common sense” against any other leftist or progressive alternative. As Scott (1977) has remarked when speaking about the need to create hegemony, “this new hegemony is not a consequence of revolution, but rather a precondition of an authentic revolution” (p. 273).

However, despite the almost successful elites' ideological strategy against the guerrillas in the cities, Brittain (2010) has noted: “The simple continuity of the guerrilla movement demonstrates that substantial solidarity has existed at a local level” (p. 30). But, how could the rebels have gained this solidarity? This process of building local hegemony has not been as simple as it seems. This struggle for hegemony has lasted decades in which several discourses —from the side of the elites— regarding communism, land struggle, social justice and other progressive issues were depicted in

such a way that most of the Colombian society started being afraid of any positive structural change, as described before. And from the side of the rebels and other left-wing movements, the counter hegemonic struggle has been directed towards gaining local support through social intervention and political education.

One can suggest that this elites' hegemony has been very successful in the cities but not so much in some rural areas. Population in urban areas have been immersed in a specific ideology for many years, all the avenues of the system have been spreading specific values, narratives, definitions and in general cultural inputs kept for a long period of time, which includes of course, how people understand the armed conflict and its actors. In contrast, population in the country side have been shielded from this influence, on one hand thanks to the isolation due to the distance from the cities, and on the other thanks to the dynamic of the conflict. Scott (1977) recognizes this specific characteristic of the peasantry when he asserts:

The relative isolation of the peasantry from the cultural and institutional life of the state and its ruling elites has meant that, as a class, it has been more immune than has the proletariat to the social and moral hegemony of the dominant classes (p. 270).

And he adds: "if we compare the urban proletariat to the peasantry in this respect, it is reasonably clear that such institutions [from the elites]<sup>55</sup> are generally much less effectively present among the peasantry that in urban areas" (p. 273). But Nevertheless, it is crucial to clarify that the terrain in which rural communities are based is fundamental to facilitate the influence of communitarian values which are promoted by the rebels. This is considered by Scott (1977) when he speaks about the capacity for coordinated actions: "A host of informal connections, including local markets, kinship ties, communal rights, religious sects, and pilgrimages, and patterns of petty trading and labour migration have typically provided the social grid for mutual action" (p. 270)

However, the panorama for Colombian rural communities that could be more prone to influence from rebel hegemony is also contested by other peasant cultures. Indeed, different imaginaries are presented in rural communities depending on several factors, like the distance to urban centres and the impact of the armed conflict, among other circumstances. For instance, Molano (2006) used to speak about the "cultura caballista" (horsing culture)<sup>56</sup> to refer to those places where a livestock culture very close to the paramilitary project is dominant. This culture is very common in some rural areas and rural villages in the north of Colombia and very different from those areas with a strong peasant culture, and from the areas under guerrilla control. Hence, there is not such a homogeneous arena in rural communities that received, with open arms and open

<sup>55</sup> Commentary in brackets is mine.

<sup>56</sup> Alfredo Molano (2006) uses this term "caballista" (horses culture) which is linked to expensive horse-owning, an expensive luxury very popular among big landlords, gangsters and some politicians.

hearts, the ideological influence of the communist guerrilla, which implies that in some cases, a large and dedicated work is needed to reach the heart of those communities.

The superstructure, in Marxist terms, has been guaranteeing the population support to the elites' model. But what happens in those territories, with an area as large as the Netherlands, in which the presence of the Colombian state is not as significant? Or where there is no a big influence from the elites' hegemony? Or where the only state's presence is through bombs and repression from the army? Or finally, where the functions of the state are fulfilled by a front of the FARC-EP or other armed group? Is there, perhaps, another ideology, another kind of education, music, or religion there?

In fact, there is another cultural and political hegemony that creates other imaginaries, beliefs and common sense among the peasant population. Is it possible to say, in Gramsci's terms, that the FARC-EP might have developed a local hegemony in those areas? To answer these questions, we will review some of the statements shown before about the Gramscian approach.

Brittain (2010) has acknowledged that "the FARC-EP has displayed characteristics of Gramsci's war of position/war of manoeuvre to create emancipatory conditions at a localized level" and recognises that "the insurgency has revolutionized one-time mechanisms of dominant class hegemony" (p. 154). In his point of view the FARC-EP is immersed in a war of position "where social, cultural, and political shifts occur, creating the initial conditions for counter-hegemony" (p. 155). He also points out that this war of positions has permitted a "system of dual power in several regions of the country offering an alternative to conventional state" (Petras, 2003, p. 25 in Brittain, 2010, p. 157)

However, Brittain (2010) focuses his approach in the counter-hegemonic struggle in terms of a war of position: "the FARC-EP attempts to create a war of position not by taking centralized power but through an organized ongoing consolidation of newly revolutionized socio-geographical environments across rural Colombia" (p. 159). Meanwhile, while acknowledging this approach, I prefer to focus more in the process of achieving local hegemony, or, paraphrasing the guerrilla fighters, *the process of reaching the biggest amount of hearts*.

### *Counter-hegemonic struggle*

The act/art of reaching the heart could be understood as a counter-hegemonic struggle in which the rebels want to somehow change the common sense of the population under their control, using several strategies (like those explored in this work under the name of "interventions") in such a way that these communities start believing more in the values (customs, stories, way of thinking, thoughts, ideology, political behaviour, ethos, symbols, etc) of the rebels than in those promoted by the elites (regime). Mampilly (2011) speaks about them like the "deployment of discursive practices and symbolic actions drawn from the insurgent political culture" (p. 57)

Someone could say that this *creation of common sense* could be considered as an indoctrination work or as a manipulation; but, is this not exactly what the elites do? Indoctrinating

or not, the point is that the possibility of winning a political struggle depends on how successful the hegemonic (or counter-hegemonic) struggle of the winner has been. And let us be clear, the FARC-EP have been quite successful in this counter-hegemonic struggle in the countryside.

Digging deeply into the five Gramscian elements described in chapter 1.2 one could make the following statements:

Exploring the **first** element, the FARC-EP have understood that they cannot wait for the success of the revolution to put substantial effort to create a new economic base, while creating several ideological spaces that manage to generate a local superstructure. So the creation of *common sense* locally should be seen as part of their struggle. A bidirectional causal relationship between base and superstructure exists at the local level in which changing some economic structures (by developing productive projects or cooperatives, among other interventions) together with a strong cultural, ideological and political work are connected with the purpose of creating alternative local powers.

Speaking about the **second** element, at local level, —in some cases— as it is specified further on, there exists a contested answer by civil society, opposing their resistance to the political society. If we consider the FARC-EP as a political revolutionary movement and not a mere guerrilla group, with all the members carrying a rifle on their backs (as it is described before), one can suggest that the FARC-EP represent and are part of this civil society which has developed several ways to confront the state, the armed struggle being only one of many possible dimensions of this political struggle. Such a struggle could be different depending on the level and depth of the political work developed by the rebels. In a first case like the *Fiscalía 21* (described in the chapter 3), the FARC-EP represents the state's institutions (political society) and at the same time are part of the civil society, putting the two elements of the superstructure coexisting together without a strong contradiction. In other places a second scenario could be found, and the permanence of the state's institutions coexists with the coupling civil society FARC-EP, who develop a counter-hegemonic struggle at local level. And finally, a third case could be the FARC-EP representing the political society coexisting with an opposed response from a civil society that does not agree with the rebels' policies and which does not share the same dreams.

Certainly, the **third** element, which defines the possibility of the existence of a contradiction between the production model and the superstructure can be identified locally in rural areas. They are immersed in the market society, rural communities want to be successful in their productive projects supported by the FARC-EP movement, but they cannot break the production relations and they are immersed in the market dynamics of capitalism. What they can offer to the communities, is an alternative model within the market society, that must be interpreted as a pragmatic and realistic approach, with the purpose of improving somehow the living conditions of the rural communities, while dedicating strong efforts in the field of ideology.

The **fourth** element is clearly understood and practiced by the rebels, since a counter-hegemonic struggle has been done at local level, although the form of production remains almost untouchable at the national level.

The last one, the **fifth** element, regarding the construction of a historical block (united front) has not been possible until now. However, there have been moments in which the rebels smartly have put their political agenda as a common goal for several sectors in the Colombian society, the current peace conversation being one of this moments. Actually, the FARC-EP for many years have been stressing the need for a political solution to the armed and social conflict, trying to reach the majority of the social sectors with the purpose of ending of the conflict.

## 2.3 The FARC-EP: governing with the peasants

### *A personal story*

Now I am in front of my computer trying to write something about how the FARC-EP have governed in rural areas. I am completely tired of reading and reading papers, trying to search what kind of approach I can use to explain the FARC-EP approach in rural areas. I am trying to formulate arguments in an academic way; I am honestly exhausted of focusing on how to write references following the rules of the APA standard while my mind is trying to organize some ideas. For sure, I will focus on that later on. For now, I want to tell my personal experience, when I was working as mechanical engineer supporting peasant organizations in Colombia. That could be useful to see the level of commitment of the FARC-EP in the development of productive projects as part of their tasks of rebel governance.

I was in a far-east region of Colombia in the Meta. The village is a *caserío*<sup>57</sup> near the Duda river whose name cannot be mentioned for security reasons. When I arrived there, a man with a gun in his waist driving a small motorcycle approached me to tell me that he was waiting for me. I did not know that someone with a gun would be waiting for me, he was a miliciano. Milicianos are a kind of police force in villages under guerrilla control. They perform some logistic tasks for the guerrilla but they also fulfil functions of surveillance of what is happening in the *caserío* and they make reports to their superiors. They are also connected to the leaders of the JAC (*Junta de Acción Comunal*) and, one supposes, that the milicianos manage some kind of permanent presence in those villages when possible. He was a small guy, 1.50 meters, a bit fat, clearly indigenous. He seemed to be proud of himself, but also perhaps proud of his gun on his waist.

When I was student at the National University of Colombia, we created several groups of critical students to work, from our respective careers, to support somehow the social processes of left-wing movements in Colombia. At that time, I had just finished mechanical engineering studies and I was very connected with students of agricultural engineering, in fact I had a relationship with a woman who was student in that department; that is why I fell in love with agricultural issues. Later on, with a group of professionals recently graduated from different areas, we started visiting a rural region to support some specific peasant organization, to make a difference and do something useful

<sup>57</sup> Term to refer to a very small village with a few houses.



for the peasant population. We were sure that the peasantry and food production were important issues, we already knew that peasantry in Colombia was a strong political actor, these are the kind of youthful dreams for social justice that I stubbornly continue to hold.

Our first attempt in rural areas was in the region of Fomeque, two hours away from Bogota. It was a rural area formerly under guerrilla control but it seemed that in that region they were not too successful. Actually, I am not sure if this region was only a corridor for the rebels. In truth, nowadays most of the people in this area support right-wing ex-president Alvaro Uribe, because, as they say, he was the person who “liberated” this region of the guerrilla’s terrorism. Our first attempt was a completely disaster. First, because we could not continue going there, our main obstacle was to find economic resources to go back there. Activism without funding is too difficult. “Without funding there is no party, without party there is no revolution” (Lenin, many years ago). Second, and this is more of a sociological reflection which I do not have more evidence to confirm, so I am only speculating, this community had a lack of communitarian work-ethic. In fact, the kind of peasant behaviour and peasant values that some scholars used to speak about were not there. Competition, envy and pettiness were some of the findings I discovered in few days. One peasant told us that trying to organize this community would be difficult because most of the peasants are dependent of what the others had, not to support them, but to compete with them. If one sowed a crop of beans, another one would do the same and then, when the harvest came, the prices decreased and no one got a good profit. Others, like my girlfriend's father, were not so proud of being descendant of peasant family. He once told me that when he was child one of the most horrible of his experiences was when his schoolmates were laughing because he was a peasant child who did not have shoes and needed to walk barefoot to the school. I think it was (is) a very conservative community and without enough communal values.

After additional attempts, some successful, others not so much, I ended up working with a peasant organization in the east of Colombia. I was there with this miliciano I mentioned before. It was my first contact with a guerrilla member in the countryside. I had had other contacts with guerrilleros at the University, in fact some of my friends who were members of the student movement finally decided to become members of the guerrilla. Some of them have died and others are still members or commanders of the guerrilla.

I was trying to support the community by creating a productive project which could be helpful to somehow improve their living conditions. As an engineer I was working with agricultural machines and I had a bit of experience with that. When I arrived at the meeting, I discovered a guerrilla fighter with his rifle on his back, speaking to the audience about a *trapiche*<sup>58</sup> which would be partially funded by the guerrilla. Other members of the community and the leaders of the JAC were there as well. The guerrilla fighter suggested to this peasant organization that the guerrilla would contribute about 20 million pesos and the community would have to raise the remaining

<sup>58</sup> *Trapiche* is a traditional mill used to produce *panela*, a traditional sweet product made out of sugar cane juice, very popular among Colombians.

funds, about 100 million of pesos in total<sup>59</sup>. I found this moment fascinating, as I had never imagined that such a situation could be real. Actually, I have to confess that I might have been a little bit naive about rural realities, not as much as this urban audience that witness reality from a crystal bubble in a middle-class home, but still I was too young to understand how to behave in that moment. I was much too excited chatting with the fighters. So, when I was arrested by the police in my house few months later, I could not comprehend that being at that place would be seen as argument to accuse me of being a member of the FARC-EP, thanks to a betrayer of the guerrilla who was in the meeting and testified against me.

Regardless of my bad experience of three years of prison, partially as consequence of this visit, it was very enriching for me since it allowed me to witness a small example of the real interaction of the FARC-EP with peasants, and I could correct my previous prejudices about this rebel group. Just like it was identified in hundreds of pages of literature about rebel governance, I experienced in person the act of being rebel rulers when seeing these people managing this village.

### *Replacing the state*

Thus, one can say that some functions (and in some cases, all the functions) of the state have been carried out by the guerrilla. Brittain speaks about that in these words:

...the FARC-EP seem to have taken “on the role of local government,” enabling the insurgency to “have (a) major say in who is elected and how municipal funds are spent. In such zones, the guerrillas are de facto the law, adjudicating disputes and punishing thieves, while taxing most productive activities, including the highly profitable coca crop.” (LeGrand, 2003, p. 178 in Brittain, 2010, p. 211)

For the rebels, as Walter Mendoza justifies, the guerrilla has to become the state<sup>60</sup> in those areas where the state itself does not exist:

Colombia has extremely abandoned regions, where the state is a simple decorative object because it really does not appear. Then this state’s vacuum has been filled by the revolutionary organizations, I mean by the FARC and by the ELN as well. They [the ELN] also make their own projects in peasant communities. In that case, we are doing government, we are playing the role of the state. Because the state is this institution that gives the people what they need.

<sup>59</sup> Approximately 28.000 Euros. Exchange rate used: 1 Euro=3500 COP.

<sup>60</sup> He means to be the government.

His words represent what the state means for the rebels. Somehow there is a common idea among the rebels that the state should provide for the needs of the population. Isabella San Roque, in her own words, highlights the role played by the rebels in these stateless regions:

“In general, in all the fronts of the FARC, there is always a close relation with communities. Logically the peasant grassroots are our grassroots<sup>61</sup>. That is not to say that in the cities we do not have followers or people who are part of our struggle. In those regions where the state is not present, or is present only through military actions, or public force, or through repression, or where there is no institutional presence, we are very strong. We have filled the role of the state, of “new power”, and the population recognizes this.”

Victoria Sandino, based on her own experience as guerrilla commander, goes further by saying that they are the authority in those regions:

“...actually, we are the authority that people recognize. People feel that they can rely on it to resolve their conflicts. Where the guerrilla is present, people live in community, with more cohesiveness, because there is a respect for this authority and because if there are problems, as an authority, we can help the community resolve them.”

### *Guerrilla and paramilitaries are not the same*

One Colombian colleague at Wageningen University debated my arguments about the FARC-EP interventions in rural areas just as I came back from Cuba and I was telling him the preliminary findings of this research. He argued that paramilitary groups developed similar things in the rural areas under their control, they built schools and infrastructure in rural villages and so he asked me: what is the difference between the guerrilla and the paramilitaries? Definitely, a structured and ideological process of rebel governance has been developed by the rebels that contrast with that one developed by paramilitaries in some rural areas. Some of the differences between guerrillas and paramilitaries, explored in depth by Gutierrez (2008), demonstrate that they are not the same and cannot be seen from the same lens.

It is common to find communities in Colombia that have lived under control of different illegal groups, which have practiced different justice and governance systems in different times. These civilians used to speak about the differences among styles of governance. For instance, among regions controlled by paramilitary groups and others controlled by the rebels, Gomez (2014) recounts some stories regarding this perception; two testimonies of civilians could be useful to understand these different perceptions. The first one is Marcos who spoke about the FARC-EP actions in his region:

<sup>61</sup> The original word used by her is “bases” which is commonly used like “bases populares”. It is to designate people from the lower strata society.

“Once the FARC-EP arrived here we considered their actions good for us because they put an end to delinquency (...) people started to like them, those who remained from the M-19 and the EPL and who were not bad opted to join the FARC ranks (...) they protected us from both delinquencies: the one that was exerted by the police and the one exerted by common delinquents. The police could not come back to extort us (p. 7).”

The second testimony is by Esperanza, a woman who has lived in the same region as Marcos but in a different moment, under the paramilitary control:

“The first time they [the AUC] arrived here we felt disconcerted because we were on night watch and then at midnight, you were informed that another person, another friend, was killed. We were disoriented, not knowing where to turn, but at the same time we tried to defend your food and hold onto life as much as possible. Also, some women were sexually abused by paramilitaries; it seems that they killed their husbands to take them and, later, abandoned them (p. 16).”

By the same token, Brittain (2010) describes the experience of a woman who compares both behaviours in different regions:

“At FARC checkpoints, I was welcomed and never threatened. In rebel territory, the FARC smile and greet you warmly. In return, average Colombian people openly welcome the FARC fighters. The difference from one area to another is evident beyond roadside checkpoints. Colombians – particularly organizers – assume they are watched and followed by repressive paramilitary forces all the time. They are very cautious about whom they will talk to and what they will say publicly. In a coastal area where paramilitaries have a lot of control, no one would speak above a whisper to me about the paramilitaries or the government because the police openly attended all their meetings. Police–government–paramilitary collaboration is understood as a fact. By contrast, in FARC territory, people speak freely, without fear of reprisal. Talking politics with campesinos and with FARC soldiers, I experienced freedom of speech at a level I don’t even feel in my own country. In addition, the campesinos reported that they felt safer in rebel-held territory. Members of one village told me that the government stopped committing a massacre when a campesino ran up the mountain because they knew that the FARC would be there momentarily to protect the villagers” (p. 32)

One of the issues that has to be handled by the rebels on a daily basis is conflict resolution, which as stated before, is an important capability for an effective rebel governance system. Conflict resolution also entails some advantages for the guerrilla; first of all, conflict is something that is always present in any community or any group of people, which is more exacerbated in conditions where there is a general lack of resources. Such a society is typical in Colombian rural areas. Conflicts cannot be avoided but they can be controlled and its consequences minimized. Consequently, to have a place almost free of conflict, implementing an effective dispute resolution is a smart strategy in areas controlled by illegal groups. This peaceful environment would allow the guerrilla to operate in such areas without any inconvenient or obstacle. Second, resolving conflicts among people allows for better knowing the inhabitants of the region. Being involved in the daily life implies also being involved in the daily conflicts which is an important way to gain confidence and authority. Being involved in conflict resolution implies a *de facto* recognition as an alternative state. And third, the strategy or the method used to resolve conflicts can be seen as a good demonstration to show the population what the management of justice would be like in a future society governed by the rebels. Otherwise, avoiding conflict resolution can be a problem since the social contract could be in danger and then a condition of ungoverned zone would emerge, leaving the community to suffer the consequences.

However, this process of solving conflicts is not a mere need of the rebels as one of the dimensions of rebel governance. As a peasant characteristic, Scott (1977) identified the peasant involvement in conflict resolution as an expression of “moral localism”: “There is often strong pressure to settle disputes internally and thus avoid the intervention of outsiders” (p. 279), so this peasant participation seemingly cannot be considered as a foreign practice developed and inspired by the rebels. Instead, it can be considered as an alternative and natural approach to face social disputes.

Gomez (2014), in his research about the FARC-EP’s influence in the region of Putumayo, also concludes that the rebels have effectively been an alternative state in some rural areas in which the administration of justice is also part of the tasks of the guerrilla: “The welcoming of the FARC-EP was based on the guarantee of no robberies, the administration of justice, the settling of disagreements and the imposition of social order” (p. 7).

However, as I could tell from the testimony of the interviewees, it seems that this process, or the approach to conflict-solving can be different depending on the FARC-EP’s member who is working as a mediator and depending also on what kind of social organization exists in the region. Different communities can have different approaches or communitarian arrangements to solve conflicts. This means that there is no a manual or a *standard protocol* written by the rebels to handle these issues. Actually, taking into account that conflict resolution is part of the governance strategies of the rebels, Mampilly (2011) has confirmed that governance is by definition an “interactive process” (p. 15). However, as far as I could tell, this interactive process has been very successful, and I would say that this *natural flexibility* has been also useful to define - through the practice and

experience of their members - which approach could be more useful depending on the areas and the culture where are immersed.

Brittain refers to an additional practice developed by the rebels as part of their policing activities, which can be considered as a daily activity in some regions:

In certain areas under its control, codes of conduct or Rules of Coexistence (Reglas de Convivencia) have been established, which stipulate laws and sanctions regarding issues such as carrying arms, fishing, hunting, working hours, liquor consumption, prostitution, interfamily violence, drug abuse, and cutting trees” (Richani, 2002, p. 89 in Brittain, 2010, p. 211)

Consequently, reflects on the participation of the community in the creation of these rules: “People living in these areas, however, told me the regulations are highly community-based and have proved useful in protecting sectors of the environment and population” (p. 211) and concludes: “While facilitated by the guerrillas, they are regularly agreed, discussed, and debated by and through the community” (p. 212). Furthermore, based on the interviews, we can settle that the development of Rules of Coexistence is a co-creation process between the peasant organization (community?) and the FARC-EP.

Later on, this work dedicates a specific chapter to explore in depth the FARC-EP’s experiences on this issue.

### *Doing what the state does not do*

Several social interventions of the FARC-EP in terms of pragmatic developments in rural communities are presented in the current study. Britain (2010) refers to these interventions as “*social-based welfare programs*” (p. 157), while Lichbach (1994) explores this pragmatism using the term *material selective incentives* (p. 393). With the same pragmatic understanding, Leites and Wolf (1970) draw their conclusions about the “rebellion viewpoint and characteristics”. For them, the general task in order to gain the population’s support is “to join the demands for its services, based on existing frictions and discontent” (p. 152). Following this hypothesis, the examples in the upcoming chapters show that effectively one of the main tasks of the FARC-EP rebels has been providing services that, for one reason or another, are not provided or lack quality when they are provided. Leites and Wolf also suggest that a kind of prosecution against government officials can be done by the rebels in order to either convince the population that the regime is bad or corrupt, since it does not provide good services (in the case of a corrupt official for example), or to hide (target) good officials and avoid any improvement in the living conditions of the population by the regime, which could be seen as a good work or policies developed by the regime. In the stories found in this work there are no concrete reflections about that, but it can be suggested that there no generalized tactic of targeting regime officials since in much of the regions under their control there are not officials present.

Actually, most of the complaints of the FARC-EP rebels are about the lack of social services and the stateless condition of these regions. As Brittain, J. (2011) has pointed out: "A state (or welfare state) has never existed in much of the countryside, as expressed through the form of social support or legitimate authority" (p. 127)

It is very important as well to point out that some organic intellectuals of the *status-quo*, who have defended labelling the rebels as terrorists, have no choice but to recognise the important and positive role of the FARC-EP in rural communities. Thomas Cook is a good example, quoting other scholar in the journal of strategy security to recognise this:

When the FARC moved into a new community, they first raised coca prices above the level set by narco-traffickers and provided protection from narco-trafficking thugs. Once the FARC had infiltrated a new territory, they adopted state-like functions and provided public services to previously ungoverned populations. Although the FARC guerrillas moved into a new area with military force, they also took responsibility for collecting taxes, settling disputes, providing health and educational services, and improving infrastructure, such as roads and landing strips. The provision of services and outreach to the local community fit with the institutional wealth motto of the FARC. The FARC provided pseudo-state functions, including the "Reglas de Convivencia", which regulate such issues as carrying arms, fishing, hunting, working hours, liquor consumption, prostitution, interfamily violence, drug abuse, and cutting trees (Richani, 2002, p. 89 in Cook, 2011, p. 23).

To have an idea of how important the FARC-EP's interventions are for rural populations, Brittain (2010) transcribes a detailed summary of some of the services provided by the rebels, which was told to him by a peasant woman he interviewed. I show some parts of this interview divided in topics:

Security provision:

Well, it is important to say that without the guerrillas we would not have a community at all. Over the past few years the state has increasingly been using paramilitaries to threaten rural people, especially here. Doing this not only allows for foreign multinationals to take our land and oil resources but it enables the paramilitary and large landowners to consolidate further landholdings by claiming they are being unutilized or are being left fallow. It has been the guerrillas that have enabled many of us to stay on our land by keeping the paras away from us, or when they might not be able to, they inform us about where the paras are so that we can prepare to leave for few days or hide. (...) These are just the defensive measures that the guerrillas have been able to do for us.

(...) To many of us, the FARC are the government, they provide us with protection from violence, they give our communities roads and means of trading our products with other

communities. They also ensure that we are paid fairly for our goods and that the merchants and local employers respect us and our family. (...) Unlike what the papers and television says, it was not the FARC that caused us problems, but it is certainly the FARC who protects us as best they can from them... When you have a state that restricts the amount of gasoline each home is allowed to have [this is in response to the Uribe administration's claim that all persons in rural Putumayo use gasoline to produce coca paste] you quickly understand what their true purpose is. It is the FARC that not only support us to provide a living for our families but they protect us in the process.

#### Social and public services:

The guerrillas have also established schools to teach our children and any adults who want to learn about reading, writing, math, history, etc. You would be surprised, but math can come in very handy for many of us because of the rates of illiteracy and the lack of education in the countryside. The state has negated any forms of education in the countryside for decades and it is only through the FARC's schools that someone in the rural areas can have a chance of learning. The guerrillas also take care of our community's health needs by bringing in and giving medical supplies to us while sometimes offering doctors, nurses, and even dentists to look over our children and families and providing free care and services. However, there are many other ways the guerrilla support the people here. The FARC provide funding for *campesinos* within our community to work with other *compañeros* in other parts of the country so as to better enable cooperation in trade, cultivation, organic fertilizers, etc. (p. 107).

If we look at the historical development of the interventions practiced by the FARC-EP, it is crucial to remark that the interviewed rebels repeatedly refer to the time of the Caguan peace talks. They refer to the projects and infrastructure they developed during that time in those regions that were part of the "zona de despeje"<sup>62</sup>. Mampilly (2011) actually recognises that "if a civil war exhibits periods of relative peace, the insurgents are more likely to devote resources to the civil administration, and this results in a more effective governance system over time" (p. 81). So, the peace environment provided by this attempt to achieve peace allowed the rebels to additionally focus on the implementation of social policies and programs while developing the war.

This work does not provide enough information to demonstrate in detail the changes over time in the involvement of the rebels in governance practices, but in the chapter nine the reader can find some reflections that touch a bit this topic, from testimonies of the rebels themselves.

<sup>62</sup> It is a region of *San Vicente del Caguan* in which the 1998's peace talks took place. The government gave a specific territory to the FARC-EP in order to discuss the end of the conflict. This dialogue was not successful.



### *Co- governance with peasant participation*

There is another discussion regarding selective incentives which is around the question: to what extent can selective incentives be seen by peasants as a utilitarian resource of self-interest through which they benefit from private goods forgetting the ultimate goal or dream? That could be the case of the agrarian reform dream proposed by the FARC-EP in their program. Lichbach (1994) explains this challenge with these words:

Collective action theories assume that a series of individual peasant actions help achieve some public good. If such a dissident "production function" does not exist; if peasants have no sense that they are working collectively toward some common end; or if peasants are oblivious to their interactions, then the theory developed here also does not apply. For instance, if peasants who loot manors during a jacquerie do not believe that their activities further their collective cause as well as offer personal enrichment, then they are indeed thieves and not rebels (p. 414)

The FARC-EP's interventions presented in this work also show that, in most of the cases, there are no private goods given to communities without a commitment from the same communities. Most of the narratives shown in this research tell us how the community is involved in the development of the projects, in the construction of a road, or a bridge, or a school. Peasants are also involved in the process of social organization, conflict resolution, justice management and decision making. Except for a few cases, like health campaigns, which seem to be a unilateral service provided by the medical staff of the FARC-EP, the interviews have demonstrated that there is nothing done without the participation of the community in the stages of design, implementation and monitoring of the project. Peasants put their hands, their minds and their labour to achieve some specific, common goals, which can be interpreted as a *co-governance system* in which rebels and members of rural communities are equally involved.

Consequently, the process of rebel governance has required not only the feedback from the community but also their participation in governance. Mampilly (2011) recognizes that the populations are active and play a role in the rebel governance "civilians are never passive or invisible actors and can manipulate the tenor of rebel governance efforts through the explicit demands they make on an insurgent command, usually in line with their local preferences" (p. 67), and identifies three different levels of this agency: the civilian population with their own beliefs, religious and ideological grounds from below, the FARC-EP's own members or factions that represent contradictions and internal discussion from within, and transnational institutions like NGOs, World Bank, United Nations and the state from above (p. 65). Thus unquestionably, the FARC-EP have been influenced by these civilian agency levels. From below the community is not only a source of relevant information to control the areas, but also represents an important basis for rebel governance, the achievement of legitimacy and spreading values and ideological appeals. From within, as the FARC-

EP applies elements of Marxism-Leninism regarding *democratic centralism*<sup>63</sup>, there exists a huge debate among the members from the insurgency at different levels and about different topics; most of these debates have taken place in the framework of the Clandestine Communist Party meetings<sup>64</sup> and of the Guerrilla National Conference<sup>65</sup>. And from above, the Colombian state and multinational agencies exert as well agency on the evolution of the rebels' political project, to the extent that this influence could be determinant to change of their *modus operandi*, their strategic plan and the war tactics. This is something that is recognized by some rebels when speaking about the impact of *Plan Colombia* and *Plan Patriota*<sup>66</sup> on their tactical behaviour.

Furthermore Lichbach (1994) points out that: "peasant actions are correspondingly designed to satisfy material self-interests. Thus, peasants will join a dissident group or participate in collective dissent because of particularistic benefits" (p. 389). Indeed, in the stories collected in Havana, one can identify that there are particular interests or particular struggles, depending on the region in which the rebels are located, which reinforces Lichbach's hypothesis. A productive project needed here, a health service needed there, a road to connect a village, a problem with deforestation, a multinational exploiting the common good, the struggle for returning to the land, the creation of a peasant reserve zone, amongst other demands.

Likewise, Hermes Aguilar gives an example of this involvement in the decision making processes of the communities:

If the community have a very important problem, what they do first is look for the guerrilla to define an agreement that resolves this problem. For instance, regions that need to be preserved as a biodiversity reserve, the community agrees that from this part to that one, people are not allowed to work, and only one person could enter to that place only with the permission of this community. If the community cannot come to an agreement, no one can

<sup>63</sup> For a very detailed account of these mechanisms, I recommend the document of the Octava conferencia Nacional Guerrillera (Eighth guerrilla national conference), published in their webpage. Notice the pedagogic nature of this speech, designed to be understandable by anyone, which shows the commitment to connect with their peasant members, many of them illiterate (FARC-EP, n.d.).

<sup>64</sup> The party meeting is a periodical participative mechanism among the rebels of the FARC-EP, in which all the members can participate and discuss about different topics. Most of the times, the meeting includes different items: first, the moment to sing the FARC-EP's anthem; second, a political topic presented by a political cadre (political secretary) which includes a discussion; third, a review of national and international news; fourth, a moment to present the report of the political secretary; fifth, a space to expose problems, conflicts, reports, criticisms and proposals; and finally a cultural moment in which one of the members makes a cultural presentation like a song, a poem, among other expressions. One of the interesting things about this political space is that at the moment of the meeting all the members are considered equals, so it is common to see subaltern fighters criticizing cadres and commanders and vice versa. Such a space takes place depending on the conditions of the war but has an important role in the political education of the rebels.

<sup>65</sup> The Guerrilla National Conference is the maximum instance of the FARC-EP in which all the decisions are approved periodically by representatives of the different fronts and units of the guerrilla. Until now, there have been ten conferences, the last one having taken place in the framework of the peace talks in Havana, Cuba, and they approved the peace deal before signing it in Cartagena the last 26th of September.

<sup>66</sup> They are two of the recent and strongest military campaigns organized by the army to combat the FARC-EP in rural areas.

enter this reserve. And then, they look for us to let us know that this is a policy that they want to implement to preserve the biodiversity of this region.

Then, several initiatives requested by the same rural communities can work as selective incentives to strengthen collective action and peasant participation. To be accurate, based on the FARC-EP's narratives, one can say that for many years the guerrilla has been offering more selective incentives to rural communities than the Colombian state itself. However, these selective incentives cannot be understood in the way Collier (2000) does. He sees the human being as a *homo economicus* figure, for whom all the decisions are driven by economic interests (Collier, 2000 in Gutierrez, 2004, p. 39). One can also wonder: could these selective incentives be seen as payments as Mason's model or the rational choice model suggest? Lichbach (1994) stresses that it is imperative to identify that not all the self-interests of the peasants should be considered as apolitical (p. 415). Actually, the act of being part in the construction of a school or the peasant participation in the cleaning of a river, cannot be seen only as a mere act of receiving a material incentive, these are very political acts in the sense that represent some kind of autonomy and independence. This also sends a very important message to the state: *We do not need you!*

Therefore, there is also another kind of service provided with these interventions. For the rebels, the process seems to be more interesting than the goal, since through this involvement with the community interesting skills can be developed among their members, which can serve in a specific moment as a source to strengthen their political struggle. To give an example, contributing in a struggle against a mining project in a rural area, which affects the interests of the peasants, can be useful to identify leaders and to educate politically the members of the community towards a higher level of the political struggle; or perhaps, organizing meetings for a productive project could be an opportunity for the peasants to reflect and study about other political issues, or to become committed members of the clandestine structures, or simply, to assure the food supply for the rebels. The reader could imagine the kind of discussions and ideological debates that have taken place during meals or at night when those thousands of peasants were cleaning the Atrato river as Pablo Atrato's story reveals.<sup>67</sup> What kind of relationships, feelings and, why not, love, have emerged from the interaction between guerrilla fighters and members of the rural community in those weeks of intensive communitarian work. Therefore, it is clear that peasant participation has not been a mere discursive resource for the rebels. It has in fact been an important approach to strengthen their political struggle.

### *An effective rebel governance system*

Looking at the five characteristic elements regarding effective governance, described by Mampilly in the theoretical review (section 1.3) about rebel governance, and the other theories explored and

<sup>67</sup> In the section entitled "health support and environment protection" the reader can see this anecdote in the story "Go away deforesters"

based on the interviews, one can summarise that the FARC-EP have developed five elements which sustain their governance system: The **first** one is the development of a force capable of policing rural communities. The role of some milicianos and some members of the guerrilla is this kind of formal presence of a man or a woman, with a relative authority, which can be contacted by the people to present their demands and problems in order to transmit these demands to a superior authority and to look for a possible solution. The **second** element is the development of a mechanism of conflict resolution and justice management which guarantees the communal living and the social contract among people. These two elements are described in chapter three in more detail showing, some practices regarding this element. The **third** one is the development of welfare programs or social interventions that could improve the living conditions of the members of the community. These interventions are related to the provision of essential needs of the population like education, health, food production and the strengthening of the rural local economies, among other aspects. An account of examples of these social interventions is shown in chapter four, where there are some anecdotes about the development of productive projects and infrastructure led by the rebels and peasant leaders, followed by some stories of health campaigns and environment protection campaigns performed by the rebels. The **fourth** feature is the development or the strengthening of bodies of representation and decision making in the community, which is a core characteristic of the FARC-EP approach of rebel governance that helps and contributes to the design, implementation and monitoring of the previous three elements. These participative bodies, basically the *Juntas de Acción Comunal*, and some policies addressed to strengthen the organizational skills and abilities of the communities are described in chapter five. And the **fifth** and final element is the construction of an ideological, political and cultural apparatus which is ever-present in all the previous components and transversally crosses every finite element of the daily life of the peasant community, with the purpose of creating a local hegemony and pursuing a counter hegemonic struggle against the regime. This apparatus is explored as well in chapter five.

For a better understanding of these elements, Figure 3.1 tries to schematically describe the rebel governance system of the FARC-EP. Notice that the body of representation is in the centre of the picture and controls the functions of the other four, including the creation of a local hegemony apparatus. Notice as well how the rebel hegemony is always confronting the regime's hegemony through every finite element of all the structures and also how both hegemonies are trying to conquer each other's space. It is essential to realize as well that all of these mechanisms are not only driven by the guerrilla; there are shared tasks and a shared commitment with the communities involved. Characteristics of the region, conditions of the war, arrangements with the community and individual assessments of each commander, among other factors, definitely shape the model according to the needs of the moment.

### THE REBEL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM OF THE FARC-EP

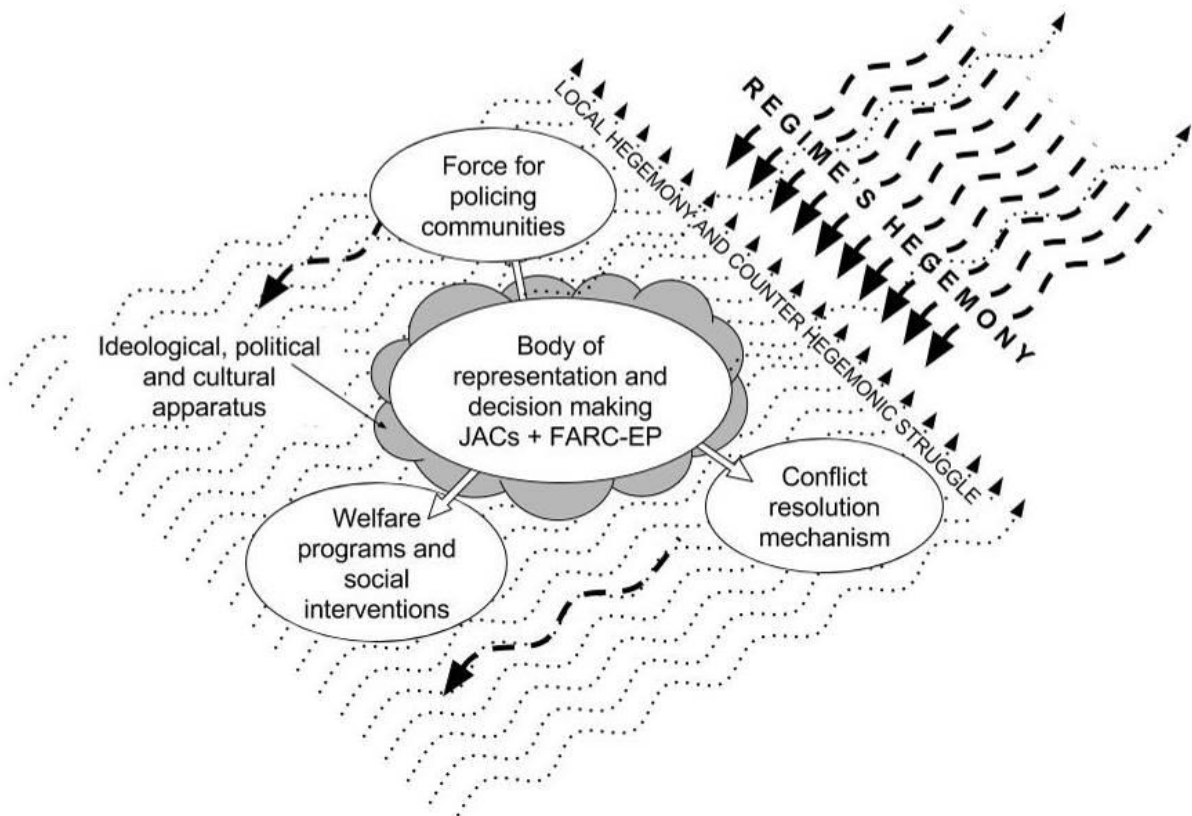


Figure 2.4 FARC-EP's model of their rebel governance system

In the following three chapters, I explore these aforementioned interventions through the voices of their protagonists. All of these interventions serve to build a more complete picture of the FARC-EP governance. Somehow, they ultimately explain how they interact with civil society. All the interviewees have different backgrounds and experiences, as well as different degrees of authority within the guerrilla. Some of them have had similar experiences and have been focused in specific tasks in the rebel group. A short description of each guerrillero can be found in the Appendix A. Each chapter contains as well a short collection of these interventions with their respective commentaries and one or two *specific stories* with additional anecdotes that are left to the reader at the end of the chapter to re-create and illustrate the act of governing by the rebels of the FARC-EP.

### 3 Conflict resolution and justice management

***“Cuando dijo: esto es mío,  
enseguida se armó tremendo lío.***

***Cuando dijo: esto es ajeno  
su corazón bombeó veneno”***

*(When he said: this is mine,  
Right away a huge mess was created.  
When he said: this belongs to someone else,  
His heart spewed poison)*

Julian Conrado in his song: “Cuando vuelva la igualdad”

This chapter collects some anecdotes and reflections that illustrate how the guerrilla has developed structured systems for justice management and conflict resolution, and how they work. Rebel governance strategies were discussed in a previous chapter . These are seen by the rebels like the process of becoming a parallel state in rural areas under their control.

Victoria Sandino adds that frequently people realize that the FARC-EP are more effective at administering justice and that they have more “unobstructed mechanisms” than those of the state. The *specific story* at the end of this part will show the reader one of Sandino’s anecdotes, regarding how some people prefer the conciliation process and the justice of the rebels, rather than that of the regime’s institutions.

#### *Solving conflict and disputes*

For this work, I define conflict resolution as all of those practices in which the rebels can assume the role of conciliation or mediation. This means a process of listening to the parts involved in a problem or small conflict, with the purpose to engender an agreement that can be seen as final, equitable and definitive solution for all parts.

Walter Mendoza highlights how important it is to handle conflict resolution in rural communities is:

In every place where the FARC has permanently been, communities come to us with the purpose of getting help, to resolve their problems. Many of them may be personal problems, marital problems. Because people have a lot of trust in the FARC. Or, for example, problems of property boundaries. Or, for example, someone has a debt to another person and does not want to pay... These are resolved with the intervention of the community or through dialogue among the parts in conflict. In that sense, we administer justice, but true justice, without bias, without traps.

For his part, Hermes Aguilar declares that:

There exist problems that in juridical terms nobody can resolve, and people say that the only one that can resolve these problems is the guerrilla, (...) the guerrilla does not resolve problems by itself, but provides an integrated approach that allows people to resolve problems by themselves.

On the other hand, Pablo Atrato highlights a simple but powerful reason to be involved in conflict resolution: “The police does not exist there, people wait for the organizational commission to arrive or they look for a commander to ask for help in resolving a conflict”

Perhaps this Walter Mendoza story can better illustrate how conflict resolution is a central and daily task for the guerrilla.

A long time ago, before coming to the Havana, there was some land trouble between an indigenous community and an afro-Colombian community, it almost got to a point where we would have a lot of deaths. One day, there were people coming to the encampment where we were and they told us:

—My brother... there is going to be a massacre.

—Well, what happened?

—The problem is that the *cabildo* and the community are going to fight with machetes<sup>68</sup>, they are going to shoot each other because they have rifles, and the Indians have arrows.

It was because of 40 meters of land<sup>69</sup>. This problem was very old, and they had never been able to resolve it. Because they always went to the *fiscalia*<sup>70</sup>, to the church, or to the same indigenous authorities, or the authorities of the afro-Colombian community. The problem is very simple because there is gold in this area. They called this *pelusas*<sup>71</sup>. The problem was that they used to go mining together and because of that there were a lot of problems in this plot. It was a simple problem. Then, we said:

—Well... what we have to do first is to call an assembly and present a proposal. If they are sure that in this place there is gold, then half and a half, half of the place for the afros and half for the indigenous.

And then, our proposal was accepted. The agreement was signed by both parts and that was all.

When I asked him if the agreement signed was sent to legal institutions to be certified, he answered that this is not needed and that this paper remains in the community. I conclude that this is because

<sup>68</sup> The Spanish expression given by Walter is “*el cabildo y la comunidad se van a dar machete*”.

<sup>69</sup> He is speaking about 40 square meters.

<sup>70</sup> Fiscalía is the Colombian prosecutor's office.

<sup>71</sup> *Pelusas* seems to be a word used for small particles of gold found in the soil.

this kind of arrangements is somehow supervised by the guerrilla. People realized that the guerrilla could find a better solution than the state. On the other hand, people would need to travel a very big distance to have such a conflict mediated by any state institution.

### *Participative approach*

All the interviewees have strongly remarked that these interventions regarding conflict resolution and conciliation processes are not impositions. They emphasize that they do not pretend to impose their solutions. They make proposals and the final decision, whatever it may be, is made by the community, including the possibility to rejecting the proposal of the rebels. Pablo Atrato speaks about this approach in these terms:

There is something important to point out, which is that none of these things are imposed, they are set up with the people. (...) generally, we do not intervene. Simply we are guarantees that the agreed upon solution is being fulfilled. We hardly ever say that we have to do is this or that, we facilitate the dialogue; and we are mediators and guarantors.

Meanwhile, Victoria Sandino refers to this approach in terms of *Native Justice*:

For example, there is an expedited mechanism in the communities for the resolution of conflicts, which is the conciliation committee, it is some kind of *justice of their own, native justice*, created from the base of the communities. After speaking with the communities, we tried to elect, with the elder people and the people with more authority, a committee that can find a solution for their problems since the guerrilla is not always in the area. We go and come back. Then who has to resolve these problems? The community itself. Later these committees were recognized by the juntas, by the state.

### *Family conciliation*

Camila Cienfuegos has been handling family disputes, describes this account to better explain one of the possible approaches:

When families face problems, many of them ask us to help them resolve the dispute. For instance, in cases of aggressions against women, we call the husband and we told him:

—Why do you fight so much with your wife?

—It's because my partner is a rebel,

A woman told us:

—My partner hit me, and he did also that in front of my children, because he was drunk, and when he is drunk he hits me.



So, when he was sober we called him and we told him:

—*Compañero*, this is not good, this is your family, this is your home, they are your children, and she is your wife. Who is with you in good times and in bad moments?

And we started to make him recognise that it is not the best way to grow a family, with mistreatment. It was like showing him that this is not appropriate behaviour. In extreme cases, we called this *compañero* and the junta decided... For example, in cases of violence they had to pay a fine to the junta and with this money they developed their activities. But the junta defined the rules and we executed them.

Meanwhile, Isabella San Roque speaks about a similar approach she used by when she was working on family conciliation:

There was a young man that we had to drag to the encampment, and we told him:

—Either you respect your partner or we will have to take other measures!

It was an extreme case in which the man was mistreating his wife.

### *Rebel justice*

In the upcoming lines, I explain what the rebels have done in terms of *Justice management*. It refers to the way the FARC-EP's rebels have developed an alternative justice system in the regions under their control. In this case, justice management is more linked with punishment practices as a way of administering justice. I have to be clear that for obvious reasons I was not told too many details about the total scope of "justice practices" they have established; for instance, in cases of rape, or sexual assault, or extreme violence against children, the final resolution could be the death penalty, as Victoria Sandino briefly mentions in her interview. Others like Isabella San Roque told me that in those cases the community normally makes the final decision about the sentence to be applied and enforced by the guerrilla. Most of the times the sentence is banishment of the criminal from the region, or in other cases —depending on the conditions of the community and how remote the community is— the criminal can be turned over to state justice authorities.

As a good example of rebel justice management, Isabella San Roque refers to the following event, that shows how problems regarding custody of children are handled by the rebels:

There was a nine year-old girl, whose parents were separated, by mutual infidelities. The girl was under custody of her mother, but the mother had a unstable personality, she was a bit irresponsible, with habits of staying until late in parties, her care for the girl was a bit sloppy. And the father was already in another relationship, he had another wife, he was a *finquero*. Then the girl used to go to the father's home every 15 days, the father gave her economic support, he paid alimony to the girl's mother, and the mother pretended that the father had to pay a double fee, but she wanted to party all the time. The girl was very bored with her

mother since she also changed stepfathers frequently, and it can be traumatic for a girl. So, the father exposed the situation to the JAC, to the *comite de concilio*<sup>72</sup>, and the committee could not resolve the problem, because the mother was hysterical, and she defended the idea that the father had to pay a double fee, and she said that the girl should remain under her custody. Then, this problem was handed to us. What to do with the girl? They came to us. The mother, the father and the girl, and I was in charge of this problem. But initially, when the woman came, I was thinking that she had reason on her side, but in this kind of things what we have learnt and what we have stressed is that we have to be objective. A person that has the mission of resolving such a problem cannot be in favour of one or in favour of the other, we have to analyse the situation with objectivity. We listened both of them, they presented their arguments, the woman told us that she was taking care of the girl and she needed an income for her and the girl, and that she should not have to work. And the father expressed that he could cover the entire living expenses of the girl, but the mother had to work to earn a living for herself.

Finally, I asked to the girl:

—What do you want? With whom would you like to stay?

She answered:

—With my father!

It was very clear that she loved her father a lot, she hugged him. We saw that her relation with her mother was very broken, and the mother was a little bit aware of the situation, she had a very difficult temperament. The girl said that she wanted to go with her father. And the mother finally agreed. “You can go, but you cannot take anything you have at home”. She did not allow her to take her clothes from her house, and from my part, in this case I did not want to say no, because what was more important in that moment was the happiness and the well-being of the girl. She wanted to go with her father and her father said:

—I will give her the best I can, study, clothes, healthcare, what she needs she will have with me.

Finally, a document was signed in the presence of the community, and it was also written that the mother could have her girl over every 15 days, like in a *comisaría de familia* (family commissariat).<sup>73</sup> I said I would become a family commissary.

Brittain also recounts an anecdote about justice management exercised by the rebels:

An extreme example of this process occurred when a homicide took place in Caquetá. The person accused admitted to killing a young man while intoxicated. Because of the severity of

<sup>72</sup> Here appears a new organizational mechanism: the *Comite de Concilio* (conciliation committee)

<sup>73</sup> It is an official institution in Colombia that regulates conciliation between members of a family, most of the time deals about custody issues.

the crime, the FARC-EP decided to organize a conference between the dead man's parents and the killer's parents, which the entire community was invited to attend. A guerrilla representative asked the mothers to talk privately about the situation of their families and the plight of both those involved in the crime. After deliberating for several hours, they agreed that the man who had committed the crime was an alcoholic who had never intended to kill. The mothers mutually agreed that for the safety of the community the perpetrator should be ejected for a minimum of one year and could only return if a fine of 25 million pesos (US\$10,000) was paid to the victim's family. This was based on the reasoning that a young person provides a great deal both financially and physically, not only to the community but also to their family. The dead man's family (and largely his mother) would suffer financially as well as emotionally, so the fine was meant to act as a form of compensation (Murch, 2000 in Brittain, 2010, p. 216).

Furthermore, Camila Cienfuegos, with the following anecdote, shows us a similar problem faced by the rebels in some peasant communities:

We collected the report of the community, of the victim, we called the victim and the accused, we spoke with each other and when we had concrete evidence and we had verified that it was true, we called a meeting with the junta and finally the junta decided what to do with this person. Sometimes they were banished from the region; the same community asked them to leave the region. We have found stepfathers trying to abuse their girls, and the mother herself called us, or sent us a letter asking for help. This is a very tricky issue, but we have to protect the well-being of the minors. When the problem was too big, sometimes the junta sent the criminal to the nearest official institution to put a criminal complaint and to be placed in custody by the police.

### *More effective than state justice*

Thus, the FARC-EP could be seen in several cases as a superior stage of proceedings, something like a *higher court* in a guerrilla encampment where the problems unresolved by the efforts of the community can find a final solution. This higher court regulates and verifies the fulfilment of the agreement agreed to by the parties in conflict.

In fact, looking at the narratives in this chapter, one can assert that the justice managed by the FARC-EP is more effective in terms of time and costs for rural population. This service does not have any cost and it is made available in the region where the peasants live, permitting them an easy access to justice that would not exist otherwise. The decisions taken are very well respected by rural population; people know that they cannot renege on the agreements with the JAC and much less on rebels' decisions. People feel that the agreements are fair, and one can suggest that in most of the

cases the decisions are taken with the participation of the community in assemblies, or just by the representatives of the peasant community in the JAC.

Using the patterns identified so far, figure 3.1 can better explain how the general procedure to manage justice and resolve conflicts by the FARC-EP functions. Basically, a conflict/dispute has three stages of proceedings; the **first** one is the normal attempt to find a solution *by both parties in conflict*, the **second** one is *the intervention of a community institution*, whatever it may be, and finally the **third** is the *direct intervention by a delegate of the rebels*. However, we cannot say that in the second stage there is no influence of the guerrilla. Indeed, what they have told us in the previous stories, is that there is, so to speak, some kind of guidance to steer the policies of the JACs.

Getting ahead to the upcoming anecdote by Victoria Sandino, it is interesting to see as well how people from other regions used to go to a region under FARC-EP control to solve their conflicts, unrecognizing the official institutions in their own place of origin. Looking at the way some state officials recommend the rebel intervention to solve a conflict among civilians, one can suggest that the third concept explored: *Hybrid political orders* (Van der Haar, 2013, p. 99) fits more with this example, since it is a form of “functional complementarity”. One can see how the state’s officials do not discard the rebel intervention, rather they promote and advertise this service provided by the FARC-EP. Either due to being lazy or being busy, the fact is that they preferred the rebel intervention to their own.

Thus, sometimes there is no clear line that divides what is done by the state and what is done by the guerrilla, and depending on the region they could be overlap, either as opposing approaches and in other cases as complementary systems. Actually, in most cases, this border is geographical and it varies over time, depending on the dynamics of the war. In recent years it has been even harder to define clear boundaries.

Based on the previous anecdotes, one can suggest —regarding conflict resolution and justice management practiced by the rebels—, that this process somehow has enriched not only the guerrilla members involved in this task, but also the social organizations in those areas. Communities have been empowered by this approach, since they can realize, with the help of the guerrilla, that they can have the power to make their own decisions and to control their own communities without an external influence. So, the term formerly used by Isabella San Roque, *new power*, to describe this process, can be better understood now. Conflict resolution and justice management may then be understood as a political strategy to empower communities and give them autonomy.

**FLOWCHART CONFLICT/DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS**

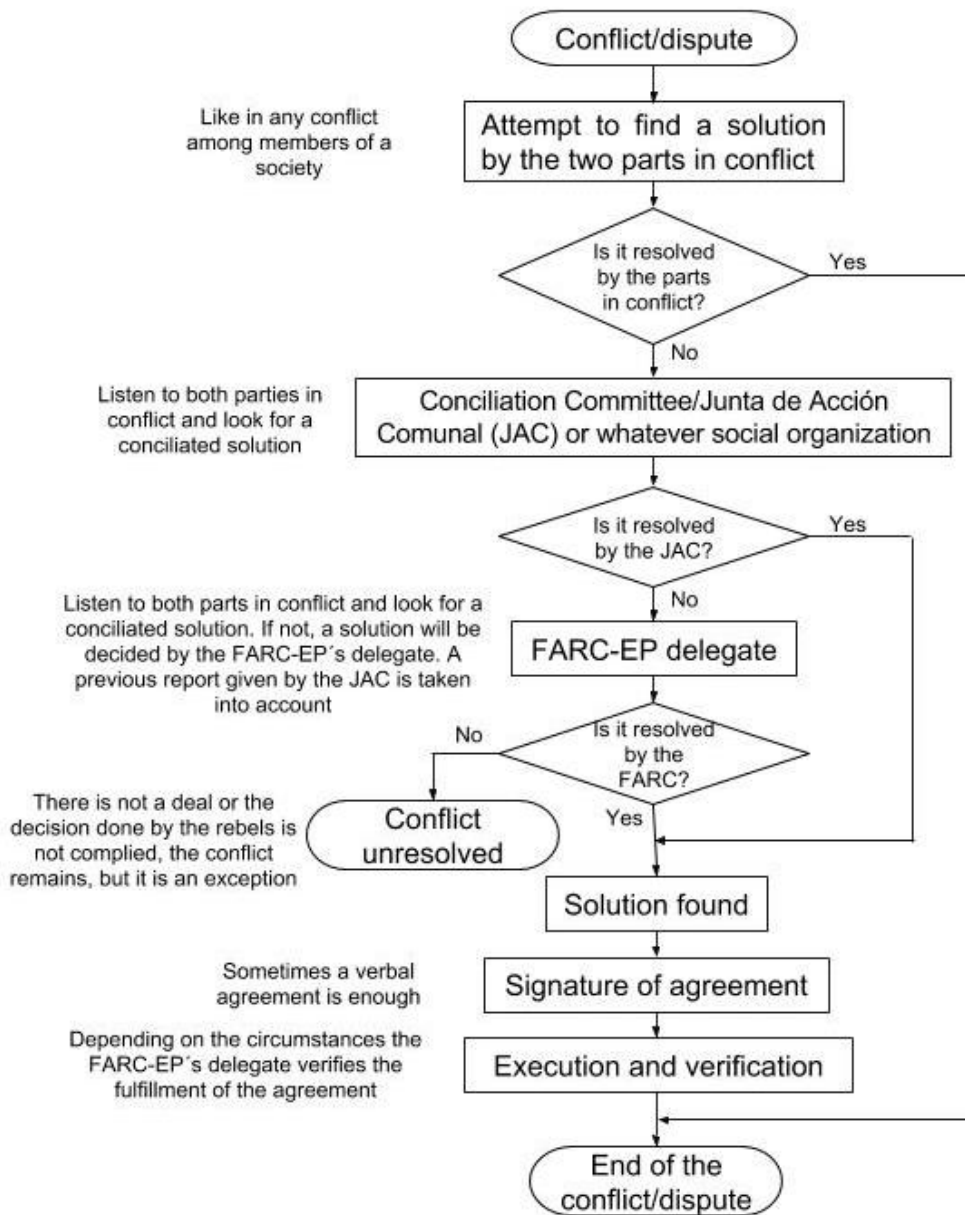


Figure 3.5 Flowchart explaining the conflict-dispute resolution process by FARC-EP

*Victoria Sandino and the “fiscalía 21”*

In the area of the central block<sup>74</sup>, so to speak, a guerrilla institution was created. It was a commission that was called: commission of “quejas y reclamos” (of “complaints and demands”). But this commission grew so much, resolving problems of the population, to the

<sup>74</sup> The FARC-EP is geographically divided in blocks to develop their strategic plan.

point that it was not only for resolving problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> front, but also people from other regions of the country used to come to this commission. I mean people from Bogota, from Ibague, from Huila, as well as people from the eastern *llanos*. And the same tribunals<sup>75</sup>, in Chaparral and other close-by cities, gave us the name of “fiscalía 21”. And all the people spoke about fiscalía 21, to the point that those people who lived in rural areas and used to go to the official tribunals or to the fiscalía to register complaints, were advised by the officials that it was better to go to the fiscalía 21, because they, [the guerrilla] could better resolve their problems. They also told the people:

—we cannot go to those places, we do not have mechanisms to enforce justice in that region.

And I am speaking about the public servants, about the *fiscales*<sup>76</sup> and the judges. They told the population:

—It is better to go to the fiscalía 21 because they can resolve your problem.

All the people knew that there was the fiscalía 21, a commission of the 21<sup>st</sup> Front that every Saturday received people from different parts of the country with conflicts and problems to be solved.

So many people came to this commission, and told us: “I have a problem with the neighbour, a problem with an inheritance, a problem with a land, a debt that someone has not paid me”. Different problems and conflicts that communities have. Then we sent a subpoena to both parts in conflict. Then, our work was to review documentation. Whether it had been discussed by the regime’s justice before, even whether it had been handled by another guerrilla front. Sometimes people brought signed documents from eight, nine, ten years ago, and then we had to review whether it was fair or not, whether the conditions had changed. They had to leave those documents for review, and with the parties we reached an agreement. For instance, a person had a debt to another and he did not have money to pay it, but instead had this object or this other property, and then we made the transfer of the property, or another deal that had to be fair and just. The idea was to make a fair deal.

Another example... It is a common case to have couples that want to be divorced, and they go there, and discuss and argue:

—¡You have another woman!

or conversely,

—¡You have other man. You do not love me anymore, you do not love the children!

Something like this kind of episodes was very common to see in the 659806274 *frente* 21. In those cases, well..., there is a process of persuasion and we asked them:

—To what extent do you know the consequences of being divorced? Do you know what implications it has? How many years have you been living together? What are the things you are getting over?

<sup>75</sup> She is speaking about official tribunals and courts of the Colombian state.

<sup>76</sup> Those who are in charge of investigating crimes in the fiscalía. Prosecutors.

And the young guerrillas of the commission were gaining so much experience that they could repair some marriages. For instance, they would tell the couple:

—Tell me one thing: with whom you were sharing your life? What did you like the most when you fell in love with her or with him?

He answered:

—She was very kind to me, very beautiful.

And the woman could say:

—He cared for me, he prepared breakfast some days, he treated me very well, and now he does not tell me anything, he does not help me with anything.

Those are the kind of cases we received in our fronts. People first go to the conciliation committee. If it is not resolved, they have to present the case to the JAC, and finally if it is not resolved there they go to the front and there they have to reach an arrangement. Sometimes people went directly to the front. People recognize our authority.

Finally, it became very big, there was no time to do other things, our common tasks, we were dedicated fully to conciliation processes and this is not our only task. That is why we decided to request the people to fulfil the first steps; I mean to speak to their own JACs.

In other cases, where there have been more conflictive problems people are sanctioned. Sanctioned by the community, for instance to work for the community, to repair the school, to grow something, to perform maintenance in the roads. If someone has committed an aggression against another member of the community, this person could be obliged to work in the land of the victim as a sanction for fights, for violent confrontations. We have resolved a lot of problems. The first sanction is handed down by the community, when the guerrilla arrives the sanction may be higher if the person has not executed the JAC's sanction.

In cases of sexual violence, for instance, we conduct a trial in front of the community, and the community proposes what kind of sanction they want. In some cases they expel the person from the community, or they decide a fixed period of time of working somewhere or building a school, or to perform maintenance in the roads. Many times, working during a large period of time depending on the magnitude of the situation. And those people who have committed so much harm to the community ended up with the maximum punishment under our own guerrilla's norms.

## 4 Social welfare interventions





***“Every day we have to struggle so that this love for humanity is transformed into concrete acts, into acts that serve as examples of mobilization”***

Ernesto “Che” Guevara

### *More praxis, less theory*

If we look at the FARC-EP’s behaviour, we can recognise that there exists a very pragmatic way to interact with peasant communities. In more specific terms, as I have shown before, all the interventions presented in this work are addressed mainly to find concrete solutions to concrete problems. This is something that makes the Colombian guerrilla movement and their structures different from other left-wing parties in the country. Some of them focus more on theorizing about revolution or participating in elections than in building a new society. In this case, helping those communities solve daily problems is a very remarkable approach practiced by the rebels. Paradoxically, these interventions have been seen by the Colombian state and its army as a model to be copied in those peasant communities in which the state has been more present. Indeed, in 2014 there was a complex situation in the middle of the peace talks when a general of the Colombian army was captured by the FARC-EP in a remote rural area under their control (Semana, 2014). The general was not leading some kind of army attack on the guerrilla or bombing of encampments, he was working on a project to supply alternative energy to a specific community in the region of Choco (to which Pablo Atrato has a connection). This kind of recognition of the success of the tactics used by the guerrilla has been visible in several areas during the last decade in interventions undertaken by the army, named “programas civico-militares” (civilian-military programs), obviously with a big budget and support from US government. The latest version of this program has been called “programas de consolidación” (consolidation programs), with an important level of social intervention. Van der Haar (2013) recognises this kind of competition for legitimacy in the context of institutional multiplicity:

The existence of different sets of institutions in overlapping social spheres has, as consequence, that multiple offers of services are visible to local citizens and compared by them. This implies an almost continuous contest for the loyalty of the local population”

This chapter explores this pragmatism, showing the sort of social interventions practiced by the rebels, which must be considered as part of their rebel governance system. These interventions are related with productive projects, infrastructure development, health support and protection of the environment.

## 4.1 Productive projects and infrastructure development

### *The rebels' relation with food production*

Now, I would like to show the relation of the FARC-EP's fronts with food production. One of the important aspects to highlight is that the guerrilla sees the act of producing food as a tactic for surviving. Contrary to the media portrayal of the rebels as an actor that encourages peasants to plant coca crops, the reality is that due to their own needs they are dependent on local food production in each region they live in<sup>77</sup>. But what is most important is their historical roots, in which the peasant condition and the act of working the land is part of their culture. Isabella San Roque explains this in the following words:

We have in our norms this requirement that we have to grow food precisely to have something to eat during the war. We had big crops before the current aggressive military campaign, before the *Patriota*,<sup>78</sup> comrade Marulanda used to send his troops to cultivate the land. For instance:

—Now we are going to grow a big *platanera*<sup>79</sup> and when we pass through here we have *platano*!

Green bananas, yucca and corn are the most common foods we use. But with the advance of the war we keep moving and there is not so much possibility to grow food by ourselves. What can be possible in certain contexts is for instance to make an arrangement with a family that has a small farm. We can say:

—Take these seeds and grow this food, you can use it for yourselves and when we come back we can take a part of the crop.

It is cultivating in *socia*.<sup>80</sup> Or we can also help a family clean or to improve the crop. We can send troops to help a family with the crop. You know, the majority of the people who belong to the FARC are peasants, and then they know more about those issues and they enjoy it a lot as well.

In a similar manner, she recalls an important fact about the coca crops and their relation with the community:

In this region [Region of Caguan], the agriculture is very complex, because of the fact that there are no good roads, it means that the culture of cultivation is not so widespread.

<sup>77</sup> Actually, the rebels are also dependent of the local economy, be that illegal or legal economy. In that case, in some places the guerrilla can be dependent of the trade of crops for illegal use like coca, marijuana and the like, in others they may be dependent on taxes levied to mining companies or petroleum multinationals.

<sup>78</sup> She is referring Plan Patriota, one of the latest military campaigns organized by the army to combat the guerrillas.

<sup>79</sup> Crop of green bananas, or plantains.

<sup>80</sup> *Socia* is a popular word to speak about partnership.

Because if you grow green bananas and you cannot sell them, you lose your time and money. And what is more successful in those regions? The coca crops of course. People survived with this crop, this is a reality in Colombia. And what we have tried to strongly encourage in the last years, is that if they have to grow coca, they have also to grow food. We consider that this is important not only for their subsistence but also for the war. Why? Because in these regions the army is continuously doing census, and controlling the “remesa”<sup>81</sup>. Then in the time of the Caguan [peace talks], we suggested that they cultivate food. But now there are peasants’ associations, very well organized, that promote crops of other products and that stress that coca cannot be the only product to be grown.

Walter Mendoza highlights as well the strong connection with the peasants:

We the FARC, because of our peasant origins that everyone knows, have always been in the countryside during these 51 years. We have lived with the peasants, with the afros, with the indigenous, with the *colonos*, and we have organised and oriented farming projects through communitarian farms. We have helped and motivated the peasants to grow the *pancoger* crops, like rice, corn, vegetables, together with the communities, with the purpose to rescuing food sovereignty.

In the meantime, Hermes Aguilar speaks about the *war economy* to refer to the act of producing or supporting food crops. He describes how productive projects have been one of the core tactics of the rebels in their regions:

The projects... In all our existence, we have put in place productive projects because the guerrilla needs them. One: livestock projects, there are people who live in the depths of the jungle, in very remote regions, and they do not have the possibility of buying fences, or animals, and there are cases in which the guerrilla buys the animals and gives them to the communities. We make a verbal agreement with them and this project has a profit which will be divided among the community and the guerrilla in equal parts. Of course, we document the agreement, for instance writing the quantity of animals we gave them, how many cows, how many heifers, bulls, and the cost of each one. They are two-way projects, they serve the community and also serve the guerrilla. There are cases also in which we planned a war economy with the communities. Peasant communities grow food with a given plan, with the purpose of having a stock of food in a complex situation of the war, or for their self-subsistence, or for selling those products for a profit in order to support other needs.

<sup>81</sup> 1196725708 Remesa is a term to speak about food products, generally bought in small shops in villages or brought from the big cities.



Figure 4.6 Crops and cattle of the FARC-EP. (Viva, Candelaria y Gonzalo, N., 2014). Re-printed with permission of the authors.

Walter Mendoza also has his own experience in food production:

Four years ago, we did some work in the Pacific region. There is a region with 20 1196725731 *veredas*, in this region peasants, afro Colombians and indigenous communities converge, each of these sectors with their own kind of social organization. They are grouped in a big organization named the *Junta Mayor*. It is a kind of federation of Juntas comunales. Then it is a agricultural region, they grow everything, green banana, rice, yucca, 1196725732 *papachina*, sugar cane, because it has two climates: a cold one in the mountains, 1500 meters of altitude, and another lower and warmer with altitudes of 200 meters. We have organized

with them farming projects. They grow corn, rice, *papachina*, *ñame* and also fish, chicken, pork production and livestock.

### *Supporting local economies by building infrastructure*

This pragmatic way of interacting with peasant communities has one dimension of support to the local economy through productive projects and infrastructure development addressed to increase —within their possibilities—, the population's income, which can be helpful in improving the living conditions of the same population and fulfil their own needs. Britain reminds us of the utility of these projects:

During the 1990s and early 2000s, infrastructure projects were established on a regional scale. Roadways were constructed and ensured civilians had some access to imports while enabling small and medium-sized producers to export surplus goods with greater ease. Creating a passage for rural-based trade also created avenues for municipalities to communicate. These cross-linkages empowered communities to carry out more efficient ways of expanding and sustaining mutual goals. Apart from roadways there were projects to revitalize rural airspaces throughout controlled territory.

But supporting food production is not enough to improve local economies; the rebels have understood that the development of appropriate roads is key to improve the mobility of the population. Isabella San Roque remembers her experience with the Oriental Block in which several projects were developed, and the effects of these interventions:

In the oriental block, we have the experience of having the *zona de despeje*, (..) from the guerrilla, several dynamics at the level of projects were generated. For instance, comrade Jorge Suarez played a leading role in this kind of projects. In this 1196725736 *zona de despeje* there are a lot roads in which the guerrilla were working on, helping the communities to build these roads, also in their design. Actually there are some roads designed by comrade Manuel Marulanda. He was an excellent planner, an engineer of public works. These roads were built to benefit the communities, some of them were bombed after the 1196725737 *zona de despeje*. Why were they bombed? Because the state thought that these roads were our strategic corridors, but this is not true, they were created to develop the region, to improve the conditions of the region. (...) After the colonization of these regions, the subsistence of the communities was very difficult and they did not have the possibility to sell what they grew, and these roads have permitted a bit of communication with other villages.

Speaking about another kind of infrastructure, Pablo Atrato states that one topic where they have been involved is in the construction of rural schools:

As far as I am concerned, in my front we have supported the planning and the construction of several schools, we have built 4 or 5 schools in the region. Generally, the teachers belong to the communities, and later it has been possible to get support from the local government and have a salary. Initially we supported the construction of the school and the training of teachers.

Walter Mendoza, for instance, describes an interesting story regarding the development of a bridge in some region on the Pacific coast from which we can conclude that this pragmatic way of interacting with communities and solving concrete problems seems to be more effective than the state bureaucracy:

In this region, there are no roads, there is a project for a road but now every transport is on the back of a mule, and those *veredas* were bottled<sup>82</sup> and they lacked two bridges. The municipality had made some research to build these bridges. The bridges have a length of 35 meters. They are over the same river but in different places. The municipality sent engineers several times to get a quote to build the bridges. The conclusion was that the two bridges costed 1200 million pesos<sup>83</sup>. So, they would never be built. Then we proposed to the 20 *veredas*:

—These bridges can be built and we do not need this huge amount of money.

Then we proposed to them that all the owners of *fincas* and owners of shops should make an economic contribution to build the bridges. Then it started involving a tax on beer, cigarettes, bazaars, the *finqueros* donated cows, others donated pigs. We made our research, because we have also some guys who have experience in civil engineering, and then we made some calculations of how much they could cost. Conclusion: only buying the materials, cement, metal bars and transport, because the sand was already in the river and the labour force would be supplied by the community members, each bridge would cost 120 million pesos<sup>84</sup>. This money was collected in less than two months, because the people really wanted to build these bridges, it was a necessity for the communities. We acted as organizers but the very community made the project happen. We agreed that the community supply the labour force, the food and we supply the engineers. The community also supplied the mules for the transport of the materials. The bridges were in service after three months. Something that the state could never had done. Now more than 600 mules per day are traveling on these bridges. This is a road for mules, people do not want a road for cars and trucks since there is a transnational mining project on this area and they do not want this project. There is also a river, the Naya river, and now a dam project which is not wanted by the community

<sup>82</sup> *Embotellado* in Spanish is an expression to refer to something that is blocked and cannot go out.

<sup>83</sup> Approximately in euros: 343.000 Euros. Exchange rate used: 1 Euro=3500 COP

<sup>84</sup> Approximately in euros: 34.000 Euros. Exchange rate used: 1 Euro=3500 COP

is being spoken about. Now this region is more productive than before, thanks to the bridges. The same community agreed to take care of the maintenance for the bridges and they put a toll for the mules, (1000 pesos for mule). This money is used for the maintenance of the bridges.



Figure 4.7 Fighters working on the construction of a road in the Caguan region. (Viva, Candelaria y Gonzalo, N., 2014). Re-printed with permission of the authors.

Brittain (2010) also stresses that “the guerrillas coordinated and built over 250 kilometers of new road/highway and repaired another 250 kilometers during the first two years of the demilitarized zone. During this time, San Vicente del Caguán alone saw 64 streets built by the FARC-EP” (p. 182), and adds that “Other infrastructure projects have been proposed, such as an expanded electricity supply, improved schools and medical centers...” (p. 183). Additionally, the newspaper *El Tiempo* describes an important fact about the construction of a road by the rebels which was discovered by the army in 2000 “the FARC advanced in the construction of a road of 100 km which crosses the Paramo [of Sumapaz], (...) the road went from Uribe to Macarena and San Vicente del Caguán” (Vasquez & Restrepo, 2000). But, let the protagonist of this incident, commander Edison Romaña, tell his version of the construction of this road. It shows its impact on a rural community which was living isolated for many years.

*Edison Romaña: the very apathy of the government makes possible the integration between peasants and guerrilleros*

I am going to tell you about three of several projects we have developed in more than 50 years of struggle, working together with civil population. We developed the first one in the 1996-98, in *San Juanito* in the department of *Meta*, this is in the middle of two beautiful *paramos*, the *Farallones de Medina* and the *Paramo de Chingaza*. This village although near the capital, Bogota, and near Villavicencio, it did not have neither roads to connect with these cities, nor electricity. The guerrilla was developing raffles, bazaars to collect funding to build the roads in this village. We put in work, we bought the fuel for the machines trough the JAC, the guerrilla supplied the bulldozer and bulldozer's driver as well. There was a total integration between guerrilla and civil population. One day, the food for the workers was given by one *vereda*, and the other day by other *vereda*.

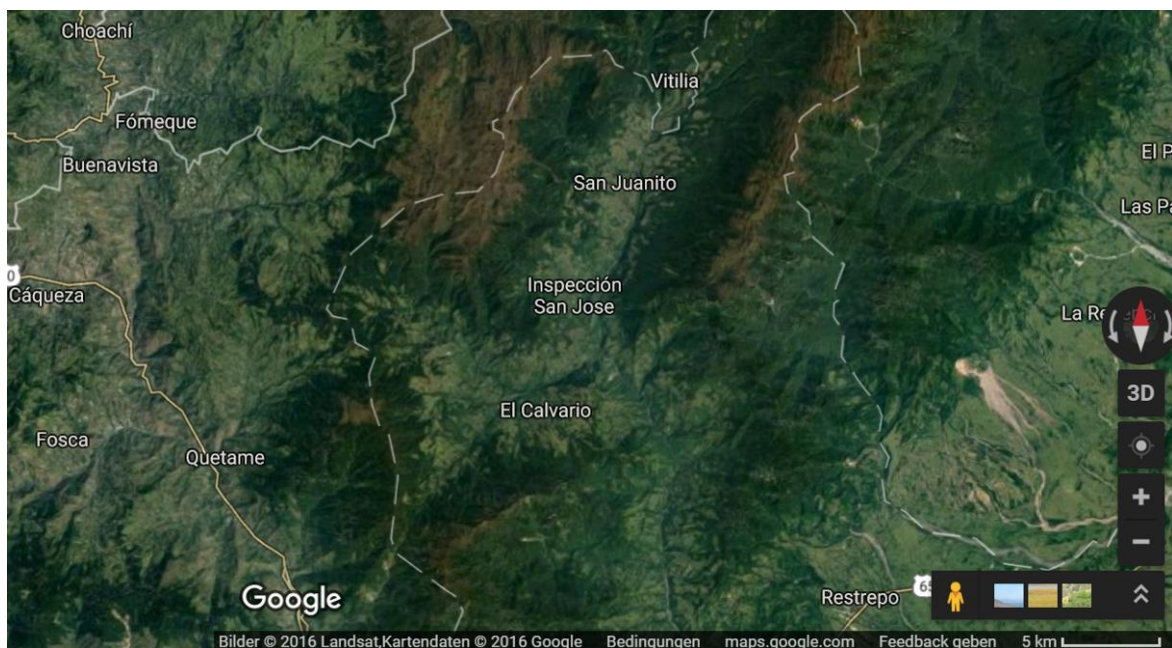


Figure 4.8 Region of *San Juanito – El Calvario – Fomeque*, a few years ago under control of the 53th front of the FARC-EP whose commander was Edison Romaña.

In 1997, for the first time, a car could enter *San Juanito* from the *Calvario*, passing by *San Jose* and *La Candelaria* to arrive to *San Juanito*. We built 22 km of road. The happiness of the population was so big. That day they had a party. There were ancient people who had never seen a car in their lives because they had never gone outside the village. The transport was by *bestias*<sup>85</sup>. We also connected *San Juanito-Fomeque*. After that, there was more development in that region, people could sell their products in other towns and villages. In the meantime, there was a process of collecting funding to bring electricity there. Although there is a nearby dam that supplies electricity to Bogota, this village did not have this service. But with our efforts we connected this village to the electric grid. We can say that around 2000, 2002 the village finally had roads, electricity, internet thanks to the help of the

<sup>85</sup> Popular name for horses.



guerrilla. This place was very well known for the battles between the guerrilla and the army but not for the works of the guerrilla movement.

There is another work that people remember so much in the region of *Sumapaz*, in the 20th locality of Bogota. They were waiting for decades and struggling for these roads, and they could never manage before, but at the moment the guerrilla movement arrived, it encouraged this population and with the same methodology we have used everywhere, we helped them build the roads. People had the idea of connecting the high parts of the *paramo* of the Sumapaz with the rest of the villages. The guerrilla proposed to build 80 km of roads, together with the communities of Sumapaz, of the veredas of *La Playa*, *San Jose*, *San Juan del Sumapaz*, *El Salitre*, *La Granada*, *El Tunal*.

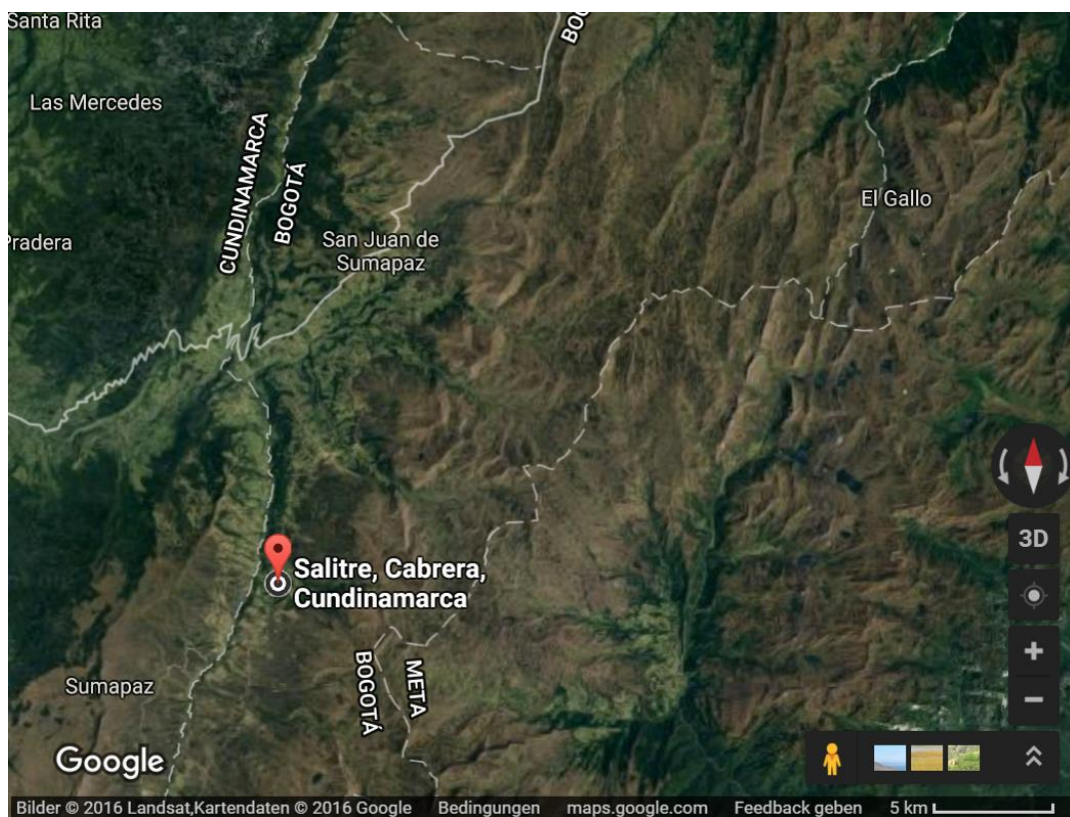


Figure 4.9 Region of Sumapaz with influence of several fronts of the FARC-EP, just to the south of Bogota, 80 km from the city center.

But there, there was an awkward situation because, we had advanced in building the road, and we were in the high part of the mountain in *Las Aguilas* almost finishing the road going down the mountain to the region of *Meta* in the eastern *llanos* (plains), and the air force bombed our machines, the bulldozer, the trucks, and the work for the road was stopped. There was an organization by the same community; they protested against the military action in the region, and thanks to that, the military actions against the works stopped. Now the road is functional and it arrives at the *vereda* *Punticas*. After building the roads with the community the government put a battalion in *Las Aguilas*, at the end of the

road to control this region. (...) In these years, there was a lot of repression against the peasants of Sumapaz, against the peasants of this region. (...)

The other project was in the *Zona de despeje*, hundreds of kilometers of roads were built by the communities and the guerrilla in the departments of *Caqueta* and *Meta*, exactly in *San Vicente*, *La Macarena*, *Mesetas*, *La Uribe* and *Vista Hermosa*. With the peasants, we built the road from *La Uribe* to *La Julia*, close to the Duda river. After that the communities wanted to extend the road to the *Quinigua* to come to *El Guayabero* and arrive at the existent road from *San Juan de Lozada* to *San Vicente*. This work would have never been done by the oligarchy but if they would have done it, they would have spent millions of pesos in building these roads. But we did them by collecting money in social activities with the population. But no one talks about these roads built by the guerrilla and the communities. We had to make some stuffing in these areas for the road and we requested a quote to some engineering companies and they asked us for 5000 million of pesos<sup>86</sup>. And the movement and the communities did not have this money. And we had to resort to the willingness of the population, of the peasants and of the guerrilla. We spent more time, eight months. We connected *Caqueta* and *Meta* through the village of *La Uribe*. These were some works that were done although the army bombed some of these roads after the *zona de despeje* was finished by the government. They bombed a lot of bridges and roads and they destroyed them. If the guerrilla does something good it is terrorism.

If we look at the works we did in the *zona de despeje*, there were a lot, schools, also the church of the Macarena was built with our efforts, we put funding and ideas to build this church. Through a priest that is a Spanish priest, Cantalapedra, we worked with him to build this church. We dreamed of building the most beautiful church among these villages. But due to that, because he was working together with the communities, with the civil population and with the guerrilla, he was prosecuted and put in prison after the end of the *zona de despeje*<sup>87</sup>. He was very kind and he was loved by the communities, by the people, he was not shut up in his house like other priests. Instead of that he remained with the communities, giving ideas on how to solve the basic problems, about health, agriculture, and so on. From this place he was transferred to La Uribe, and he started to build the church of La Uribe, and he was captured along with other 16 peasants. He was accused of being the chief of the militias of the FARC-EP, it was in 2002. People in the region knew him very well and started protesting and mobilizing for his freedom in Lejanias, Mesetas, La Uribe, La Macarena. He spent a year and a half in prison. He was first released but he did not leave the rest of the peasants alone, he started putting lawyers, making complaints, and managed to get the rest of the peasants freed.

There have been lots of works. In the 80's, there was a total abandonment by the state, the guerrilla played a role in guiding the peasants in order to survive. If it would not

<sup>86</sup> Approximately in euros: 1.5 million Euros. Exchange rate used: 1 Euro=3500 COP

<sup>87</sup> To see more about this case: El Tiempo (2005) and Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz (2005).

have been like that they would not have survived. We trained them to construct the *pilones*<sup>88</sup>, how to grow crops. Comrade Marulanda helped a lot the regions with power plants that he designed by himself, *Pelton* turbines. He made this with wood and he brought electricity to the peasants. The very apathy of the government made possible the integration between peasants and the guerrilla.

<sup>88</sup> Pilonos seems to be a term to designate an artisanal machine for agricultural purposes.

## 4.2 Health support and environment protection

Health support and environmental protection are other social interventions that can be understood as part of the involvement of the FARC-EP in the communities' challenges. First of all I am going to speak about some healthcare services provided by the FARC-EP.

### *This is not a service, this is solidarity*

There is a pattern in the narratives I found in Havana regarding the lack of healthcare services which is, in most of the cases, due to different causes like climate conditions, distance to the main cities and villages, mobility conditions and of course, the lack of state presence among other possible causes. Pablo Atrato explains how difficult the access to healthcare has been for the communities, which is useful for the reader to understand the current conditions of some inhabitants in Colombia:

People count on us in this territory, they count on the FARC. In those areas, particularly in the Choco which is a jungle, physicians never go there. Not even to the villages<sup>89</sup>. I put a simple example, in the *municipio* of Bojayá that is very well known, there is a physician once a week. You can imagine the *veredas* and the *corregimientos* that are inside the jungle. Who goes there? Nobody! They count on the physicians and on the nurses of the guerrilla. We are the ones who help them in emergencies. This is a region where endemic illnesses like yellow fever, leishmaniosis, abound, this kind of illnesses that have a permanent character, typical from the jungle.

As it was written before, Camila Cienfuegos also recalls that the support has not been only in providing healthcare assistance, some nursing courses have been offered to the population: "We teach them the first aid practices, the basics, like doing stitches". Edison Romaña brings up other anecdote regarding health support as well:

We have done health campaigns in the region, for instance we made surgeries, treated haemorrhoids, varicose veins. We also have dentists. You can imagine a peasant who has lived 30 years without teeth and thanks to us he can have his teeth, this is something that he will never forget, that the guerrilla movement built his dentition.

Thus, health campaigns can be useful to help communities, and in this way, to "reach the heart" of the population. However, Hermes Aguilar let us think again that there is something more than the simple currency model could explain regarding this social intervention: solidarity.

<sup>89</sup> He used the term: *cabezeras municipales*.

I think one of the principles of the organization is solidarity. Solidarity because we are dealing with the unprotected population of the country. As I know myself, all the history of the guerrilla's life has been one of work with communities where one of the topics we support the most is healthcare. Support the community with healthcare. There are a lot of places where the state does not go and the guerrilla has to go. For viruses, illnesses, small surgeries, family planning, and in serious cases to help them be transported to the hospital.



Figure 4.10 Nurses of the FARC-EP. They care not only for fighters but also the populace. (Viva, Candelaria y Gonzalo, N., 2014). Re-printed with permission of the authors.

### *The FARC-EP protecting the environment?*

And what about environmentalism? Is this possible? For one part of the Colombian population, it could be very difficult to believe, as it has been difficult to believe in the different faces of the FARC-EP shown in this work. Now I am going to shortly present the environmentalist face of the Colombian rebels. A long time ago I heard from somebody that in the region of Meta there are a lot of snakes, of course most of this region is tropical with several forests and part of the jungle. The normal reaction of peasants in that region when they find a snake is to kill the animal as if it were a danger for the people, as indeed some of them are. Most of the cases they are “boas” constrictor, which do not represent any danger for the population. Conversely, they can help them to control another kind of non-loved animals like rats. But one of the fronts of the guerrilla in that area had spread the

information that this kind of animals had to be protected by the population and no one had the right to kill them. This is a simple anecdote that can reflect that there is some kind of awareness about the environment among the guerrilleros. Such awareness has been denied by the media which has reminded us, in most of the cases, the environmental consequences of bombing the fuel pipes of the multinational corporations by the guerrilla, but not the environmental degradation caused by the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources by those same corporations, which could be just as harmful —if not more— as those actions of the insurgency.

With the following anecdote, I show the reader a simple intervention by the rebels to help peasants to change traditional agricultural practices. This is what Isabella San Roque told me:

The technique used for crops in those regions implies knocking down<sup>90</sup> trees with chainsaws, and setting fire to the plot. Then many times in the strong summers this fire is spread to the mountain leaving the mountain on fire. This has a lot of environmental consequences. After that they grow the crops. Then, what we have tried is to advise the peasants that it is better to avoid destroying a lot of forest. In the past, in the time of the colonisation, there were big plots razed, 100 or 200 hectares by the *finqueros*. This is too much. Now the peasant organizations have been regulating this practice and we help them spreading this regulation. For instance, we strongly encourage the rotation of plots, I mean if someone has knocked down two plots and first one is used, next time they have to use the second one and avoid razing a new plot.

Brittain (2010) for his part says about the FARC-EP: “Realizing the degradation of land and water facilities in the countryside, the FARC-EP has given much attention to ecological protection when using local resources” (p. 183). And suggests that “The guerrillas have an intimate connection with the Amazon that dates back to the 1970s. Over this time the insurgency has witnessed environmental degradation as a result of corporate exploitation in the quest for profit maximization” (p. 185). Based on previous works, he also refers to the FARC-EP’s struggle against “illegal fishing, unsustainable hunting and logging and destruction of endangering species” and for the conservation of the agricultural border in the Macarena region” (Satchell, 1999, p. 41 in Brittain, 2010, p. 186).

For this work, I have few interesting anecdotes regarding environment protection by the FARC-EP told by Pablo Atrato, who seems to be a passionate commander in protecting the environment.

<sup>90</sup> She used the Spanish verb *tumbar*.

*Pablo Atrato: 'Go away' deforesters*

In 2013, with the 57<sup>th</sup> front of the FARC, we made a cleaning of the river *Truandó*. It is thought that this river is one of the projects of the Empire<sup>91</sup>, and of the Colombian development plan. Through this river there was an old project of more than 50 years to connect the Atlantic ocean with the Pacific ocean. I mean, to join the Atlantic with the Pacific by the *Atrato* and *Truandó* rivers. Then, there is a project called interoceanic channel Atrato Truandó<sup>92</sup>. And this river, due to the indiscriminate exploitation of wood resources, was effectively damaged. It was practically unseaworthy. Then we proposed a cleaning this river. We arranged and planned with the communities, and during fifteen days, we worked twelve hours per day, with one thousand people, one thousand! One thousand people working on the river. We had some guerrilleros helping them and directing the work. We spent more or less 600 million pesos<sup>93</sup> in the cleaning of this river. We bought supplies, fuel. There were 120 outboard motors, more than 200 chainsaws cleaning the river. And food for more than one thousand people is not an easy thing.

Among the things we contributed to the community for the cleaning of the river,... we bought 100 *tambores*<sup>94</sup> (barrels) of 60 gallons of fuel in Quibdo, and the police in Beté confiscated the fuel. This was the contribution of the police! 20 barrels were taken by the police. Because the police said they were the fuel for the guerrilla. And they did not return the fuel.

And look at what happened. When we were almost finished with the cleaning the food was over. Then we found additional money and we gave it to buy some animals, some cows in Rio Sucio. And when the young people, members of the *consejo comunitario* arrived at the village, they were captured by the army. The army said that these cows were for the guerrilla. This was a very interesting anecdote. They said to the army:

—The money was given by the guerrilla, we cannot deny it because all the people know that we are cleaning the river, and because we do not have enough income to buy these six animals, but these cows are not for the guerrilla, these are for the people who are cleaning the river.

The army did not have another option but to let them go with the animals. They released them. It was very funny because when they arrived at the encampment they told us what they faced and all the people were laughing. There were no reprisals, because they also benefit from the wood exploitation.

<sup>91</sup> He is speaking about the USA.

<sup>92</sup> "The Atrato at one time attracted considerable attention as a feasible route for a trans-isthmian canal, but any such plans were abandoned in favour of the ". Atrato River. En.wikipedia.org. For more detailed information have a look at the document: "El canal interoceánico al nivel Atrato-Truandó y las hidroeléctricas pueden cambiar la suerte del país" (Pinzón, 2009).

<sup>93</sup> Approximately in euros: 171.000 Euros. Exchange rate used: 1 Euro=3500 COP

<sup>94</sup> *Tambor* is a word to speak about a container for liquids.

I want to tell you another story. The case of the national park *Los Katios*. This park has a border with the natural park Darien in Panama. If the FARC did not intervene, this park would not exist anymore. There are mafias of the wood trade, this is a mafia that is based in *Turbo* and in *Quibdó*. They put more than 200 chainsaws in this park to take away all the wood. If we did not intervene, stopping and kicking out all the *aserradores*<sup>95</sup> the park would have disappeared. The fauna would not exist there anymore. The army, the police, all of them were benefitting from this business.

The intervention was: first, the community told us that they [the mafia] were not going to leave anything. In this park there is an indigenous community, from the ethnic group<sup>96</sup> that returned eight years ago. They were driven out when the area was established as a natural park. They were wandering somewhere and they made a deal with the State and now they are living inside the park again. They are the people who have taken care of the park. They are over the Cacarica river. People told us that the mafias were cutting down trees and deforesting the park and no one intervened. We made a census and they were not people from the region. They were from Turbo, from Apartadó, from Quibdó. And hundreds of pieces of wood were running through the Atrato river and no one said anything. We stopped this. *¡Pa fuera!*<sup>97</sup>. This is something that people in the region are very thankful for.

<sup>95</sup> Those who use chainsaws to cut down trees.

<sup>96</sup> <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waunana>

<sup>97</sup> Colloquial expression to say "go away".



## 5 The construction of local hegemony

***We live in the world that your propaganda made  
But where you think you are strong you are weak  
Your lies tell us the truth we will use against you  
Your secrecy shows us where we will strike  
Your weapons reveal your fear for all to see  
From Cairo to Quito a new world is forming  
The power of people armed with the truth***

Julian Assange in the song "Multiviral" of Calle 13

Lichbach (1994) emphasises that "selective incentives supplemented by ideology can be effective; selective incentives alone are counterproductive" (p. 385). Following this statement, Lichbach elaborates: "Rural guerrilla warfare thus mixes politics and crime, the pursuit of public goods and the pursuit of private goods, the search for social justice and the search for selective incentives" (p. 398). In our specific case, the *farianos* apparently are very aware of this reality. As I have explained before, the FARC-EP interventions can be only understood together with a political-ideological activity designed to gain support for the taking of power. This can be possible only through gaining a local hegemony that justifies their political struggle and that gains the support the majority of the population (at least the majority of the local population) in favour of their ultimate dream. Mampilly (2011) adds that the process of achieving legitimacy incorporates the "production of political power through methods other than the provision of goods, including, commonly, the adoption of cultural symbols" (p. 56)

Other interventions of the FARC-EP designed to achieve local hegemony are related with *social organization and leadership* in the communities. These interventions involve several actions developed by guerrilla members in order to organize the community in such a way that they (the rebels) can be supported logistically, ideologically and politically, as it was explained before. Those interventions are focused specifically on political education, culture, communal living and education in general (teaching different skills and abilities to the population). All of these interventions show the level of leadership and the commitment to the peasantry acquired by the rebels.

### *Teaching basic but important skills*

Brittain (2010) has highlighted how important education is for the FARC-EP's rebels: "As Colombia's dominant class excludes the poor from a formal education, the FARC-EP attempts to create a platform from which those marginalized can learn, critically think, and broaden their social positioning through rational endeavours." (p. 174)

Visiting a FARC-EP encampment, he tells an interesting account of the educational spaces of the rebels:

The encampment schools were plastered with pictures of Che Guevara and past commandants of the FARC-EP, and were referred to as “cultural centers.” They were heavily used and resembled a jungle-like revolutionary museum; filled with pamphlets, books, music, and information related to Marxism, Colombia’s political economy, and Latin American society. The centers were also outfitted with a public television and a stereo/radio. Apart from these existed public civilian education centers, which were in many ways similar to the “cultural centers” in their simple construction. They remained civilian-based and all teaching materials were removed after each lesson. These centers were built in semi-open areas where a small portion of land had been cleared and an oversized-camouflage tarp/brush acted as a roof (they were essentially small huts or shacks that housed no more than 50 people). While the overall structure of the building matched that of the “cultural centers” (benches, a blackboard, some FARC-EP publications, and so on), electronic goods were seldom provided as electricity is often unavailable. Males and females, of various ethnicities and ages, attended classes. Depending on the time, classes differed in ratio of gender and age. Afternoons saw more women and youths whereas early evenings witnessed teenagers, equal proportions of men and women, and adults ranging from their 20s to 50s. (p. 175)

Additionally, using an interview of a female peasant, Brittain recalls the involvement of the rebels in schools’ development:

The guerrillas have also established schools to teach our children and any adults who want to learn about reading, writing, math, history, etc. You would be surprised, but math can come in very handy for many of us because of the rates of illiteracy and the lack of education in the countryside. The state has negated any forms of education in the countryside for decades and it is only through the FARC’s schools that someone in the rural areas can have a chance of learning. (p. 107)

All the fronts of the FARC-EP are organized by commissions, depending on the tasks developed; there is a commission for exploration, a political commission and an organizational commission, among others. Commander Hermes Aguilar clarifies what the *organizational commission* is and its involvement in political education:

In every level of the FARC-EP there are organizational commissions, from the basic units, the companies, the columns, the fronts and the blocks, which define the policies to follow in a particular community. (...) Once the exploration works are done, to determine the first analysis of the region and the people who live there, you are going to find sympathisers. This allows us to propose to the communities an organizational work on every level, like *juntas*

*comunales*, [communal board], *juntas de comite minero*, [Mining committee], *juntas ganaderas*, [livestock committees] or *party militants*<sup>98</sup>. The population starts asking for political orientation, for education, and then I have to take a political topic to this community to discuss based on the latest news. People ask us for courses each 15 days, or 20 days, and because they are small organizations we can give a course in three days, and then they go there and make their notes, they discuss, analyse, and propose us additional courses. We have basic, medium and high level. High level is for the leaders of bigger areas, for people who have been in the basic and medium level courses before. There, we study philosophy, economy, political organization, or the topic they request us.

Pablo Atrato, for his part, emphasises the importance of improving the organizational level of the communities:

The FARC are a political organization which has taken up arms and in consequence we act accordingly. Whenever we go to the communities, we take our political message, our ideological conception, this is always our approach. Fundamentally, from the beginning, we approach the people trying to improve their level of organization and their level of political awareness, so that they have a better comprehension of what is happening in the country. This are the basics. To understand why we have taken up arms and our political motives, what our development model is.

### *The communal councils*

The common thread that has been identified in the interviews is the FARC-EP's support for traditional and legal forms of social organization in the regions where they are present. Those legal forms are, in official terms, *non-profit civic organizations* whose main goal is "to lead and to impulse communitarian processes in neighbourhoods and *veredas*<sup>99</sup>, trough participation in the daily life in the community", (*Ministerio del Interior*, 2016). These organizations have different names depending on the social groups involved. Thus, for peasant communities is the *Junta de Acción Comunal* (Communal council, henceforth JAC or *junta*), for black communities it is the *Consejo comunitario*, (Community council) and for indigenous communities, the *Cabildo indigena*, as it was described by Pablo Atrato.

The support for the creation and development of these organizations has been a key part of the guerrilla's strategy, with a clear purpose of organizing communities and dealing with them. "They formed a kind of council, together with representatives from each of the *veredas* (rural neighbourhoods), in which the representatives of the party and of the youth and women's organization also participated" (Gilhodés, 1970, p. 249 in Brittain, 2010, p. 11). However, for Pearce

<sup>98</sup> He is speaking about militants of PCCC.

<sup>99</sup> *Vereda* is a kind of territorial subdivision in Colombian rural areas similar than municipalities in urban areas.

(1990), the original JACs “were in fact strategic state-induced mechanisms created to pacify class-conscious peasants. Far from organic, they were created by government officials and used by the local elite to procure increased political clout and/or garnish centralized state funds”. (Pearce, 1990, p. 149 in Brittain, 2010, p. 161).

Either useful for the regime or for the rebels, the truth is that, as Walter Mendoza declares without hesitation: the political activity [of the FARC-EP movement] is developed through these organizations, showing us that the relation with those social organizations is important to develop their political strategy. That is why, despite them being social organizations, completely legalised and formalised, they have been persecuted by the state and have been seen as enemies of some local administrations and by the army in some cases. And of course, depending on their political achievements, they have been military targets of paramilitary bands (Fensuagro, 2016).

Thus, these JACs have been created with the purpose of strengthening their organizational capabilities. Camila Cienfuegos explains the FARC-EP’s involvement in the development of these juntas with these words:

We make a work of accompaniment to the communities, which is related with the development of the *Juntas de Accion Comunal*. Since many of these communities are not versed in the management of the juntas, then, we help them to request the *personería jurídica* (legal status). And starting from this point we work side by side with these communities, depending on the development plan they have.

Pablo Atrato, an Afro-Colombian commandant of the FARC-EP speaks as well about the *Consejo comunitario* in the following words:

After the 1991 constitution, a different space for organization was created, which is known as *Consejo comunitario*, that is to say, that part of the territories is collectivised. I mean, the communities in the department of Choco, in its majority, are owners of the land, not in an individual way but in a collective way through law number 70<sup>100</sup>. (...) it was positive; it is a step forward, now the state has been working to take back this law, to annul it with the purpose of favouring businessmen<sup>101</sup>.

To the question of whether there are FARC-EP’s members or not in the *Consejo comunitario*, Atrato answers us:

<sup>100</sup> Congreso de Colombia (1989).

<sup>101</sup> Once the government revokes the current law about collective property of the land, several multinational corporations would be interested in the natural resources of this region.

No, no, no. Generally, we do not participate in these *consejos*, we try to help them, to guide them, but, through the *organizational commission* we try to improve the living conditions of these communities through proposals we make and we deal with them

To complement this, Walter Mendoza clarifies that their involvement in the JACs is not hidden:

We, in the regions where we have a direct presence (...) our participation is open, there, there is no secrecy, because...it has to be said, we are the government in these areas, we live there constantly, and we have been there in the last 51 years

It is clear for them that the guerrilla offers advice to those communal organizations, trying to give them, one way or another, more autonomy, as Brittain (2010) has put "JACs have demonstrated, how, when linked with the guerrillas, rural class consciousness has the potential to transform a society" (p. 169).

### *Civico-fariano work*

Speaking about the kind of activities developed in these communities, Walter Mendoza continues:

For instance, we say: we are going to do a *civico-fariano*<sup>102</sup> work [between civilians and FARC-EP], then we help the peasant clean the *caserio*<sup>103</sup>, organize a sports field, build a soccer pitch, or maintenance and construction of roads, or maintenance of *caminos veredales*<sup>104</sup>, ...or even build bridges.

In the meantime, Isabella San Roque goes in depth into how the social dynamics in some rural communities work in order to justify their interventions, highlighting the learning processes of communitarian work:

The capitalism makes it so that all the people are thinking in their own farm, people are thinking in *tumbar*<sup>105</sup>, to build their *rancho*<sup>106</sup>, but sometimes the collective dynamics are too small. When there is a guerrilla presence, generally there are more elements. Then, there is more communitarian work, and for instance, the *zona de despeje* stimulated this dynamic a

<sup>102</sup> Fariano(a) is a common term to designate all people or objects that belong in the FARC-EP environment.

<sup>103</sup> Hamlet.

<sup>104</sup> Unpaved roads in the countryside.

<sup>105</sup> It is a popular expression to define the act of cutting down trees and bushes, and of razing a piece of land to put it ready to cultivate.

<sup>106</sup> Rancho is used to speak about a small and cheap house built by peasants with materials found in the region, mainly wood. It is different from the "casa" (house or mansion) built by big land owners, with more luxury and much more expensive. Do not get confused with the term rancho in English to refer to big farms of landowners.

lot, because *trabajo civico* [civilian work] was generated. It means that people go out one or two days, and develop works for the community, for instance the construction of a bridge, the construction of a dam, the cleaning of a road; all the works required by the *vereda*. Also, the support to productive projects, for example, chicken farming, with more work by women than men, you know that this activity in these regions is more an activity for women than for men. (...) and with these projects people learned how to work in a team, which is something very difficult to learn.

A fact that is interesting to highlight is that most of the testimonies offered by the interviewees speak about the support of the guerrilla for the self-organization and autonomy of the communities. That means that the direction-leadership of the FARC-EP is not oriented to ensure the obedience of the population, neither does it represent an order that population has to obey. This was explained by Hermes Aguilar in the following terms:

The same community starts telling us: we lack a school here, so we have to create the school. There is no health centre, we have to build the health centre, and then the joint work [FARC-EP and communities] started in order to define how to build the local and to train the nurses, and everything that is needed.

### *Social organization and leadership*

Victoria Sandino shares a remarkable anecdote that can be useful to paint the picture of communal organization attained with the support of the guerrilla:

The regime strongly pushed a project that was created by the funding of international aid called "*familias guardabosques*" (forest rangers), (USAID, 2004). In the beginning, it was planned with a different objective, but the communities changed the goals of this project. Supposedly this project was designed to stop the growing crops for illegal use, I mean *coca*, *mariguana* y *amapola* [Coca, marijuana and opium poppy]. But in the practice, the real interest of the regime was that these people would become informants. Then, in the contract was written, if the people did not report on every event in the region, about anomalies, they would lost their agreed-to salary. And what were the anomalies? The presence of the guerrilla in the zone, and so, they should denounce those anomalies. In that time, they received more than a minimum salary per month. So, they were the same peasants employed as forest rangers. Then we made a socialization<sup>107</sup>, and an in-depth discussion of the program in each of the communities. We said to them:

<sup>107</sup> Here, the term socialization is used by Victoria to speak about the act of spreading the discussion about the problem faced among members of the community.

—You definitely are growing illegal crops, the government said that they are interested in ending illegal crops, so are we, and you also want to go out of this illegality, then, how can we do it?

We can do it through projects, thought development programs, but not from the point of view of mere social assistance. Because people who had never had this income spent this money on anything, in the bar, in getting drunk or buying unnecessary things.

The case is that discussing with the communities, we agreed that people should make a list of demands, and a modification of the program in such a way that income was not hinged on them being informants, but that our demand was to develop the community.

Opposite of the traditional discourse in which guerrilla has been seen as an actor that displaces people from their regions, Pablo Atrato told us a different reality:

In the region, there was one of the biggest displacements that have happened in Colombia in recent times. It was the displacement of the *municipio*<sup>108</sup> of *Rio Sucio, Choco*, in the basin of the *Cacarica River*<sup>109</sup>, *Giguamiando, Curvarado*. In that basin, there was a serious problem of displacement generated by paramilitary groups that displaced the majority of the population of these communities. The FARC started to work hard in order to return the people to these communities, but this had to be accompanied by a project of agricultural development in order to safeguard the return of the people. (...) it was not only the problem of the crops of the *pancoger*<sup>110</sup>, but also to resolve the problem of housing, because the *bloque Hermes Cardenas*<sup>111</sup> of the paramilitaries burned the *caserío*, and then we had to start from zero. Then, with a few people that remained in the area, we started to speak with them to motivate those who had left the region to return. People from *Pavarandó, Turbo* and *Apartadó*. And people started moving back, coming to these places were the people were gathered, and people were returning step by step. And now, people are still returning to these territories. (...) The FARC were very involved in this process, it was a difficult situation because what we did was dealing with the communities, and we had to plan this return with them.

### *Construction of cultural hegemony*

An additional and important intervention undertaken by the guerrilla, which is very useful in the struggle for hegemony in those areas, is regarding culture. Music, arts, and other cultural

<sup>108</sup> *Municipio* is a public administration division in the regions. In English, it can be interpreted like Municipality.

<sup>109</sup> The Colombian state was convicted by the Inter-American Court of human rights (HRIC) as responsible for several human rights violations in this displacement. To check the sentence, have a look at: Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (2013).

<sup>110</sup> Food crops for their subsistence.

<sup>111</sup> For a detailed description of the displacement see the reference: Verdad Abierta (2014).

expressions are some of the *ideological tools* that any party has in order to exert influence if it wants to become (in Marxist terms) the *ruling group*. Brittain (2010) considers that in order to avoid the capitalist influence and media manipulation in rural areas under guerrilla control, “...the FARC-EP have tried to nurture an alternative culture outside foreign and domestic class control. Establishing a cultural alternative to imperialism creates the potential for a more collectively conscious opposition to arise”, as well as, he describes that “artists, musicians, playwrights, poets, and writers are frequently asked to voice their feelings and share their gifts with others” (p. 200).



Figure 5.11 FARC-EP’s singer of traditional peasant music. He leads the group *Horizonte Fariano* very popular among peasant communities and fighters. (Viva, Candelaria y Gonzalo, N., 2014). Re printed with permission of the authors.

The creation of a common sense is then strongly mediated by culture, in those regions the FARC-EP have been promoting their own influence through music<sup>112</sup>, cultural events and the like. Pablo Atrato describes a specific anecdote related with the *encuentros interétnicos* (inter-ethnic encounters) strongly supported by the rebels:

I remember, some years ago, we did in Antioquia, in some places of Antioquia, *Encuentros interétnicos*<sup>113</sup>, with afros, the black, the indigenous, the Embera, and the *paisas* as it is said there<sup>114</sup>, we did two or three encounters of about two thousand people, lasting four or five

<sup>112</sup> To know some of the musical works of the FARC-EP that are frequently listened to in some rural areas check some websites in the references: Tribuna Popular (2011), Barriga, Juan (2015) and Compañía Victor Saavedra.

<sup>113</sup> Greeting of Pablo Atrato to the inter-ethnic encounter of 2016: Redacción Colombia Informa (2013).

<sup>114</sup> *Paisa* is a word used to designate those who were born in the region of Antioquia. It is a common popular expression that does have a regional representation of a specific culture, values and stereotypes.



days. This is very important to culturally integrate the communities and to improve their relation with the territory, because they are from the same region (...) and then, it was very fruitful because it helps to improve their living conditions and their organizational skills. We also participate in the encounters with theatre plays written by us. The guerrilla participated with poetry, singers, guitarists.



Figure 5.12 FARC-EP's musicians. Accordion combined with rifles. (Viva, Candelaria y Gonzalo, N., 2014). Re printed with permission of the authors.

### *Support for peasant mobilisation*

As a result of these interventions, the FARC-EP, and the guerrillas in general, seem to gain with the self-organization of peasant communities. There are no anecdotes associated with their direct involvement in peasant strikes. I suppose that they want to preserve their clandestine tactic of being involved in social struggles. However, we know and it is highly recognised by several social organizations, by scholars and of course, by the intelligence apparatus of the Colombian

government, that the FARC-EP have been heavily involved in peasant strikes. Brittain speaks, for instance, about processes of land redistribution led by the FARC-EP:

A rare investigative piece that was published by the Washington Post in October 2003 reported that during the previous two years the FARC had broken up ten large ranches in southern Meta and redistributed the smaller parcels of land to subsistence farmers. The guerrillas have carried out similar programs in Caquetá, Putumayo and other regions (Leech, 2005 in Brittain, 2010, p. 102)



Figure 5.13 Dance by the guerrilla's fighters. (Viva, Candelaria y Gonzalo, N., 2014). Re-printed with permission of the authors.

Thus, the strong peasant movement created in Colombia cannot be disconnected from the conflict dynamics and also from the political work as one of the tactics of the guerrillas. Furthermore, the anecdotes shown in this work could demonstrate that a self-management of the communities is

developed by these social interventions. As we can conclude from these experiences, the effectiveness of self-organisation of communities and other social processes as products of having the rebel presence and facilitation is something that makes them strong in comparison with other communities in other regions. It is clear as well that the guerrilla has accomplished an important role in discovering these community talents or capabilities.

Now, it is time to remind an important story which could show the reader the kind of activities developed by the rebels to strengthen such peasant organization.



Figure 5.14 Play by the rebels. (Viva, Candelaria y Gonzalo, N., 2014). Re-printed with permission of the authors.

*Camila Cienfuegos: The work with communities is 'something very beautiful'*

We started giving nursing workshops to some communities, teaching the basics, like giving injections, taking blood pressure, doing stitches, immobilising broken bones, for when people fall playing football, or fall from a horse. In general, how to give the first aid while

they take the sick person to a hospital. You can imagine that hospitals are very far away and if someone needs urgent treatment, this knowledge is very useful to survive. Then this course is something that people like a lot.

We also implemented work with traditional medicine, I mean medicinal plants. In the communities, there are people who know a lot about medicinal plants. There are grandmothers that have an important knowledge about that, and then with them we tried to share those experiences:

—*Compañera*<sup>115</sup>, what do you know about medicinal plants.

And they told us: “*compañera*, I know that this plant is useful for something, for stomach ache, or for tooth pain, for the fever”. Sometimes we do not imagine how enriching the knowledge of these people is, they have a lot of knowledge but the majority of the people ignore them. Then we worked with them to write down the recipe, how the preparation of the medicine goes, how it grows, and like this, we were exchanging this knowledge with other communities. And a book was created with all those recipes, and the plants were grown. Finally, we taught that not all the medicine has to be bought, and that the nature can offer us a more sane and natural medicine and that it can help those forgotten regions.

One got inside the houses greeting the women, and some of them asked us to help them with their husbands, because there are several cases of mistreatment of children and women and then, we try to speak with the husband in order to tell him that this behaviour is not correct. There are so many men in the countryside that, because of this patriarchal state, believe that they can hit their women or their children. We said to them:

—Look, *compañero*, you cannot do that, she is your partner, she is the mother of your children, and the familiar violence is too hard because your children see it.

So, this is more or less the kind of situations we commonly faced in the houses. In this way, we asked them if they know about alternative medicine, about medicinal plants. And some of them start telling the *comadre*<sup>116</sup> if she knows another recipe or plant, or the neighbour, and then, the project was spread by the same people. We started recovering all these notes, some of them without orthography or badly written but the idea was there. We classified all the notes, we corrected them and we started to put all these recipes in a book, we made pictures of the plants as well.

This process was very beautiful. You can imagine going door to door and asking these women for recipes and putting all these stories together in a book, and how these women felt when they could see their recipes in the book. This book was an example for other organizations who wanted to do to something similar.

<sup>115</sup> Typical term used by left-wing militants and followers in Latin America, the FARC-EP use the term *comrade* only for members of their organization, to speak about the rest of their sympathizers or followers they use *compañero/a*.

<sup>116</sup> In the catholic religion, it is used to designate the person that you choose as a godfather or “godmother” in the baptism of your children. The he or she would be respectively the *compadre* or the *comadre*.

After that, we made another experiment. We had already the book, we made copies of it and we gave them to the communities, and it was a trial project that was spread in other *veredas*, and it had a very good reception by the community. And people were very happy of having their book and seeing themselves as authors of the book. Each recipe appeared in the book with the name of the person who gave us the recipe. This was very nice for them; they felt very proud of their work. And then, there was something like a competition of seeing who had the best garden with medicinal plants.

The book was not published in the name of the FARC, the book was from them, and we only helped them organize and develop the idea and print the copies of the book. It was very gratifying for our organization to be able to rescuing this traditional knowledge.

But, that is not all we do. We were also responsible for repairing the roads, we built sport fields, we organised the population to make a communal *caseto*<sup>117</sup>, and then, we lent them our mules and chainsaws, and some of our comrades went there to work, we made a "*minga*"<sup>118</sup> and we worked together with the communities. It is a benefit for them, it is what we want to show, that people have to be the owners of what they are creating. So, each *finquero*<sup>119</sup> gave a small contribution to the community, for instance, they paid one day's wages of one or two of their workers to go to work for the *junta de acción comunal*. Then we made a lunch, one took the potatoes, the other one took the yuccas, the other the beef, the other one a chicken. And then, we worked very hard from 8 hours till 15 hours, and at this hour we played a soccer game. Well..., they played, we could not do that, we organised the match or were the referee.

Additionally, we made workshops about family planning, because so many people do not know this because of the patriarchal education, so many women do not know about contraceptive methods because they have never had a talk about that.

Definitely, the work with the communities is something very beautiful<sup>120</sup>, and it is something that the guerrilla has incremented a lot and we have helped to forge in people the sense of how to live in community. We have never been authoritarian, to say for instance, we are here to implement this or these are the rules that must be used by this community. Our work is to help them to organise themselves, to orient them, that is why we call us as a *politico-military* organization, and this is the work that so many people do not recognise about the FARC.

<sup>117</sup> Small construction based in one common space for meetings with services like toilets and kitchen.

<sup>118</sup> *Minga* is a traditional way of working in indigenous communities, which has a huge influence in several places in Colombia and in Latin America. The basic idea is to make a solidarity meeting to work in something to achieve a specific goal. The meeting is not to speak about the idea, it is to work on something and finally a plate of food and drinks are given to the participants.

<sup>119</sup> *Finquero* is a term used to designate the owner of a piece of land. Here, the speaker is referring to small or medium owners.

<sup>120</sup> *Beautiful* is a common expression used by this woman to express her feelings of something that is enjoyable, gratifying for her.

## 6 FARC-EP's reflections on their interventions and their expectations on the peace talks

***Mirando flores en la patria Buena,  
se deshacen las penas en tus felices manos,  
los niños pobres que van a la escuela,  
hermosamente prueban que no luchaste en vano.***  
*(Looking at the flowers of the beautiful homeland,  
the sorrows melt away on your happy hands,  
the poor children are going to the school,  
beautifully proving that you did not fight in vain)*  
Julian Conrado's song: "Fabricando estrellas"

There was a very important change in the way the FARC-EP have related to the public sphere during the peace talks. One of the most remarkable changes is that other figures, middle-ranking cadres, and other members of the FARC-EP, have been protagonists or have accomplished a more visible role. In particular the role of guerrilla women has been very noticeable in these peace talks where almost the half of the peace delegation of the rebels is composed by women. As a consequence of this change, many rebels have been expressing their feelings and points of view in several media, interviews and videos. In the following lines, some of these testimonies are presented, containing reflections about their interventions in rural communities and rural areas and their expectations on the peace talks' achievements.

Looking at these previous accounts, one can witness some characteristics of the rural society that the FARC-EP wanted to create in those areas under their control<sup>121</sup>. Several interventions have been done with positive and negative implications. As the reader can see in the following lines, self-criticism can be difficult for the rebels. Speaking about their own mistakes and about the consequences of these processes and being critical with themselves can also be difficult, taking into account the management of the information and the need of secrecy regarding their experiences. Despite that, I was able to find some interesting reflections to paint a picture of what they have done in rural areas.

To give a first example, Pablo Atrato highlights that there were failures in these processes, but more than failures these are "slow processes of construction". He narrates to us this reflection about a process of encouraging peasants to grow food instead of living from the exploitation of wood:

<sup>121</sup> The general and partial agreements and the other main documents produced in the frame of the peace talks by the FARC-EP are the main documents if the reader wants to explore in depth what they want in terms of rural development.

We started doing a work of convincing peasants to grow food again, for instance to convince them to grow green bananas. Many of them preferred to live only from the exploitation of wood in this region. Some of them told us:

—I prefer to go to another region than to stop chopping wood.

Then a region fundamentally for agriculture had become a region with a heavy mining component. They were indiscriminately deforesting the region. Then, in many communities our advice was traumatic, but it was not an imposition by the FARC, it was an agreement process with the *consejos comunitarios*. But some of the people in the bases did not understand this, because they were committed with the outside dealers who pushed them in several ways, like paying in advance or giving a chainsaw, fuel, food among other things. Then, there was an outside pressure, which made the understanding of the phenomenon that has been occurring more difficult. So, some sectors resisted, but the same communities took self-control of this problem. For instance, it was said by the *consejo*:

—Those who have not grown the two hectares of food per family for self-consumption cannot cut wood.

Thus, it was some kind of pressure on the families. And in some cases, the same communities enforced more rules, for instance, once, a member of some community proposed to me:

—Comrade Pablo, we can put in place an additional rule: those young people that have families and do not have a house cannot cut wood until they have their own house.

This process was very difficult but finally people understood this. Once a woman came to the encampment with ten *envueltos*<sup>122</sup> and she told me:

—Comrade Pablo they are from the maize you made us grow.

Now people understood the importance to grow food, but it was hard. Today the thing is different, from 1996 almost till the 2010 the food supply was very hard, it was in crisis. The paramilitaries, the displacement of peasants, did not permit to enter food to the region. And then this process to come back growing food was very hard.

Camila Cienfuegos in her interview was very sensitive speaking about the damages of glyphosate fumigation in rural communities and the environmental degradation. She also talked about her worries about the region in which she was living as a guerrilla fighter and the impossibility of making a change there, which includes the suffering caused to the civil population by their enemies:

There are zones where there is disastrous poverty, where children suffer of hunger and malnutrition, because there is no way to grow food. Fumigations have left ecological damage and irreparable damage to the soil. There are genetic malformations; there are children with skin afflictions, women and elder people with asthma, water contamination, and death of

<sup>122</sup> Typical delicious recipe of cooked corn flour covered by green banana leaves, sometimes with cheese and a traditional sweet named “bocadillo”.

cattle. After an aerial spraying with glyphosate, those communities suffer a catastrophe, because everything dries. It becomes like a desert, the glyphosate is the worst thing that can happen in a community, and it kills everything, including hope.

It is the same with the crops of eucalypt and pine trees of *Carton de Colombia*<sup>123</sup>, they have sterilized so much the land. There are places when there is no water anymore. Multinational investment has killed nature, the native forests. I have been in regions where there are so many eucalypt crops. Furthermore, there is a big exploitation of the workers; there are very bad working conditions in this company. This is in the Valle del Cauca. In Barragán and Santa Lucía you can find families living there in very hard conditions. Children that have cut their fingers because of this job, with working accidents that nobody pays for. This is very painful. *Carton de Colombia* with so much money and those families living in shacks. The labour force is very cheap. How is it possible that a child cannot go to the school because he must help his parents in their job? It also produces social damage, because the paramilitaries come due to this investment. They say that it is development but in reality, there is no development. Only tragedy is left, the hunger, the misery and the land without productivity to the communities.

Unfortunately, in some cases we cannot do much. Sometimes there is foreign investment with big power, and when we try to stop or at least speak with them to improve the workers' living conditions, at least a fair salary, these people send the paramilitaries, or the armed forces. And this is the response to the claim of the basic needs of the communities. (...)

When the paramilitary or the army campaign comes, civilians are accused of being members of the guerrilla, when people are only working because there are no more places to work and to live. They start involving everyone and committing massacres. And the massacres paramilitaries have committed with the support of the official army have been disastrous and they have been painful for us. It is painful that one way out of dealing with the guerrilla, out of dealing with this force, with this political and armed organization, is killing the masses, these people who support us. And this is not a mistake of the FARC, it is a clear strategy to destroy the popular uprising in order to weaken us.

Victoria Sandino on the other hand makes her reflection showing the changes they had to make to shape their organization and to face those new realities produced by the scaling of the armed confrontation.

<sup>123</sup> Carton de Colombia is a company which produces paper and exploits wood in several regions of Colombia. <http://www.smurfitkappa.com/vHome/co>



Victoria Sandino on the other hand makes her reflection showing the changes they had to make to shape their organization and to face those new realities produced by the scaling of the armed confrontation.

It has changed, but the essence is the same because the guerrilla has always needed a social base and the communities are its social base. Then, support to the communities and from the communities to the guerrilla have always existed. A long time ago, we were only working in conflict resolution, but over the years we did additional things. We can say that in some regions we were a co-government. Then, we were not only the authority in these regions but also, we spoke about development plans, about the projects that communities were developing. Thus, in that sense it has changed. Additionally, our organizers developed political work in the regions since we have the Clandestine Communist Party and the Bolivarian Movement which are led by the guerrilla. We have also environmental rules, which have been built with the communities, and have to do with environmental protection. In other words, the guerrilla was legislating. We had the law 001 which is about agrarian reform, the law 002 which is about the tax levied to the rich people, the tax for peace, and the 003, the anticorruption law. For the communities, the 001 and the 003 were fundamental because they gave them guarantees to get rid of the corruption of the state at every level. The *municipios* are full of those big 1733733078 *caciques* that used to buy the votes through giving presents to the population.

Edison Romaña reflects about how far the FARC-EP have changed over time as well:

We have changed a lot. There has been an advance. 35 years ago, the guerrilla movement remained in the mountains; in practice it was not as offensive as in recent years in military terms. At the time, it was not so much in touch with the masses. Then, it was a process till Uribe's agreement<sup>124</sup>. After this agreement, the guerrilla started a process of more integration with the masses, with other left-wing movements, even the well-known political party Patriotic Union was born. It grew up so much. Day by day the guerrilla movement has advanced.

At the time of Caguan the guerrilla movement was in all the national territory. There were so many works developed. But there was a change in the application of Plan Colombia, in the head of Uribe<sup>125</sup>. Eight years of repression and fascism of Uribe's government. The paramilitaries sprung up. With them came a big repression not only against the social movements and workers' unions but also against the guerrilla movement, against peasant

<sup>124</sup> He is speaking about the agreement in La Uribe in the department of Meta. It was the first attempt to achieve a peace agreement with the Colombian government.

<sup>125</sup> Alvaro Uribe's government.

communities, by stealing animals and land from the peasants. Of course, it was an unequal war, it was an asymmetric war. Because it is imperialism helping the Colombian oligarchy with all the resources, with the purpose of destroying the guerrilla. We cannot say that we have advanced continuously. We have had setbacks. Twelve years of strong confrontation influenced the way we relate with communities. There were bombings to the meetings of the guerrilla with the peasants. And then, in order to protect them, the guerrilla was dissociated from the civil population, so we had to work with them in a clandestine way, taking different measures.

The peace talks in Havana, Cuba, have demonstrated a high commitment by the rebels of the FARC-EP to achieve a lasting peace in Colombia. It is also noticeable that the rebels have had lots of discussion with civil society, left-wing activists and social organizations about how to prepare a new stage of peace in which a progressive government can be reached with and by these progressive political forces. Several worries and expectations can be identified in the rebels' narratives.

For instance, to start with an important reflection, Walter Mendoza considers that the state should solve specific and concrete problems of the population and they have to be prepared to be the state. He also highlights some specific observations about what they are going to do in a peace-building stage:

If we sign a trust peace agreement, that guarantees our ability to legally participate in politics, for sure we have to focus on everything regarding management and government. And we have to focus on how we are going to support communities, not only in the countryside, but also in the cities, in the villages. Peace can be done with reforms; there is no other way to achieve peace. We have told this to the government. For as long as the government does not solve the problems of the people there will be no peace. Which are the most essential problems? The basic problems that have existed for a hundred years. One, the land for the peasants, the *Comprehensive Rural Reform*<sup>126</sup> which is the first point of the agenda; 2) healthcare; 3) housing; 4) education; 5) jobs and 6) the right to recreation, to leisure. For example, this problem of the coca crops. Now, they [the Colombian government] have sounded the alarms that coca crops have increased again, but it has to be like that. While there exists a demand, there exists production. Why? Because the government has done absolutely nothing to substitute the crops of coca, opium poppy and marijuana. To substitute them, not to eradicate them, or to fumigate them which is the repressive part of this policy. We have said that with this policy, it cannot be solved. To produce a *carga de maiz*, one peasant spends twice the amount of money that he receives from selling it. A cow for example, one peasant invests 2 million pesos to maintain one cow and later someone

<sup>126</sup> In Spanish, the original name is *Reforma Rural Integral*

pays 1.5 million for it<sup>127</sup>. Then, there is no other different option than to grow coca or marijuana. They invest less and have more profit. In this way, this problem cannot be solved, it is bullshit!

They think that security is provided with more weapons or more war tanks, this is bullshit, the security are the reforms. They are focused on security in terms of having policemen here, policemen there, soldiers there, this is all bullshit.

Concerning a political life without weapons, Walter Mendoza continues:

The guerrillas are territorial. There is a need to make pedagogy. It is an abrupt change, to transition from the armed life to a disarmed political life. A lot of political work and pedagogy is needed. It is not only speaking about the guerrilleros but also about the communities. Communities have asked us:

—Compañeros, what are we going to do when you lay down the weapons?

We said a different thing in the peace table. When there are the conditions to make the step to become a legal political party, this day the weapons will not be needed. We do not want to repeat what happened with the Patriotic Union. What is the state going to do about paramilitaries? This is the cornerstone of the problem. Paramilitarism is not only four people with weapons somewhere, paramilitarism is a state conception, it is a state policy. In Colombia, any businessman has a private army, and any of them can organize one in 24 hours. With these conditions is too difficult to achieve an agreement. But we are in this process. That is why we came to Havana.

Big projects of multinational companies in Colombia are waiting for the success of the peace talks to commodify natural resources, and the FARC-EP are aware of these threats. Pablo Atrato and Hermes Aguilar explain their worries regarding these consequences of laying down the weapons:

(...) the hill is known as "*cara de perro*", this is a sacred place for the Embera indigenous people. And the established project is copper exploitation. The concession is for the Muriel mining corporation<sup>128</sup>. This is a company that has destroyed several territories in the continent. This was stopped because communities have struggled against this project. There were several indigenous murdered, even children, in 2007 and 2008. And now it is stopped. The exploitation is in an area of 16.000 hectares. Listen carefully, 16.000 hectares! They are going to leave us a beautiful hole, and it will damage several rivers: Murindó and Jiguamiandó. They will disappear because this is an open pit to exploit copper, molybdenum and gold. And over this mine there are 4 or 5 communities, indigenous and afro-Colombians. It is located in *Murindó* and *Carmén del Darién* that are over the *Atrato* River. This is a latent

<sup>127</sup> Approximately 570 and 429 Euros respectively. Exchange rate used: 1 Euro=3500 COP

<sup>128</sup> To see more about this project, I recommend this report: ABC Colombia (2011).

threat. People say this has not been exploited because the FARC are here. Because the FARC have supported us in the resistance's process and Because the FARC have not permitted the entry of the company. This is something that we have been saying in the peace talks. It is not possible to continue deforesting and destroying the environment only for the profit of 3 or 4 multinational companies. You can imagine ravaging 16.000 hectares to benefit a company such Muriel, at the cost of the life of thousands of people. This is something that the government does not want to talk about.

The success of the peace talks is in the hands of the government. If the government is only manoeuvring to lower the temperature of the conflict, without resolving essential problems of the communities, there is a problem. It depends on the same government to open democratic spaces for participation to discuss the future with these communities. The participation of the community which will suffer the consequences of these projects has to be direct. How can leaders from Bogota define the future of thousands of people in those territories? One of the state's reasons to stop the war is because we are disturbing the multinationals' exploitation of natural resources, and this is one of the reasons they are at the table talking to us. We are not the problem, the conflict is still there, and it is a social conflict.

To arrive at a political life, they reflect as well:

This is when we need to further intensify the political and organizational work with communities. We cannot sign a peace agreement if we are not sure that we can start with an trial process to see the attitude of the government regarding these projects to achieve peace<sup>129</sup>. When these pilot projects are ready we can say that we are in peace.

Edison Romaña, who has been involved in infrastructure works, invites the government to join efforts to rebuild the roads and bridges destroyed by bombings:

In this moment in which we are developing a peace process and de-escalating the conflict, it would be good to make a deal with the government and reactivate these roads, like the road that was built from Vista Hermosa to Mesetas, which is essential for the civil population. Currently this road is destroyed and it is not working anymore because the army bombed these roads during three years, they bombed the bridges over the *Santo Domingo* river, in *Yarumales* and they were destroyed; they were bombed in the *zona de despeje*.

Additionally, Isabella San Roque draws her panorama for the FARC-EP's future role in the regions.

<sup>129</sup> The interviewed is speaking about those projects that are supposed to be implemented in the framework of the agreements signed.

We are full of optimism and hope with this process. We are committed to peace. And this commitment has to do with the fact that we have a first-hand insight of the reality of these communities. We have lived with the people their scarcity, their political difficulties. We know their realities, the fact that a leader, for questioning the role of multinationals, or for improving the life of their communities, is put in prison accused of being guerrilla fighter, or tortured, or killed, is something to reflect. Then, what we hope is that these consequences change.

If the agreement is achieved, we think that these things we have done in small projects can be done more broadly. The FARC's ranks are full of people who know the land work. For sure it can be possible to stimulate so many projects. In politics, they must give more possibilities to the opposition. This has been criminal in Colombia. People should have the option to choose new alternatives. For sure people will support us as a new political movement.

The paramilitaries are a threat, our security is under threat. While the armed forces and the Colombian government do not take the appropriate measures, and the paramilitaries continue growing, and the social leaders continue being stigmatised, and the persecution of the political movements persists, there will not be conditions to enter democracy. This a determinant factor for the development of the process.

Edison Romaña also expresses optimism about the peasant involvement in a peace building stage:

Communities have already an idiosyncrasy, a culture. Where there is no presence of the state, they know how to face their problems, through the same peasant organizations, through the *juntas de acción comunal*, through the workers' unions, through the different kind of organizations of the communities. (...) So, at the moment an agreement is reached, they know how to deal with those problems by themselves.

Finally, to conclude with these testimonies, in a moment of peace, like Romaña suggests, Victoria Sandino is also enthusiastic about the peasant organization that remains in rural areas:

I do not believe that they can be affected, because those who want peace so badly are the communities. Also, because the idea with this peace we are constructing is not to abandon the regions, but is to be able to exist in an open way, in a legal way with these communities, in a qualified relation that was built in these years of struggle. We are not going to be with weapons but we will be doing politics. I think it will be done with more commitment, we are not going to be there with the war discourse. It will be easier because there will not be the need to leave a meeting because of a bombing. We have to establish safety mechanisms, of course, for the communities and for us. If there is no possibility to end paramilitarism it will not be possible to sign a peace agreement. We cannot repeat the experience of the Patriotic

Union. There has to be a commitment from our counterpart to end the war. When we speak about laying down the weapons we are not speaking about giving the weapons to the state, we are speaking about leaving the weapons in general, and it includes the FARC and the regime.

It is imperative to recognise that the FARC-EP have played an important role in the Colombian peasant movement. We cannot see them separated, as isolated actors. There has definitely been a bidirectional relation in which peasant activists and guerrilla members have been connected in different ways and their struggles seem to align to the same direction.

## 7 Conclusions, discussion and future perspectives for the FARC-EP

***“Bueno, bueno, bueno, todo el mundo a bailar,  
a mover la cintura con fusil y forniture  
porque llegaron las FARC!”***

*(Come on, come on, come on, everybody has to dance,  
to move their waist with the rifle and the equipment  
because the FARC have arrived)*

From the song: “El baile del guerrillero”

### 7.1 Conclusions

Why did I choose the statement: “we have to reach the hearts if we want to reach the minds of the population” to be used as the core issue of this work? To be honest, more than any of the rational theories explored in this work, this phrase was the one that, in my view, best describes the act of being revolutionary. Reaching the heart could perhaps be the initial and permanent intention of the rebel group when we look at their behaviour in rural areas. Certainly, it can be found —despite their mistakes—in all the strategies put in place by the rebels in rural communities. Behind their interest in developing a governance system lies the rebels’ wish to gain peasants’ hearts so that they can deploy their strategic plan: “to take power”.

Several questions were addressed in this research to understand this phenomenon of reaching the heart —a notion that perhaps may sound “suspicious” to many social scientists. I will now try to provide an answer to the main question of this work —*en passant*— hoping to give more credibility to the fact that —as the rebels themselves stated—, reaching the heart is one of the main goals for a rebel project.

*I*

This work has explored three main issues to answer one main question : ***what are the key strategies of the process of “reaching the hearts” developed by the FARC-EP?*** The first one is the need to *approach peasant communities and rural inhabitants by intervening in their lives* - trying to help them in their specific troubles and problems. This was called “solidarity” by Hermes Aguilar. Some social scientists have called these interventions *selective incentives*, and this work has explored several reflections around this term. These reflections have focused especially on declaring that selective incentives given to the population without using ideological appeals do not represent a

successful strategy for rebel groups. It was demonstrated as well that the FARC-EP have been aware of this need.

The second strategy is the *development of a rebel governance system* with specific characteristics and whose purpose is to govern rural areas not only through the support of peasants but also pursuing additional peasant support. Once the rebels approach a rural community with pragmatic strategies —solving some of the needs of the population— a rebel governance system is developed and this rebel governance system can differ depending on the specific characteristics of the region and of the community. However, reaching the hearts is not the single objective of these rebel governance practices. Exercising rebel governance pursues other goals —like guaranteeing the security of the rebels, controlling transport and information in these areas, generating income from the local economy to support the armed struggle, and improving the level of organization of the communities, among others.

Finally, a third strategy is the implementation of a counter-hegemonic struggle which includes ideological and cultural interventions to reach the heart of these rural communities and to increase political awareness and peasant support. This represents, in other words, the struggle for the “common sense” of the population.

This work also explored some theses about the nature of the rebelliousness of the peasantry. The purpose of this was to identify if there existed a set of conditions which made the process of reaching the heart easier for the rebels. One can definitely confirm, as Scott (1997), Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) and van der Ploeg (2009) have stated, that there are some special characteristics about the peasantry that make them more prone to support a rebel project. The peasant principle, the conditions of marginalization, how the peasants view themselves and the cultural and social values of the peasantry are important to be a rebel.

Nevertheless, there is not a fixed and homogeneous precondition of the peasantry to be affected by revolutionary ideals. In general, objective conditions that could generate rebelliousness are not sufficient for someone to become a rebel or supporter of the rebels. Neither does being poor or being peasant equate to being a rebel or supporting rebels; as Skocpol (1982) has stated: “income sources in the abstract are not valid predictors of the political interests and capacities of agrarian classes” (p. 359). So, supporting a revolution, or in this case a peasant rebellion, really needs deep ideological and cultural work, addressed to reach the hearts, involving most of the population in the political struggle. We explored how important it has been for some peasant families to be members of the Communist Party, a party that has been traditional in some rural areas. Other factors we explored —like the foundational myth of the FARC-EP and the role of emotions (Beltran, 2016) and feelings (Monedero, 2016) in the construction of peasants’ social imaginaries— have been important to understand the act of being rebel.

The influence of the political discourses and spaces for political education have been crucial to get peasant support. Some individuals or communities would support the rebel project if they realized that they could improve their living conditions while others pursue the provision of security for their villages. For sure the act of supporting rebelliousness can be a mixture of some of the



possibilities shown in this work. Some factors could be more relevant than others in different contexts but, in general, a talented rebel leader must have a holistic perspective to be able to reach the peasant heart; that is, he should be able to take into account this immense sea of possibilities.

## II

The first specific question: ***which interventions have been practiced by the rebels of the FARC-EP in rural areas under their control to achieve peasant support?*** is answered as follows:

The FARC-EP have applied different interventions in rural communities, but not all of them pursue the same objectives. The interventions shown in this work can serve not only to clarify the complexity of the rebel behaviour, but also to demonstrate that there are objectives that are different from those frequently aired in the media. To make a short summary, these interventions can be divided in six categories.

First, we presented some anecdotes of those *interventions addressed to approach the rural population*, either to have a clear picture of the community —through a work of exploration— or to scrutinize the immediate needs of the population. We heard the voice of Camila Cienfuegos, who told us her “work-style” when interacting with children and peasant families, and we heard as well commander Hermes Aguilar’s description of initial support like *solidarity* with the population — among others.

The second category is the *involvement of the rebels in processes of conflict resolution and justice management*. This includes the need to have permanent representation of the rebels in peasant communities through *milicianos*. We saw how in a region under the control of Front 21 the official, governmental institutions in charge recommended the mediation of the FARC-EP because they had a more efficient system to resolve disputes among the population. Thus, in some areas the justice management of the state has been entirely replaced by rebel structures. Some guerrilla members have been engaging in family conciliation and child custody and other typical family problems as well. We also show how there has been a need to create, with the participation of peasant leaders, rules of communal living in order to police the population.

Third, there are *social welfare interventions* with the purpose of pragmatically addressing specific needs of the population. The FARC-EP work to provide solutions to the short, medium or long term needs of the population. These interventions include the development of productive projects to support local economies; the construction of basic infrastructures like schools, hospitals or communal houses and roads; the development of health campaigns or general health support to peasants by deploying the same medical staff of the rebels; and the protection of the environment through the development of policies and activities coordinated with the communities.

A fourth category encompasses *interventions addressed to strengthen the political education of the peasant masses and their social organization*. We discovered the organizational tactics of the guerrilla through the creation of legalised forms of communal association —the *Juntas de Acción Comunal*— which have served to strengthen the political capabilities and mobilisation of thousands

of peasants. We have also shown how education and literacy campaigns of peasants have been useful to generate critical thinking amongst them. An example of this involvement in organizing the peasantry was the cleaning of the Atrato River by thousands of peasants.

The fifth category involves *cultural interventions developed to bring about a counter-hegemonic struggle*, at least among rural communities. This involved the intercultural encounters developed by Pablo Atrato. Indeed, music, art, or paintings are some of the possible cultural tools that may help to gain access to the hearts of the population. This category responds to the need to spread certain and specific values among members of the communities in order to create a specific common sense among them; in other words, to create *local hegemonies* in rural areas. This category could contain the former categories: in the end, all the practices of the rebels could be understood to achieve a counter-hegemonic struggle by reaching the hearts of the peasant population.

The sixth category are those *interventions practised to recruit new members for all the structures of the FARC-EP to develop their strategic plan*: to take power. Like the previous category, this need is always present in the everyday interaction of the rebels with peasant communities. The FARC-EP have established several forms of doing “something” for the revolution, and becoming a guerrilla fighter is not the only possibility. Peasant leaders, families, communities, workers, landless farmers or students are always very welcome to help out and serve the political project of the rebel group in a multitude of ways.

### III

The second specific question addressed is: ***what are the characteristics of the rebel governance system of the FARC-EP?*** Based on the theories explored and the interviews we answer this question as follows.

The way the FARC-EP have gone about their political and armed struggle is a balance between struggling for the taking of power while governing rural areas. The FARC-EP, in fact, have developed a rebel governance system which, according to the rebels, has several characteristics. The literature showed us different approaches to understand rebel governance concepts. Mampilly (2011) stated three elements of an effective rebel governance model: first, *a force capable of policing the population* which provides stability to the governance system of the rebels. In our case, this task is mainly developed in rural areas under rebel control by the *milicianos*, who fulfil the function of local police with the support of local peasant organizations. Second, *the development of a specific mechanism of conflict resolution*. As it was described by Victoria Sandino, Isabela San Roque, Walter Mendoza and Camila Cienfuegos (who spoke about the need to resolve disputes among members of the community) there has been an important involvement of the FARC-EP in resolving conflicts and small grievances among members of peasant communities. And third, *the provision of public goods and services* which can support the communities in their concrete needs. Edison Romaña and Walter Mendoza accounted for the importance of developing infrastructure to support rural

communities and their economies, while Pablo Atrato strongly stressed the need to intervene in a given region to protect the environment from the mafias —thus showing his involvement in preserving the common good, in this case the forest of a region in Choco.

Based on the literature reviewed and the approximation to Gramscian concepts, two additional elements were added to characterise the rebel governance system of the FARC-EP. The first one is the development of democratic structures that open the space for peasant representation and participative decision-making processes. Thus, the support to the creation and development of 123128949 *Juntas de Acción Comunal*, as described by Pablo Atrato and Hermes Aguilar, can be seen like a tactic of the involvement of the rebels with rural communities with a view towards strengthening democratic values among the population. And second, the development of a strong ideological and cultural apparatus in these regions, which is addressed to “conquer” the common sense of the population. Thus, both Pablo Atrato and the literature we reviewed pointed to the existence of cultural interventions and political spaces implemented by the rebels to develop important ideological and political work among members of the community.

Altogether, these characteristics of the rebel governance system of the FARC-EP have been fundamental mechanisms to develop their political and armed struggle —and have had much to do with the need to reach the hearts of the peasant population. With this I include the way the *milicianos* behave and practice their policing tasks in rural villages; the success of the conciliation processes and conflict resolution strategies; the development of infrastructure needed by the population and the provision of successful social services; the proper function of participative structures among peasants and a creative ideological and cultural influence. Together, these determine the success in reaching the population’s heart.

#### IV

A third specific research question we addressed was: ***how is the counter-hegemonic struggle led by the FARC-EP in rural areas?***

The rural society that the rebels want to create requires intense ideological work. This however is not what some people term “indoctrination”. Actually, the interviewed emphasised the need of political education of the peasantry to raise awareness of their own reality. So, a first element of the development of this counter-hegemonic struggle is *political education*.

Despite any mistakes committed by the rebels of the FARC-EP, one can suggest that, in general, they have shown a positive behaviour towards rural communities by practicing their rebel governance system in such way that in most cases living conditions have improved. The way the rebels interact with peasant communities in developing and implementing these interventions is important in order to achieve peasant support. Thus, a second element that characterises the counter-hegemonic struggle is *exemplary behaviour of the rebels*, their ability to lead by example.

To be able to interact with the peasants and strengthen their organizational capabilities, the FARC-EP realised that *supporting the creation and development of Juntas de Acción Comunal* was a

key strategy to develop the counter-hegemonic struggle; this is thus the third element that characterises it.

A fourth element which was not successfully developed by the rebels in the past, but which has improved in the context of the peace talks, is their *communicational strategy*. These interventions and especially their positive consequences were not reported efficiently in the past. When I asked for pictures, videos or reports that document what they have done in rural areas, some of the interviewed reported that there are some pictures “somewhere”, so it seems that there was no standardised protocol to report these activities. Victoria Sandino promised me to give me an example of a communal living manual and Pablo Atrato also told me that he would send me some pictures of the cleaning of the Atrato river. However, due to the dynamics of the peace talks they could not do so. In general I suggest that this lack of documentation of rebel governance practices can be explained by the need for secrecy and to protect the communities and peasants with whom they necessarily interact in the development of these activities. Nevertheless, one has to look at the activities reported and documented by the legal peasant organizations —especially in conflict zones and rural areas under guerrilla control— to have an idea of the political and ideological influence of the rebels in these communities and peasant organizations. Perhaps in a future stage —when the peace agreement is being implemented— this relation between peasant communities and the FARC-EP will become more evident and openly talked about than during the war.

A fifth element that has been relatively successful in some areas is the creation of *cultural local hegemony*. The songs of Julian Conrado, Lucas Iguarán and the Horizonte fariano, among other guerrilla artists, are well known among peasants. The relationship and interaction with religious leaders in some regions, especially catholic priests, and the interpretation and respect for peasant beliefs by the guerrilla has been important to construct local hegemony. As described by the rebels interviewed, inhabitants in regions under guerrilla control succeeded in creating cultural spaces like parties, bazaars and other cultural expressions practised not exclusively among guerrilla fighters but also among peasants. Also, the interventions to organize peasant communities (like the *civico-fariano works* described in chapter five) helps construct a local cultural hegemony.

A sixth element is the *combination of activities oriented to transform as far as possible the economic base with activities addressed to gain the common sense of the population*. By this I mean that interventions to develop an alternative production system —which includes the creation of cooperatives, more horizontal relations of production and local control of the economy and food production— are combined with ideological interventions, to create local powers. Indeed, in most of the areas the peasant production model remains intact and the guerrilla developed a realistic market-oriented approach, including efforts to help rural communities enter the logic of the market locally and efficiently so that they could improve their living conditions.

A seventh element is the *existence of a noticeable contradiction between civil and political society in rural areas*. The fact that the political project of the guerrilla can be considered as an expression of the peasant struggle, and they are part of the civil society (mostly ruled through consent by the guerrilla) who in some areas are engaged in a struggle against the political society

(which exerts the power in those areas by coercion) is an indicator that a counter-hegemonic struggle in rural areas is effectively being sustained.

## V

To answer the question: ***what are the FARC-EP's reflections about their interventions, and what are their expectations about the peace agreement and its implementation?*** we must have a look at the previous chapter. Some of the reflections about what they have done in rural areas have much to do with the impossibility to achieve more goals. In fact, despite the relative power achieved by the guerrilla in some rural areas, it is clear that they wanted to defeat the Colombian government. But this turned out to be impossible. Nevertheless, they realized that they have achieved important goals and they thus feel proud when speaking about what was achieved with peasant communities. Some of the most recurring elements I found in the interviews speak to the self-perception of being successful as local governments. This work has used the academic term “rebel governance system”, but they used to refer to it stating that “we are the government” or “we are the power”. Their narratives also emphasise the need to achieve the hearts and the minds of the population; thus, they remark that the guerrillero must have a very good behaviour towards the community. There is a strong commitment in the guerrilla towards helping the peasant, either at the beginning —during exploratory work— or during their presence as rebel rulers.

FARC-EP members also show an awareness of their own weaknesses. One example of this was when Camila Cienfuegos spoke about the persecution of peasants accused of being guerrilla fighters and the fumigations of crops. She realised that the guerrilla could not do enough to help these peasants. The interviewed are also aware of the changes that the guerrilla have made over time to relate with peasant communities. Edinson Romaña and Isabela San Roque, for instance, highlight that in the past decade the direct relation with peasant communities has been more difficult due to the growing intensity of the war. Faced with this situation the guerrilla had to focus more on the development of war strategies than on developing rebel governance mechanisms.

Speaking about the peace agreement and its implementation, the most recurring element in the interviews (and in interviews carried out by different media with FARC-EP peace team representatives) is that paramilitarism is an enormous threat to peasant communities and the soon to be demobilised rebels. They also reminded us that they are afraid that, if the peace deal cannot be implemented successfully, many communities will be abandoned and left to their fate by the state. Furthermore, they expressed their fears concerning the fulfilment of the commitments reached during the peace agreement.

However, they also realise that there is a challenge to be embraced in the implementation of the peace talks, namely the possibility that they can increase their political influence in rural communities and at national level —thus intensifying their political and organizational work. They also, as Romaña suggests, are willing to work with official institutions and institutional cadres to rebuild some infrastructures affected by the war and plan the development of new ones.

## 7.2 Discussion

Many people have questioned, in different ways, the revolutionary condition and the political status of the FARC-EP. Many of my relatives and friends are not so gentle when speaking about them. Others, more strongly attached to a *homo-economicus* reading of the FARC-EP, sturdily argue that they “are in it for the money” and do not believe that the guerrilla members are not paid.

Many years ago, I spent much time going to the lectures for my engineering degree and to the political spaces created by the same students. The second ones were, for sure, as enriching as the first ones. In these political spaces, which are usual in Colombian public universities, it was very common to hear or read statements written by revolutionaries; these were part of my political education and of my formation as an activist. Famous statements by Che Guevara (“the true revolutionary is guided by big feelings of love”), the Colombian catholic priest and guerrilla fighter Camilo Torres Restrepo (“Only through revolution is it possible to achieve love for the neighbour”) and similar phrases by various Latin American revolutionaries, including poets and leaders, have frequently been portrayed as too romantic or as idealistic clichés. Also, they have been underrated—if not consciously hidden—by scholars who do not find them scientifically rigorous. These phrases and statements however appeal to dimensions of the human being that sometimes are incomprehensible to those who write in scientific journals. In all the literature I found which focused on trying to discover the rational motivations of peasants to become rebels, only some authors spoke about the importance of feelings in following or supporting a revolutionary project; and only a handful of them spoke about the dream of a new society—a dream that could lead people to make the most incredible things—including sacrificing of their own lives—for a political cause. Indeed, Beltran (2016, p. 78) uses the term “*combatientes sentipensantes*” (feeling-thinking combatants) to refer to the FARC-EP—thus suggesting we need a more complex approach to understand the Colombian rebels.

In this work, I have summarized the most noticeable interventions put in place by the FARC-EP in rural communities. Transversally, if the reader can note this, there is a strong connection between peasants and guerrilla fighters that cannot be explained by the rational choice theories explored at the beginning of this work, and that escape from traditional and “neutral” analyses. Regarding the approaches to understand the relation of the insurgency with peasant communities: the theory explored in section 1.1 about the importance of feelings and emotions—as developed by Beltran (2016), Monedero (2016) and, previously, Eduardo Galeano—, seems very important to comprehend the complexity of the rebel world—or, for that matter, of any project of social change.

On a general level, if a rebel organization or progressive political project is willing to speak to, listen to, live with, or learn from communities, if it is capable of understanding the most endearing feelings and dreams of the population, then it is more likely to build a strong connection with their hearts and minds.

Nevertheless, it is not enough to develop this struggle for the common sense by having good intentions only, or by behaving according to the political principles of the rebel group. There is a strong need to reach the public sphere, showing what the rebel group has done; its improvements, its social interventions, its impact on peasant communities, and so on. This could be done by using a better communicational strategy by the rebel group with the purpose of reaching the majority of the population. There are constraints, especially structural constraints, that stand against the diffusion of the political work of a rebel group. Most of the time these constraints are linked to media ownership (who gets to show what). In a country with a lack of free press, the development of an effective communication strategy to face the war propaganda is harder.

If we look at the significant interaction between the interventions shown in this work and peasant communities, we cannot state that interventions without an “advertising” component cannot be important. In fact, there are no apolitical interventions. Each act of a rebel group is political, always. In fact, one can say that all FARC-EP’s interventions can be understood as part of the ideological and political work required to reach the hearts of the population. Also, one can say that all interventions by a rebel group in fact confront the war propaganda against it —either through direct ideological education or as an indirect consequence of what the interventions accomplished. However, it is not a matter of how sincere and honest the intentions of the rebel group have been. And neither does it matter whether or not their interaction with excluded communities has been constructive or participative, or if the rebels have improved the living conditions of the peasant population. If these good intentions, constructive and participative interactions and improvements to peasant life (and in general of the life of the subaltern classes) cannot be communicated to the majority of the population, it is unlikely that the revolutionary project will succeed. Cultural and political hegemony are, in this sense, in the arena of the strategic political communication.

### **7.3 Reflections about the future perspectives of the FARC-EP**

Based on the previous discussion there exist different possible scenarios for the upcoming years. One of these scenarios, the most pessimistic one, is the occupation of zones previous controlled by the guerrilla by criminal organizations or neo-paramilitaries. This vacuum that will be created whenever the FARC-EP demobilise could easily be filled by a new emergent power that would not be the state. Unfortunately, these new powers would not be so friendly to peasant communities — especially in far-away regions where monitoring is expected to be low to non-existent. If the implementation of the peace deal, especially regarding rural development issues, is not successful or cannot be implemented for whatever reason, these communities could face the arrival of new

criminal structures and regional *caciques* and *gamonales*<sup>130</sup> who would decide their immediate future.

The cease of control of these places by the guerrilla, the end of the influence of the structures of rebel governance previously formed and improved over the years and their own political structures, would allow for the establishment of this new power, including its own cultural hegemony. A repetition of the scenarios of Guatemala and El Salvador (in which development policies after peace deals did not produce the social change required to avoid the surge of criminal structures like those of the Maras) looms large. These criminal structures, supported by drug trafficking, would exert a violence which in most of the cases would be instrumental to the continuity of the neoliberal agenda. This violence could eventually work in favour of current national and regional elites. This would not be a political violence coordinated by rebel organizations; rather, it would be common criminality which would be useful to justify the continuity of bloated defence budget.

A second scenario of post-conflict, the optimistic one, could be that —after years of an effective implementation of the peace deal— rural communities will see an improvement of their living conditions and some degree of development of their regions. In this scenario paramilitarism would have been controlled and dismantled by the state, and there would be no threat against peasant leaders and 1733747688 *ex-guerrilleros*. Thanks to new policies regarding rural development and the creation of democratic structures in all of the national territory, the FARC-EP, as a new political movement, could win elections and keep their previous power - but in conditions of legality. The previous forms of social organization and rebel governance would gain legitimacy among the rural population, for example by turning the success of time-proven local policies into an effective alternative for the new Colombian democracy. The mass media and the elites would allow the cadres of the new political movement express their ideas and ideology without any obstacles, demonstrating that a new environment of reconciliation is growing, and the population would finally be able to choose their leaders in conditions of freedom and sound democratic practices.

A third scenario could be a middle ground in which effectively the tensions between the elites and the progressive movement would remain. The implementation of the peace deal would be the arena of a new social struggle —not only at peasant level but also at the national level. In this scenario, the eventual success of some new policies regarding rural development could be ascribed not so much to the goodwill of the Colombian elites but to the social mobilisation of the poor. Likewise, it is foreseeable that some rural areas formerly under guerrilla control will become the target of multinational companies willing to exploit natural resources. Communities in these regions would face possible violence and threats because of their social resistance. The national government would have to struggle with local administrations which could favour peasant resistance. New models of repression would appear, but also new forms of social struggle would certainly emerge.

<sup>130</sup> These words are used in Colombia to designate those people who have a strong local or regional power, controlling the economy and social life. To see more: <http://www.banrepcultural.org/node/73231>



The possibility of gaining some local and regional administrations by the new political movement would allow for the construction (or further development) of local hegemonies. And at national level there would be a struggle between the traditional mass media and alternative media. A new target of struggle would ensue around the democratization of the media – one in which the progressive social movements would play an increasingly important role.

The FARC-EP faces the challenge to keep its current structure (not the armed one), continue the strategies to reach the hearts of the population, and improve on the mechanisms implemented in their rebel governance system to continue with their political project and their strategic program. However, without their weapons, these tasks must in future be shaped under new conditions and needs. Performing the five characteristics of the rebel governance system of the FARC-EP in a stage of peace building would require a re-engineering of these practices. Policing of the population, conflict resolution, provision of goods and services, participative structures of decision making and the struggle for the common sense must be carried out in some regions as part of the policies of the new local administrations led by the new political movement —or alternatively be seen as tasks of a civil society in which they would play an important role.

For sure, the Colombian state faces structural constraints in the implementation of the peace agreement. These are related to the heavy bureaucracy, the traditional practices of officials, corruption, and the immovability of an “internal enemy” doctrine —especially among military ranks. The huge amount of economic support from international agencies for development and multilateral organizations could perhaps be channelled for other purposes; yet, the strong struggle and surveillance by social organizations could inhibit these traditional practices. Different NGOs will be born from civil society. They will struggle to compete for post-conflict funding. This could play an important role in the disarticulation and fragmentation of the social movements – unless of course the new political movement take the steps needed to avoid these undesirable consequences.

The guerrilla’s commander in chief, Timoleon Jimenez, has strongly argued in public that the FARC-EP fighters will not be demobilised; rather, as he sees it, they are going to mobilise even more but this time as members of a political movement. One of the most relevant achievements of the guerrilla has been the strong cohesion among their members. This contrasts sharply with the fragility of the current legal left-wing movement which is fraught by internal strife and differences among their members.

Can we suggest, then, that the FARC-EP will be an important protagonist of Colombian politics in the future? What I am pretty sure of is that, based on the stories described in this work, the FARC-EP are bound to become a legal political movement **only if the state complies with their commitments in terms of protection and guarantees for the new political movement**. If so, the FARC-EP (whose old acronym will in the future refer to *“Frente Amplio por la Reconciliación de Colombia - Esperanza de Paz”*, *“Broad Front for the Reconciliation of Colombia – Hope for Peace”*) will reinvent democracy in Colombia. A large part of Colombia’s population presently see the traditional and historical elites as actors whom they cannot trust. Evidence of this is the low level of participation in elections —which can either be interpreted as the de-politicization of most the

population or, more likely, discontent with “ineffective” democratic practices. People frequently refer to politicians as extremely corrupt individuals who only advance their own interests. The possibility that the rebels show another style of governance could boost the reinvention of Colombian democracy and increase popular involvement in democratic practices. This concerns not only voting behaviour, but also participation in processes like those experienced in the countryside by the peasants and which we expect to be improved upon in the upcoming peace-building stage. We will witness how this new political movement will challenge the traditional *modus operandi* of the traditional parties - including left-wing parties.

To hypothesise about the future of the FARC-EP as a legal political movement: if the FARC-EP can continue to treasure its traditional, strong connection with rural communities; if they can continue to govern in “their” regions by winning democratic elections; if they can improve their former methods of governing and can spread their method over the Colombian territory; if they can develop an effective communication strategy: then it will very likely develop a successful counter hegemonic struggle for the seizing of power in the coming years.

This work has tried to scrutinize the FARC-EP’s world. The reader can be sure that, in the near future, the new political movement built by the former rebel armed forces and by a host of grassroots organizations will enter the political arenas to struggle for political power under democratic rules. It will try to keep its relationship with peasant communities who will probably have to confront all sorts of threats coming from the enemies of peace. But it will do so by taking advantage of the new possibilities that it will have as a political party.

\* \* \*

Writing this final chapter after more than a year of debates, activism, internal struggles, readings, and video-searching (among other things), I was thinking about an anecdote that I have experienced to show the reader the true dimension of what I am talking about. I remember the 31st of December of 2009, in the prison of 1733747749 *La Picota* in Bogota. We were almost sixty people in a corridor where there were approximately twelve cells with four or five people in each one. It was the first New Year that I had to live without my family, it was the first New Year that I had to celebrate in prison. This night was very difficult for the new people in prison. I was in the corridor of political prisoners, so I was sharing my days with 1733747750 *guerrilleros* —including a few commanders. The daily activities of the political prisoners included political education, courses of philosophy, Marxism, history. I contributed with my own, teaching lessons of Mathematics to the fighters. There, I learned some basic knowledge in law and human rights from the hand of commander Horacio Castro who also taught me a few important things to survive in prison, and what strategies to follow in my struggle against judges and other Colombian justice bureaucracy. After celebrating dinner with a little food brought in by visiting family, we had to enter our cells at 17.00 hours. Then an infinite moment started, waiting for midnight to wish each other “happy new year” and to make an imaginary call to our relatives and friends to express our good wishes for the upcoming days.

Prisoners use to play cards and chess, and personally I spent my time reading as much as I could and speaking with other jail mates. But this evening I decided to play cards with the rest of the prisoners in the cell and wait for the New Year.

At twelve o'clock the fireworks in the neighbourhood started. I imagined people outside celebrating without thinking that more than a hundred thousand souls were sleeping in Colombian jails for different reasons – most of them people who were not able to have a better future in one of the most unequal countries in the world. I imagined my family trying to be calm and supporting each other in this situation. But in a moment of surprise the anthem of the FARC-EP started being sung by the fighters in prison, and every guerrilla member in the corridor started singing the first verses from their cells:

*“Con justicia y verdad  
junto al pueblo ya está  
con el fuego primero del alba  
la pequeña canción  
que nació en nuestra voz  
guerrillera de lucha y futuro”*

(With justice and truth,  
together with the people here right now,  
with the first fire of the dawn,  
the small song that was born in our guerrilla voice  
of struggle and future).

This anthem was shouted out by these peasant voices just in the middle of the last night of 2009, in the middle of a crowded prison. Was it a ritual? Was it compulsory? Was it a spontaneous act? I do not know. The only thing I was thinking was how powerful this kind of political imaginaries and dreams have been in the minds or maybe in the hearts of peasants who have nothing to lose.

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## Appendix: Short descriptions of the *guerrilleros* interviewed

### *Victoria Sandino*

My name is Victoria Sandino, Victoria Sandino Palmera. I came from the *Comando Conjunto central Adan Izquierdo*, I am 23 years in the guerrilla, I am the coordinator of the topic of political organization in the commando, and I have been here in the Havana for two years. I worked sometimes with the commandants Raul Reyes, Jorge Briceño, with Manuel Marulanda and with Alfonso Cano of course,



### *Hermes Aguilar*

I am Hermes Aguilar, from the *Magdalena Medio* Block, member of the *Estado Mayor central*, (Major central Command). Well, and how many time I have been member of the guerrilla? A lot of time, two third parts of my life I have been *guerrillero*, 40 years.

### *Pablo Atrato*

My name is Pablo Atrato, I am part of the block, formerly named Ivan Rios, that today is named Efrain Guzman, particularly from the front 57, which operates in the department of Choco, and I have been working fundamentally in organization, with rural communities from the department of Choco, Antioquia, supporting the organizational work.





*Camila Cienfuegos*

Camila Cienfuegos is a woman that joined to the guerrilla of the FARC, in the year 1994, in the Valle del Cauca, and since that time I have been living near to my comrades. I operate in the area of the Valle del Cauca, I am member of the commando *Comandante Alfonso Cano*, and I am member of the security guard of one member of the secretariat.

*Edison Romaña*

My function in the guerrilla movement: I am part of the *Estado Mayor* of the Block *Comandante Jorge Suarez Briceño*, I have been for many years integrating this block since its foundation.



*Isabela Sanroque*



Well, my name is Isabela San Roque, I am member of the block *Jorge Suarez Briceño*, formerly *Oriental Block*, that is in the center and east of the country, and thus, I develop organizational tasks. In the last period of time I was in the department of Meta, as official in organizational tasks. I was part of the urban front Antonio Nariño.

*Walter Mendoza*

My name is Walter Mendoza, member of the peace delegation of the FARC. I am member of the *Estado Mayor central*, (Major central Command) of the FARC. I am in a region of Chocó, at the west of Colombia, in the Pacific region. I am the commandant of the *Bloque movil* (Mobil block).

