

perial landscape of the contemporary world. At a moment in history when the globalization of space is being achieved through simultaneous integration and fracture, inclusion and exclusion, transmuted colonial relations remain dynamic forces within processes of global change. The events analyzed here are moments in this worldwide reordering of body politics. Through them we may glimpse the movement from a world organized by what Tom Nairn calls the uniformed imperialism of direct political control and territorially fixed markers (1977, 356) to one shaped by what may be called the multiform imperial controls of fluid finance capital, a world of increasingly deterritorialized markers and shifting political, economic, and cultural boundaries. The Venezuelan riots and massacres, as people who lived through them know, are inseparable from the hidden violence of postmodern empires.

Ricardo Vargas

5 State, Esprit Mafioso, and Armed Conflict in Colombia

Mafias, Politics, and the Esprit Mafioso

M. A. Maillard-Bonucci offers a conceptualization of mafia useful for an analysis of Colombian politics: the mafia is not a formal organization, but a form of behavior and a mode of power.¹ There are four key historical conditions that help explain the growth and consolidation of models of mafia power and behaviors. First is a situation in which the nation-state has not established a firm presence in certain regions and local forces contest an exclusionary central power. The classic example of this dynamic is Sicily, with insularity appearing to be an important sociocultural element explaining the emergence of the mafia. Insularity should not be understood as isolation, but as a relationship with a centralized political power that helps to define social and political identities. Clientelism is a critical aspect of this relationship, with the "clientele" as an early form of mafia. Groups of "clients" have a "protector" in the region, defend his person and patrimony, are the docile instruments of his caprices and ambitions, and at the same time carry out crimes in his name, almost certainly enjoying the immunity that comes with his protection.²

A second factor is the existence of a personalized mediation with centralized political powers, which provide mafias with a "social function." In the case of southern Italy, the exclusion of a poverty-ridden region led to the creation of a relation with the center that was controlled by a local elite, which assumed representation of the region and used private violence to maintain its predominance. A third factor is that dependency is mediated through the use of economic resources and political power. Mafias represent both new and old forms of relationships, that is, precapitalist and feudal relations in a modern context.³ Mafias are thus the result of modernization processes within precarious situations of modernity.

Finally, private violence is used as a mechanism of social control and the exercise of power. In the case of Sicily, social power emerged from sources beyond those found within the formal legal system. Real power in the social and political life of Sicily was found in the use of force and violence to control eco-

conomic resources and remained apart from institutional schemes.⁴ A long history, during which power and material force were the exclusive preserve of local barons and violence was exercised on their behalf, contributed to the development of "mafia sentiments," which, more than an organization, were an ample and common part of the social psychology of Sicily during centuries.⁵

The "esprit mafioso" emerged out of the ancient customs of powerful noblemen, the aristocrats who dominated the island of Sicily during centuries and were accustomed to using power and violence to protect their own self-interest. This constituted, not only in Sicily, a privileged position of immunity before the laws of the country that, until the eighteenth century, included trials before their own tribunals, distinct from those of lower social classes. The mafia is a medieval sentiment that arises from a belief that an individual can be assured the protection and integrity of their person and property through their own worth and influence, independent of the actions of the authorities or the law.⁶ The esprit mafioso took root in Sicily, and despite social progress and political democracy, it has been difficult to eliminate among the majority of the population. It suggests that to achieve success in life, one must have the valor to oppose authority and if necessary the law, or at least support those who can do so and not suffer formal legal consequences.

An additional factor that historically helped legitimate the esprit mafioso in Sicily was a revolutionary peasant movement, long excluded from the social and political life of the nation. In the wake of the political struggles of the mid-nineteenth century, "peasants did not cease in thinking of how to arm themselves or preserve their arms in the hopes of the 'great day,' while the bourgeoisie only thought of defending itself with private and public guardians."⁷ The esprit mafioso was not mechanically derived from models of organization and rebellion among Sicily's popular masses. Rather, its development was the result of the circumstances of their exclusion and the ways by which this exclusion was transferred from the level of general social and political struggles to the individual and group. The essence of that transference was the sense that one must oppose the violence and injustices that are encountered in daily life, even if that means recurring to violence and force to preserve personal prestige.

Finally it is important to note the relationship between the mafia and the economy of those areas where such relations developed. In southern Italy, the citrus boom played an important role in the diffusion of the mafia in the countryside. The introduction of the *gabbla*, a form of extortion imposed on the citrus industry, contributed enormously to the strengthening of the mafia. The blurring of legal and illegal capital in the economy is a constant in the social and economic history of the mafia and one of its greatest triumphs.⁸

Unlike the Italian case, mafia power in Colombia expanded as a result of

the illegal drug economy in a regional environment without the need of a center. That is to say, it did not require a mediating role with the state; on the contrary, it strengthened its territorial control based on an illegal and globalized market. That is why drug trafficking has deepened the fragmentation of centralized power in Colombia, combining forms of "para-institutionality" in the exercise of both force and justice while intervening in the electoral arena. In the context of the internal conflict, it is also creating a new strategic situation for itself in the name of defeating the guerrillas. In this way, drug trafficking is situating itself so as to capitalize on an eventual reordering of power by the state. At the same time, traffickers continue to seek to legitimize their social power, just as they do with the capital obtained from trafficking, which is usually laundered through legitimate businesses in the rural sector. Private power is thus being used to create a new public order.

Two Scenarios of Esprit Mafioso, Armed Conflict, and Social Control

The premodern structure of Colombia's state is found in its weak capacity to control territory and exercise a monopoly of force in both the city and the countryside. During much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Colombia's regions developed politically and economically with little national integration. First, geography conspired to inhibit integration by making transportation between regions—particularly between the capital, located on the isolated high plateau of the central cordillera, and other departments—extremely difficult. Each region developed its own economic base and trading links with the external world. Second, continual civil wars among civilian elites mobilized local private armies. Although many of the wars, such as the War of One Thousand Days (1899–1903), involved struggles among national elites, they also provided opportunities for local conflicts to manifest themselves. In this context, national institutions such as the military and the judicial system failed to develop a strong local presence and were more often than not swept up into these conflicts.

The current conflict needs to be understood in this historic context. As the insurgency involving the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) developed from the 1960s onward, local dynamics came to the fore. Each guerrilla force filled vacuums in parts of the country where state institutions were weakest and developed ties to both the local society and the economy. Local landowners and party bosses either made deals with these forces or organized the fight against them. The relative isolation of the insurgents allowed the state and national elites to downplay their importance. Only in the 1980s, with the growth of new social movements, the growing economic power of drug trafficking, and a growing guer-

rilla presence in the cities (particularly in the now-defunct April 19 Movement, or M-19), did the state appear increasingly under siege. After a failed hard-line response during the administration of President Julio César Turbay Ayala (1978-82), President Belisario Betancur (1982-86) initiated a peace process and political reforms aimed at opening up the democratic system. While leading to a new constitution in 1991 and the incorporation of various guerrilla groups into the political system, most notably the M-19, these efforts were quickly overwhelmed by the local dynamics influencing the guerrillas, the intensification of the drug wars, and the growing organization and national coordination of paramilitary forces under the umbrella of the paramilitary United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), led by Carlos Castaño. Despite renewed efforts to revive the peace process during the Pastora administration (1998-2002), the entrenched interests and local dynamics that had developed by the late 1990s made it very difficult for all armed actors to agree on a path to peace.

A weak state has been a key factor in explaining the two types of colonization of the countryside that have predominated historically. The first pattern of colonization is based on the large ranches and *latifundio* (large feudal-like landholdings) that are sustained by patrimonial social relations. This phenomenon has been developing more recently into enclave economies that depend on commercial agriculture, similar to the situation that existed in areas dependent on banana exports at the start of the twentieth century. Politically, in these zones domination is based on clientelistic relations that functionally mirror the relations found on *latifundio*. Regional political control in these areas revolves around families whose origins can be historically traced to contraband and illegal economic activities in the seventeenth century that allowed them to create a monopoly of political control. Colombia's Atlantic coastal region provides an example of this historic dynamic. A second pattern of colonization emerged out of the large population that was displaced due to the political violence or economic expropriations carried out in the mid-twentieth century. This population occupied areas with low agricultural productivity. By the late 1970s, they had increasingly found in the coca economy a source of income that allowed them to accumulate capital and migrate to other, more productive zones.

In the diversity of these regional scenarios there emerged distinct forms of articulation with narco-trafficking. In areas based on the first pattern, a process of symbiosis developed between export capital derived from drug trafficking and money laundering carried out through the purchase of agricultural lands. This process not only led to a further concentration of land ownership but also created political consequences, including an increase in armed conflicts. It is especially in these areas that there is the strongest development

of private armed groups that act parallel to those of the state and have become key actors in Colombia's violence. These private armies first emerged to defend private property from common delinquents and threats from the guerrillas and over time developed into organizations with a separate and semi-autonomous identity. In areas following the second pattern, relations developed between peasants and the early phases of the drug trade, that is, the growing and processing of coca. In this context, the growing political and military power of insurgents introduces a new dynamic, with the latter increasingly taking on an intermediary role with drug trafficking. These regional dynamics, and their economic, social, and political consequences, can best be observed by examining two of Colombia's regions: the departments of Magdalena and Putumayo.

Magdalena

The department of Magdalena, on Colombia's Atlantic coast, has three important geographical features that are linked to different economic activities: the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, a marijuana-producing zone since the 1970s; the Magdalena River valley, historically a center of cattle ranching, with small towns that depend on this activity; and the central plains along the Ariguaní River, a largely agrarian area dedicated to such products as rice and bananas. These physical zones create diverse ecosystems and an ecological equilibrium in the water, plant, and animal resources of the area. The Magdalena River delta includes, for example, streams, canals, swamps, and flooded plains, all fed by the Magdalena River, all contributing to a rich ecosystem. Needless to say, these resources have been transformed due to the patterns of colonization and the economic and social relations that have resulted from them.⁹

The Magdalena River has historically been an important transport system, linking the interior with the Atlantic. The extensive delta system at the mouth of the river has been ideal as an entrance point for contraband and illegal arms since the colonial period. The abandonment of this zone by the state, the exclusionary nature of large landholding patterns in the region, the development of a subculture that privatizes the use of public resources, and the lack of consciousness regarding exploitation of economic resources in an ecologically fragile region have all contributed to a dynamic of conflict and methods of social control peculiar to this region. Around the delta itself, there can be found large cattle ranches and *latifundio* that commercialize bananas, rice, and African palm. For the most part, these land-renture patterns create labor practices based on premodern forms of social control, including personal dependence on the part of workers and small landholders on large landholding patrons. The use of force and political manipulation extends even to elec-

roral processes, which are used to legitimate the power of local elites. The result has been a true "geography of power," in which the interrelation of territory, resources, and social control becomes the basis of political power.¹⁰

Historically, low population densities, the weak state presence, rebellious indigenous populations, and the isolation of towns in the area have, since colonial times, made the area vulnerable to external attack. These same factors have been important in fomenting illegal activities in the region, which had become a major source of income by the end of the colonial period.¹¹ Between 1850 and 1950, the economy of the Caribbean coast developed according to global trade economic cycles. At the same time, the geographic and demographic factors mentioned earlier undermined the possibilities of economic development and social cohesion.

In the nineteenth century, much of Magdalena developed as a frontier region, with most towns emerging along the trade routes of the Magdalena River, which remained the primary mode of transportation and communication in the region. Cattle ranching developed largely as a result of the lack of a significant labor force and a social structure still based on patrimonial domination. Only after 1905, with the dramatic increase in banana exports, did Magdalena witness an increase in commerce. Nonetheless, the enclave nature of the banana industry did not result in an equal development of the area. Only in those areas where banana plantations were formed—Ciénaga, Fundación, and Aracataca—did significant export-oriented commerce develop. By the middle of the twentieth century, the port of Santa Marta had still not been fully integrated into the national economy, largely due to a lack of effective transportation. Because of the lack of a railroad connection (controlled by the United Fruit Company), and the growth of the rival ports of Cartagena and Barranquilla, Santa Marta remained largely an export enclave for bananas.¹²

Today, the Caribbean coast has the highest rates of poverty in Colombia, and its per capita gross national product (GNP) is below the national average. In 1996, half the population lived in poverty.¹³ Socioeconomic statistics demonstrate the extreme underdevelopment of the region. While the literacy rate in Colombia is 71.2 percent, in the Caribbean states it reaches a dramatic 21.4 percent, with several states, including Magdalena, having literacy rates of over 48 percent. Moreover, only 19 percent of the population in this region has access to health care.¹⁴ Poverty is clearly linked to land-tenancy patterns. Over 78 percent of the land is owned by large landowners, who represent only 26 percent of all landholders in Magdalena.¹⁵ Although most of the land of the northern coast is arable and capable of producing a wide range of agricultural products, it has largely been dedicated to cattle ranching, an activity that is not highly productive, uses little labor, and thus has a

limited impact on economic development in the region. Moreover, overgrazing, deforestation, and a growing population have contributed to soil erosion and threatened the ecological balance of the region. Faced with this environmental threat, the Colombian state has failed to offer solutions, preferring to rely on private actors and voluntary agreements.

Drug Trafficking

By the end of the 1960s the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta had become the epicenter of a marijuana boom. The isolation and poverty of the rural economy were important elements in the development of this boom, as were the weakness of the state and a complex geography favoring contraband. The expansion of this boom brought with it a new wave of migrants from other departments, particularly Santander and Tolima. The rapid changes brought about by this economy, including access to new wealth, created new conflicts that led to violence. The lack of legitimate institutions to resolve conflicts and the fact that many of those involved in the drug trade came from lower-class sectors previously denied access to the region's sources of wealth led to an unprecedented wave of violence. In addition, the participation of the region's prominent families in the marijuana trade opened the way for this illicit economy to have a growing influence in the political arena. The buying of votes, made possible by the large sums of money controlled by drug traffickers, allowed those involved in the marijuana trade to acquire political power, including election to local councils or Congress.¹⁶ Inevitably, security forces, including the police, were corrupted by this trade. As the power of marijuana traffickers expanded, their private power, based on mafia codes of conduct, was used to dominate the public sphere.

A typical example of this dynamic involves the drug trafficker José Cuesta, who came from the coffee-growing area of Caldas and was very influential among migrants from the departments of Santander and Tolima.¹⁷ Cuesta made a name for himself as someone willing to resolve disputes, filling the void left by an absent state. He managed to survive the violence in the zone and by the 1980s had gained control of the coca trade in the Sierra Nevada area. Faced with the growing presence of guerrillas (ELN and FARC) in these areas, he emerged as a sponsor of paramilitary self-defense forces (*autodefensas*), gaining legitimacy as someone able and willing to control insurgent threats. Using his economic power to control votes, he developed close relationships with political elites, including a senator, and expanded his activities into legal economic enterprises, by the late 1990s effectively gaining control over much of the private transport industry in the region, developing an "ecotourism" business, and managing much of the infrastructure in the Santa Marta area.¹⁸ Finally, he was designated a "justice of the peace," increasing his respectabil-

ity as an upright citizen of the area. In many ways, the history of José Cuestra evokes the corrupt practices of the ruling elite of the province of Santa Marta in the colonial era, when those involved in contraband were admitted as respectable members of local society. Now as then, the isolation of the area, poverty and inequality, and a lack of resources conspire to blur the line between what is legal and respectable, and what is illicit and forbidden.

The private power of drug traffickers is also inserted into the public sphere through the purchase of lands and the provision of security. This process is best seen in the southern part of Magdalena, an area dominated by extensive cattle ranches. The area is today controlled by paramilitary forces, and in particular by Antonio Corrales, who made his reputation engaging in "social cleansing" (*limpieza social*), that is, physically eliminating common delinquents, cattle rustlers, and other social undesirables. His organization gradually "evolved" into a self-defense force, finally associating itself with the paramilitary forces of the AUC. In the area of Santa Marta, paramilitary forces are commanded by Pepe Torres, who has had difficult relations with José Cuestras. Finally, in the western part of Magdalena, near the town of Remolino, paramilitary forces are controlled by the drug trafficker "El Ciempiés," whose influence in drug trafficking and recruitment extends into the marginal neighborhoods of Barranquilla. This complex panorama suggests the confluence of persons involved in drug-trafficking activities, the paramilitary forces of Carlos Castaño, and cattle ranchers.¹⁹ In economically depressed towns and rural areas, the AUC has found fertile ground to recruit members, extending its private and mafioso model of social control.

As illicit activities have increased in the region, ranchers from traditional oligarchic families, such as Juancho Noguera from Aracataca, have been assassinated, even though many of them initially sponsored the self-defense forces in the region. The arbitrary and criminal activities of these groups have included the violent displacement of traditional families, as drug-trafficking groups look to take over their lands. While these actions have created uncertainty, they appear to follow a logic that, within the context of regional violence, is rational and that aims to create a new security situation.

Insurgency

Insurgents maintain an important presence in areas around the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, which is the only mountainous zone of the area and thus provides a higher level of protection for guerrillas. The Ninereenth Front (Frente José Prudencio Padilla) of the FARC and the Frente Francisco Javier Castaño of the ELN operate in the region, with the latter acting mostly in the southern area of Santa Marta. After 1997, the ELN increased its presence in the lake regions of the area. The apparent objective of the ELN was to insert

TABLE 5.1 Violence against the Civilian Population in the Ciénaga Grande of Santa Marta Area, 2000

Date	Site	Event(s)
January	Lower Magdalena river towns of Santa Rita, Tenorio, Remolino, El Baco, Guachada	Selective assassinations that provoke the displacement of 300 people
February 7	Remolino	Assassination of 3 people and destruction of houses
February 13	Buena Vista, Nueva Venecia, Remolino	Death threats and displacement of 1,100 peasants; Disappearance of 20 peasants in Remolino and the displacement of 3,000 peasants
Late February	Trojes de Caraca	Massacre of 7 persons
November 22	Nueva Venecia, Pueblo Viejo	Thirty-six people identified as assassinated, with up to 80 people unidentified

SOURCE: Report of the Comisión de Organismos de Derecho Humanos sobre las Masacres en la Ciénaga Grande de Santa Marta (January 19, 2001), Bogotá.

itself into an area that has high indices of poverty and unresolved conflict over the management of fishing resources; that is an important corridor between the Caribbean and other areas under the ELN's control; and finally that has a difficult geography that makes it ideal as a refuge as well as a place to hold hostages kidnapped from nearby cities. The arrival of the ELN was made palpable with an ultimatum to fishermen of the region who engaged in the *boliche* method, that is, large-scale and indiscriminate fishing of waters that dramatically reduces fish populations and thus negatively affects small fishing communities. The ELN's warning of reprisals against those who engaged in this method not only announced their presence but also highlighted the inability of state institutions to resolve a conflict that had long been a sore point among the population.²⁰ The incapacity of local institutions to manage the lake environment was most notable in 1995, when, during the construction of the road between Ciénaga and Barranquilla, salt and fresh water were mixed, causing a drastic fall in the fish population.

The lack of legitimate institutions clearly helps the guerrillas establish a relative level of acceptance based on norms and rules enforced through the use of military power. The entrance of the guerrillas in the zone has led to a series of massacres and confrontations involving the paramilitary (see table 5.1).

It is clear that both the guerrillas and the paramilitary forces respond to a specific regional dynamic. As table 5.2 notes, guerrilla and paramilitary actions focused on three conflicts that were sharpest in the Ciénaga. As armed

TABLE 5.2 Conflicts and Violent Actions in the Delta Area of Magdalena

Conflict	Guerrilla Actions	Paramilitary Actions
Water resource usage by large landholders and contamination near the Sierra Nevada (Aracaca and Fundación)	Attacks in Trojes and Aracaca	Massacres and displacements
Use of <i>balise</i> fishing	Threats issued against <i>balise</i> fishermen	Massacre of Nueva Venecia
Conflict over the management of canals	Interventions in the control of canals	Selective assassinations and displacements in Santa Rita

SOURCE: Field interviews.

groups attempted to consolidate their power, they manipulated and endangered the lives of civilians to assure their control over the population.

The strategic advance of paramilitary forces in the region responds to two specific goals: consolidating themselves in an area where they exercise important political influence; and creating a strong position from which they can advance a military solution to local conflicts, a strategy that has significant support from important sectors of local society and the state. The military offensive launched by the AUC at the end of 2000 against ELN positions near the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marra was an attempt to dislodge the guerrillas from their positions and achieve a total victory. The offensive was accompanied by the massacre of El Morro and attacks along the ELN's corridor linking the Sierra with other regions, resulting in the displacement of some seven hundred families.

By 2001, the paramilitaries had made important political and military advances in Magdalena. Politically, the AUC had learned to use its force to condition the electoral process, forcing candidates out of races to create a single option in elections for mayor, town council, and other positions, as well as pressuring voters on election day to vote for candidates approved by the paramilitaries. As a result of this strategy, the AUC effectively controls a third of the municipalities in the department. Simultaneously, as it gains economic control over the district of Santa Marra, a new strategy of social control is being implemented.

The paramilitary is not merely a reaction to the presence of guerrillas; it represents an independent political and military project of social control that extends the economic structures linked to cattle ranching *latifundio* and an agroindustrial sector that receives capital directly from drug trafficking. Although the relation between these agricultural sectors and drug trafficking has often been noted, the case of Magdalena suggests some interesting peculi-

arities. First, important sectors of the traditional political class are directly involved in the management of drug-trafficking activities, a situation reminiscent of the colonial era. Second, the move on the part of the paramilitary forces in the region toward acquiring political power through electoral pressures involves them directly in the management of a series of local and regional resources. Third, this unprecedented circumstance allows the AUC to use the cover of legitimate institutions to strengthen its private control of all aspects of citizens' lives, including the use of public spaces to protect, manage, and strengthen the private interests of drug traffickers. Fourth, these circumstances deepen the trend toward the privatization of dispute resolution, impeding the possibility that community demands can be publicly aired, debated, and resolved in public institutions. In effect, this deepens the traditional exclusion of the poor from the political arena and makes it even more improbable that public policies can be adopted to improve the social and economic conditions of the poor in the region. Finally, all of the above trends create a situation in Colombia controlled by actors whose strategic goal is an authoritarian transformation of the Colombian state, a situation that favors drug-trafficking interests searching to legitimate their activities through their leadership of a private strategy of counterinsurgency.

Putumayo

Putumayo is an Amazonian department near the Colombian border with Ecuador.²¹ The central and lower regions of the department are marked by a dynamic of colonization resulting from violence in other parts of the country, a crisis in the agrarian sector of the economy, and a flight of peasants from regions that have undergone aerial fumigations of poppy (the key ingredient for the production of heroin) and coca crops. As a result of this accelerated process of colonization, the area has seen a rapid and indiscriminate destruction of its dense tropical forests. Between 1983 and 1996, Putumayo lost 355,832 hectares of forest, ~~or 17.07 percent of its forest area~~. Among the areas worst affected are the lower Putumayo, including the Valle del Guamuez, which in this period lost 70 percent of its forest, and San Miguel, which lost 44 percent of its forest area.

The lower Putumayo has seen the most dramatic levels of conflict, which revolve around two dynamics: First, the fumigation of illicit crops has dramatically accelerated. Between December 22, 2000, and the first week of February 2001, 29,000 hectares in Putumayo were fumigated, an equivalent of 67 percent of all lands fumigated in 1999. Second, there has been an intensification of the fighting between paramilitary forces and guerrillas disputing control of the region. The AUC entered Puerto Asís at the end of 1997, motivated in part by the peasant marches carried out during 1996, which it per-

ceived as an indicator of social support for the guerrillas. During the initial stage of the paramilitaries' presence, there was a wave of selective assassinations of community leaders, church activists, and in general anyone thought to have links with the guerrillas. At the same time, the paramilitaries attempted to systematically displace the guerrillas' control of the commerce in coca paste and threatened shop owners in urban areas who refused to pay for the "protection" offered by the paramilitary forces. Peasant leaders who had led the 1996 marches were also threatened, and many were forced to leave the region.

By the end of 1998, the AUC entered the area of La Horniga, Valle de Guamuéz. Apparently, paramilitary forces had carried out intelligence operations prior to their entrance to the zone in order to detect possible supporters of the guerrillas and evaluate the terrain. The attempt to dislodge guerrillas from the area began with an effort to remove municipal authorities in a bid at gaining control of coca-paste commerce and developing links between local commercial activities and the economic interests of the paramilitary groups. To this end, these forces engaged in a high level of violence in an attempt to signal a change in the control of the region. The massacres thus have a symbolic function, announcing the power and presence of the paramilitaries. Simultaneously, the guerrillas of the FARC reacted with selective assassinations and massacres of their own in an attempt to neutralize the entrance of the AUC or regain control of areas lost.

The process of reverting guerrilla control in the lower Putumayo began with intelligence operations that focused on identifying the urban militia structure of the FARC, supporters of the guerrillas, and the places that were important in the commercialization of coca paste. At the same time, the AUC was interested in identifying the taxes and fees that the service and commercial sector paid, with the purpose of gaining control of these structures of payments, in the best tradition of the classic *gabeta*. Once this information had been ascertained, those involved in the local economy were notified of the change in the structure of power in the region and their new obligations. In the process of controlling the coca-paste economy, guerrillas had opted to eliminate the intermediaries in its commercialization. Behind the elimination of these intermediaries was an attempt to gain control of their profits, although the public argument of the guerrillas was their lack of confidence in this sector and its possible links with paramilitary groups.

The structure of "services" provided by the urban militias of the guerrillas has been a focal point of counterinsurgency strategy. Some estimates put the number of militia members at four to five times the number of combatants. As one union leader noted, "What are the militias of the FARC and ELN? They are instruments that allow them to place bombs, kidnap, and assault in

the cities."²² Generally the militias are directed by former guerrilla combatants who have developed physical problems as a result of combat with the armed forces. These militias are considered the principal obstacles in developing counterinsurgent actions, making it difficult for the armed forces to disarticulate the activities of guerrillas. In this sense, paramilitary actions have a specific logic within the context of the war: to undermine the militia structure of guerrillas and thus weaken their capacity to wage war.

An additional function of the militias is to exercise social control over the population. Gathering information and watching the movement of people within the town are some of their key occupations. In some areas, the militias facilitate the commercialization of coca paste by peasants. As the militias have been drawn into this activity, developing economic interests of their own, they have increasingly helped delegitimize the guerrillas, as arbitrary and despotic behavior undermines the ideals of guerrilla struggles. As middlemen in the commercialization of coca paste, the militias of some zones have become key actors linking insurgent groups with the drug economy, taking the place of a multiplicity of intermediaries that channeled part of the capital derived from the local commercialization process into such diverse economic activities as bars, prostitution, and arms trafficking. Traditional intermediaries (*chibichibos*) are usually the first to suffer economically when groups linked to the insurgents decide to enter the trade themselves. These intermediaries in turn become available as a social base to paramilitary groups, who usually allow them to continue in their role as long as they pay a tax to the local AUC. The relation between the intermediaries and paramilitary groups is clearly one that emerges only as a result of guerrilla actions.²³

The illegal economy and the war also intersect in the area of prices. Normally, guerrilla intermediaries offer lower purchase prices for coca paste in order to increase their own profit margins. Many producers risk their lives, given that guerrillas impose a "death penalty," by selling their coca to non-guerrilla intermediaries who promise market value for their product. Here again, the expansion of paramilitary forces in the Amazonian region is linked to the illegal economy. While guerrillas manipulate market prices to their own advantage, the AUC is much more flexible, allowing demand and supply to fix the price of coca paste without intervention, as long as intermediaries are willing to pay their tribute.

Another problem that peasants face comes from the fact that guerrilla intermediaries often do not pay promptly for their products, undermining the legitimacy of the guerrillas and reminding many peasants of state agencies that did not pay for legal crops, a situation that initially led many peasants into the coca economy. In many cases guerrillas will pay peasants in "certificates" that can be used in small stores to buy necessities. Merchants are then

forced to wait for payment from the guerrillas for the certificates, usually having to accept less than face value. A difference thus emerges between the role that guerrillas used to play as defenders of peasant interests and providers of security for recent colonizers of the zone, and their more recent role as armed middlemen in the drug trade, who underpay for products, are late with payments, and use strong-arm tactics to quiet complaints.

Although the entrance of the guerrillas into drug activities was a pragmatic reaction to the coca economy, it opened the way to an increasing delegitimization of insurgent groups and new opportunities for the entry of paramilitary groups into the area. The guerrillas have reacted to these challenges by imposing new rules of behavior backed by armed threats and attempting to demonstrate their continued military and political power, as with the "armed strike" that was declared by the FARC in Putumayo from late September to November 28, 2000. The strike was a political disaster for the FARC for a number of reasons. First, there were no clear objectives offered to the population, beyond a rejection of the paramilitary presence. Second, despite an attempt to send a message regarding the implementation of Plan Colombia, the strike proved exhausting for both the FARC and the population. By weakening both groups, the strike lessened the possibility of effective resistance to antidrug efforts. This created ideal conditions for the government's plan to initiate an aerial fumigation program, which effectively started in the area in December 2000. Third, the strike resulted in the destruction of property such as cars and an oil pipeline (causing serious environmental damage) and a prohibition on transportation that created food shortages, hitting poor peasants hardest. The result thus appeared self-defeating for the population of Putumayo. Finally, the strike was lifted unilaterally by the FARC without having gained any significant benefit for the people of the region but having generated serious resentment due to the high costs suffered by the population. The strike demonstrated the profound political crisis of a guerrilla group that substitutes unclear demonstrations of force for specific political objectives. Moreover, the absence of a political project and concrete proposals for regional development has led to a growing preference for the use of force and an authoritarian and arrogant approach toward the civilian population.

Comparing the Two Scenarios of Conflict

Both Magdalena and Putumayo evidence a strong absence of a legitimate state presence. However, the ways in which this absence is manifested are distinct in the two regions. In the Atlantic coast region, the exercise of power is based on premodern relations articulated with state actors through the clientelism of the two traditional parties. This pattern traditionally allowed the state a minimal level of institutional control. With the growth of drug traf-

ficking, illegal private actors have increasingly displaced the state in the area of social control. The exercise of power by these new actors has been carried out through the use of violence, the creation of personal ties of loyalty, and the payment of various forms of *gabala*, in a pattern that cuts across the entire region. The internal war affecting Colombia has, moreover, dramatically reduced the institutional capacity of the state to carry out even its minimal functions, while at the same time the premodern and privatized social relations that characterize illegal actors involved in the violence have become their strongest weapon.

Colombia's armed conflict is not one involving a struggle between a modern state attempting to impose its legitimacy through the use of force and an insurgent group. The support, both implicit and explicit, by sectors of the state for private groups engaged in violence and atrocities evidences a pattern of social control reminiscent of the premodern era. At the same time, this relationship crystallizes the prevalence of an *espite* *mañoso* in a context of modernization without modernity. By substituting for the legitimate exercise of state power the atrocities and cruelties carried out by private actors, a subculture is emerging that is based on values of order enforced through premodern private powers. This subculture, with deep roots in drug trafficking, is increasingly demanding its acceptance in society as legitimate. Its primary function is to castigate and warn its enemies or their potential friends. In this sense, it embodies practices characteristic of medieval warriors, with vengeance as a necessary value in the code of honor. This code, typifying what Lawrence Stone has termed the medieval "society of *honorados*," has an increasingly high level of acceptance among the diverse sectors of political and economic power in Colombia.²⁴

"Security for investment" is one of the pragmatic slogans formulated by these sectors. Rather than a formula for the development of a modern state, it posits an authoritarian model of development using premodern methods to guarantee security. As their legal counterparts do, these illegal investors aspire to insert themselves into the global marketplace and attract foreign investors. In the areas of both security and investment, they obtain the support of a variety of organizations that see in their private mechanisms a better likelihood of security being provided than the state can offer. This situation leads to an important question: what is the state in Colombia at the start of the twenty-first century if not the very predominance of these private interests, which have proved incapable of creating symbols of a unifying national identity and culture and which are now affected by these same mechanisms of private power that they tolerated for so long? The Colombian conflict is nothing more than the result of a long history during which multiple forms of private power were created and armed.²⁵ In this context, the *espite* *mañoso* has be-

come a symbiosis between the historic legacy of drug trafficking's attempt to legalize and legitimize itself through land ownership and the implementation of a successful counterinsurgency strategy based on the privatization of power. For significant sectors of the country's political elite, the *espíritu mafioso* is becoming the primary ethic in the exercise of public power. It is worth remembering that in the Sicilian context the *mafia*, with its use of violence as a mechanism of economic control and strength, permitted the creation of an order whose rules, though unstable, helped define a structure of power.

What might be the final result of this dynamic in Colombia? The growing fragmentation of national political power and the self-sufficiency of regional power groups that challenge the national state are a key part of this situation. Behind this self-sufficiency lies the power and resources provided by drug trafficking, which accommodates itself to this fragmentation and, as we have seen, gains strength in diverse regions. An increased level of centralization would thus appear to be, at least in the long term, a possible response on the part of all armed groups as well as the state to the ungovernability that fragmented power presents. While the guerrillas are supposedly fighting to capture centralized state power, the response of the paramilitary forces is more complicated. These forces developed with the direct and indirect support of state power and thus have up to now not attempted to attack the central state. Moreover, it is clear that a significant sector of the state still is convinced of the military usefulness of paramilitary forces in diminishing the insurgent challenge, believing in their instrumentality. Nonetheless, this new actor has begun to acquire a level of power that has led to a growing demand for political recognition. How the central state will respond to this challenge remains to be seen, although an accommodation that requires an authoritarian reposition of the state is a possibility. It is quite likely that paramilitary forces will attempt to occupy any new political spaces created by a centralized redefinition of state power.

The *espíritu mafioso* in Colombia is also to be found among the country's guerrillas. Insurgents have increasingly become less interested in convoking diverse sectors of society and articulating a common vision based on participation and autonomy. Instead, guerrillas have focused on using social groups in an instrumental way, to merely advance their own particular interests. Moreover, there is an increasing use of violence to advance the nonpolitical interests of insurgents. These include resolving personal disputes or obtaining special benefits from individuals, taking over the role of intermediary in the commercialization of coca paste, promoting marches and mobilizations advanced by the guerrillas, and finally ensuring that the sale of coca paste occurs in only those places authorized by the guerrillas.

The growing personalization of military power ascribed to guerrilla com-

manders throughout the country has also contributed to an *espíritu mafioso*, insofar as this personalization has been accompanied by the predominance of clientelistic relationships with the local population and a tendency to resort to force when problems or resistance emerge. Although these characteristics bring the guerrillas closer to *mafia* models of violent behavior, it should also be remembered that they still maintain political and military practices and a public discourse that emphasizes their role as an insurgent force attempting to combat the formal structures of the state.

Violence and Social Control

The *espíritu mafioso* is growing and is permeating Colombian society as a whole. Values such as vengeance and the violent settling of scores are an increasing part of everyday life. These values often produce schizophrenic results: most Colombians condemn drug trafficking; however, when a trafficker attempts to "legalize" his situation by buying land and acquire legitimacy by supporting those who promote "order" in the community, he is accepted or at least not openly questioned. The large profits generated by the global trade in drugs have clearly contributed to a new regional economic dynamic, creating employment and income without the need for government-directed development. This new source of income has also modified expectations in these regions, which traditionally focused on demands for state support of infrastructure or assistance in creating sustainable development. The drug economy created huge profits for individuals, but with a loss of social order and personal risk. In the past, community organization was by necessity a vehicle of survival for those settling areas of colonization, helping colonizers confront a range of difficulties. Today, the drug trade has created perceptions of immediate profits in the present, undermining the idea of an uncertain future that requires organization, social protests, and pressures on the state to provide economic and social benefits.

Economic globalization and the discourse of free trade have helped demonstrate to many the goods available from a highly profitable activity, creating new consumer expectations among a population that could previously not imagine such bounty. Local economies that were economically backward and isolated, never imagining direct market access to consumer goods without the intermediation of state agents, have now been dollarized and inserted into consumer markets. These changes did not come without a significant cost. The absent state cannot provide security or collect taxes. Its premodern condition does not allow it to construct affirmative cultural referents, which in turn makes the use of force the primary mechanism to resolve conflicts and regulate behavior. Even with its use of force, the state does not act to realize and consolidate a strategic monopoly. Rather, it acquiesces in and tolerates

private violence to resolve conflicts, which may be effective in the short term but over time tends to contribute to the state's delegitimization. As a result, state policies have weakened the ethical mechanisms and symbols that could strengthen its actions against those that violate the law or corrupt public policies, with Colombian society paying a high cost.

Amid the violence, drug trafficking is perceived in two ways: either as a mechanism of support for the guerrillas, which thus requires a strong response (the position of those who support Plan Colombia), or as a source of financing for the creation of a new structure of power, based on the intermediation of capital from drug trafficking. Colombia's war is thus not just one involving economic and military disputes. The demands of war are forcing the different armed actors involved to construct their own structures of security and control in local environments, in most cases sacrificing the interests of local communities. Armed conflict is thus becoming an end in itself, substituting trust in military leaders who are intolerant of civil society and merely interested in gaining control over noncombatants for the possibility of constructing democratic spaces and participation.

The Changing Map of Colombia's War

The map of war in Colombia is rapidly changing. The south is undergoing strategic changes, with the insurgency gaining influence over an ample area of the Amazonian region and attempting to gain control over the frontiers that border Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru. The strategy increases the guerrillas' mobility and helps defend their financial base. While Plan Colombia envisions government forces gaining control of a territory the size of Putumayo (24,885 kilometers) over a two-year period, the insurgency has expanded its "theater of operations" to include over 400,000 kilometers in the Amazonian region. A third of the nation's territory is thus experiencing a structure of power based on a war economy and authoritarian methods of control, with draconian regulations governing all aspects of daily life.

A variety of factors has seriously weakened the peace process, including the consolidation of paramilitary forces, which enjoy ample support from important sectors and which successive governments have been unable to confront in an effective manner; the perception that the United States prefers policies that emphasize military solutions to Colombia's problems—a perception that only deepened in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in the United States and its subsequent emphasis on antiterrorism as an integral part of national security; and finally a hardening of positions in both the state and society, as confidence in peace talks was shaken by an increase in kidnappings, extortion, and attacks against civilian targets. As confidence in the peace process waned during 2001, important sectors of Colombian society pressured Presi-

dent Andrés Pastrana to take a harder line with the guerrillas. Increasing attacks on the population and a general acceleration of violence significantly raised the costs of negotiating in the midst of the conflict, ultimately leading to a breakdown of negotiations in early 2002. Moreover, pressure from Washington to intensify the military aspects of Plan Colombia and combat international terrorism created a dynamic that made the peace process increasingly unsustainable. This dynamic also led insurgents to question the usefulness of the peace process as a mechanism to end the conflict, based on the belief that the Colombian government is not representative of society and lacks the ability to move the process forward.

Insurgents, in the meantime, attempted to increase their area of operations, their financial strength, and their military readiness in order to improve their bargaining position. Authoritarian methods of social control, attacks against civilian targets, and the lack of serious proposals concerning the country's problems created a legitimacy problem for the guerrillas and also came at a high political cost, as in Putumayo. On the other hand, the unfolding of the war, with its strong paramilitary component, reduced the government's negotiating leverage and had a negative impact on the peace process, reducing confidence among all actors. The growing U.S. intervention in the name of fighting drug trafficking, the economic crisis that took hold in the 1990s, and the weakness of the traditional parties have all contributed to a regime crisis that insurgents have learned to use to their own advantage. At the same time, civil society remains weak, unable to coordinate a response to violence, and lacking conditions for fuller development.

The situation in Colombia has begun to approach that of the worst period of the "Violencia" (1948-55), when the polarization of the countryside was such that civilian populations were ascribed to one side or the other and thus considered legitimate targets. With the state absent from this growing polarization, it has become just another armed faction in the war, losing its role as mediator and organizer of public over private interests. The peace process effectively obscured the complexity of the drug economy, treating it as a largely marginal issue, even as its role in the dynamic of war has been increasing. While drug trafficking is an extremely difficult problem to address, given its international dimension, external pressure from the United States has focused attention on coca eradication, which as a policy has failed, only contributing to an intensification of conflict. With hard-line policies being adopted by President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, elected in 2002, it is worth remembering that a purely military approach that does not recognize the complex intersection of interests and local conditions behind armed conflict, evident in places such as Magdalena and Putumayo, is unlikely to succeed.