

UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA
Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão



**Lisbon School
of Economics
& Management**
Universidade de Lisboa

Economic Motivations to Join Insurgencies in Colombia

Fabian Enrique Garzón Cuervo

Orientador: Prof. Doutor Carlos Nuno das Neves D'Assa Castel-Branco

Tese especialmente elaborada para obtenção do grau de Doutor em
Estudos de Desenvolvimento

2021

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In loving memory of my father, who always put me
in his shoulders to keep me out of the mud.

Dedicada a Lorena, por ser y estar.

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INTRODUCTION

“Conflict is the universal experience of all life forms”
—Johan Van der Dennen (1995)

Although it is perhaps impossible to define it in a literal and univocal form, conflict can be simply understood as the “collision of opposing interests” (Cooper, 2003, p. 85), and violent conflict, then, as the attempt to settle those differences through violent means.

The analysis of violent conflict has been marked by the gradual emergence of multiple analytical stances attempting to understand it from the perspective of diverse units of analysis (individuals, groups, institutions, and nation-states), and through diverse disciplines (biology, psychology, sociology, international relations, etc.), all aimed to find the best methods of intervention (medical, military, diplomatic, etc.) (Joxe, 1981, p. 13).

Porto (2002) provides a concise revision of the evolution of the analysis of large-scale armed conflict. In his compendium he underscores the fact that inter-state (and global) armed conflicts have tended to attract almost all of the academic attention, especially from the international relations and strategic studies perspective, under the assumption that “war is just the continuation of politics by other means” (Clausewitz, quoted in Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013, p. 1890). He adds that during the Cold War era conflict students adopted almost unanimously a stand in which all conflicts were seen either as ‘proxy wars’ of the bipolar clash between the United States and Soviet Union superpowers, ‘small wars’ or ‘low intensity conflicts’ with minor political importance, and that only after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the world began to realize that those supposedly isolated and meaningless conflicts were generating unusual levels of destruction and human suffering around the world, on account of “national, ethnic, religious or cultural character identity” issues (Porto, 2002, p. 5).

Among the strands of study of the circumstances for the emergence, amplification and duration of armed conflict, those related to economic factors gained continuous preponderance inasmuch as economic aspects of the armed confrontation such as financing methods, international trade in illegal markets, personal profit opportunities, and protraction with economic purposes came to the surface. While certainly not negligible, the predominance of economic

factors in the analysis of violent conflicts gradually displaced political and social elements (at the macro level) as well as ideological and psychological elements (at the micro level). The former trend is noticeable in the routine characterization of the violent conflicts that started after the end of the Cold War (or ‘new wars’) as predominantly provoked and driven by economic rather than by ideological or political motivations (See Kaldor, 2012); the latter is noticeable in the routine consideration of combatants as selfish and avaricious individuals that are willing to risk their lives merely to obtain pecuniary benefits regardless of any political or ideological alignment (if any) of the armed group (Collier, 2000a, 2000c; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998, 2004), in what now is widely known as the ‘Greed versus Grievance theory of armed conflict’.

Both tenets become especially compelling when the society in question is endowed with an abundant supply of easily exploitable natural resources to provide means for the confrontation to illegal armed groups, and poverty situations to provide material incentives to individuals to participate. Ugarriza and Craig (2012) observe that during the 1990s the analysis of armed conflict switched to “rationalist explanations” in which economic questions became dominant, and in which the spotlight was put on “data-rich analyses that focus on variables that are more naturally quantifiable, especially those related to the political economy of war” (p. 446). Based on econometric analyses of proxy variables such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the Gini coefficient, or per capita income, greed theorists concluded that –in general– armed rebellion is rarely related to dismal circumstances such as political or economic inequality, but rather the result of fabricated arguments around social outrage, used to generate and exploit conflicts to serve hidden economic agendas, especially given that –based on cost and benefit calculations– rational consumers (read, people) will never risk their safety to participate in such enterprises.

Armed conflict has also gained attention given that development theorists have underscored that it is disproportionately affecting low-income countries, and that if not the only, it is one of the major causes of their economic and social underdevelopment (Gates et al., 2012). The opposite view (armed conflict being

the result of underdevelopment) is less studied –or has less protagonism– but has opened ways to the consideration of economic and political inequality, failures in the social contract, and poor provision of government services as triggering events (Stewart, 2002).

Another source of controversy on the matter emerges from what Cramer (2006) calls the ‘Western-Liberal conception of war’: an analytical posture that understands armed conflict as a deviation from what is considered ‘normal’; read, a liberal, democratic, peaceful, politically stable, and economically prosperous society. War is thus seen as an artificial obstacle to progress that generates ‘development in reverse’¹. This view –in his words– rapidly became the mainstream line of thought for the study of violent conflict, and while the intellectual analysis tended to fixate on how destructive and negative it is, the corrective proposals focused in how to make all the affected societies to rapidly converge to ‘normality’ and ‘modernity’ through the transplantation of the self-proclaimed liberal, democratic, peaceful, stable, and prosperous political, economic and cultural institutions from the avant-garde nations of the world to the underdeveloped (and violent) ones. The same author criticizes what he considers the historical amnesia of the developed (and now peaceful) powers, which actively used war, colonialism, and slavery to expand their economic interests and/or as forms of accumulation prior to become developed, peaceful and democratic. For him, violence is common in major social transition periods “characterized by conflict over the terms of accumulation of wealth” (Cramer, 2006, p. 13).

Two crucial implications of the presumption of ‘new’ conflicts as predominantly detached from the idealistic motivations that the Western-Liberal conception of war deems as acceptable to wage wars are (a) to overemphasize economic topics in contemporary conflict analysis, converting economic theory in the preferred choice to address it, and (b) to criminalize war to the point of asserting that its political economy has lost all the politics in it (Gutiérrez, 2008).

¹ Havard and Henrik (2015).

The Colombian case has been no exception. During the late 1980s and the early 1990s a wave of literature began to raise the visibility of the Colombian armed conflict, but not precisely because of the notoriety of the social concerns that the war was materializing, nor because of the growing magnitude of violence, but because of the negative effects of the armed confrontation in economic activity and the reprehensible linkages between drug production and non-state armed groups. As aforementioned, the political and ideological elements of the insurgent struggle tended to be overlooked, and the individuals participating in armed rebellion began to be depicted as mere delinquents by reason of the activities carried out by the insurgencies to finance their operations (theft, extortion, drug traffic, etc.) or to advance their political intentions (kidnapping, attacks, bombings, etc.).

However, the last decade has seen an increase in both the variety and depth of the literature about the Colombian conflict, and although maintaining a marked inclination towards issues such as the criminality associated with it, its negative impact in the economic performance of the country, and its links with narcotics, comprehensive and interdisciplinary compendiums have broadened the spectrum of themes and the depth of the analyses on conflict-related issues such as land and rural disputes, victimization, conflict politics, historical transformations, and effects on the social fabric. One of the themes that have gained notoriety thanks to such expansion and that began to be analyzed in more detail is the individual motivations to join armed movements in Colombia.

During the 1980s the academic emphasis was put on the dynamic of the peasant and workers movements that were 'pushed to arms' due to the elite and governmental refusal to redress land property and labor controversies. Later on, during the 1990s, the first biographical accounts of former combatants generated interest in the personal trajectories of 'normal citizens' into insurgency, yet devoid from references to the contextual frame. In the early 2000s major contributions to the subject expanded the analysis by presenting comprehensive descriptions of the history of the Colombian armed conflict, by describing the precarious socioeconomic conditions (e.g. unsatisfied basic needs

and poverty) of many recruits, and by taking account of the multiplicity of potential reasons to participate in armed groups, among which personal history of victimization, search for protection or revenge, longing for status, romantic relationships with members, and allure for weaponry, emerged for the first time as causes of personal involvement in Colombian armed groups, calling into question –even before their popularization– the precepts of the ‘Greed versus Grievance Theory’.

The discoveries of this new strand of literature represented a major contribution to the knowledge about the recruitment phenomenon in Colombia but instead of opening new ways to research thoroughly the compelling factors behind it, they were –in our view– taken as the final findings on the matter, and the attention of scholars was redirected (when analyzing personal involvement) towards the recruitment of minors on grounds of its recurrence, the vulnerability of the protagonists, and its war crime character, tending to conclude that their participation was always forced for being underage, and in the case of adults, most of the time a conscious and informed decision.

Drawing from Jeong (2008), who remarks that “the complexity of conflict differs, depending on whether it focuses on interpersonal, inter-group, and international relations or global agendas” (p. 16), we argue that for the Colombian conflict attention has been focused in the tensions between the state and its armed contenders, neglecting the goals of combatants (by assuming them equal to those of the armed groups), neglecting the political or social goals of the insurgencies (by assuming them equal to those of the drug cartels because of their involvement in the narcotics business), and tacitly assuming as true diverse tenets of the ‘Greed versus Grievance’ approach; for instance, that greed is always individual and that grievances are always collective, that greed is always characteristic of the poor or of rebels, that grievances are political or immaterial wishes opposed to greed (exclusively material ambitions), or that individuals are invariably using their right and capacity to choose to make decisions regarding participation in armed groups.

In this work we adopted a methodology for the analysis of personal motivations to join insurgencies in Colombia in which we test the main precepts of the ‘Greed versus Grievance’ theory, using as input material interviews made to individuals demobilized between 2015 and 2017, along with an outline of the general historical context and peculiarities of two armed groups (the FARC and the ELN) described in previous analyses of the Colombian armed conflict. These latter elements are crucial inasmuch as they accentuate the embeddedness of potential recruits in conflict-affected milieus as key determinants of their personal interests and behavior, long before enrolment. Additionally, we proposed an alternative categorization of the motivations declared by those interviewees, which does not label individuals in restricting taxonomies such as ‘mercenary’ or ‘ideologue’, but that reflects their aspirations related to the immediate situation at hand, this is, their context. We conceptualize all the declared motives to join as grievances, and separate them between personal and collective, material and psychological.

This alternative layout allowed us, to break the traditional dichotomy between ‘greed’ and ‘grievance’ and show that the latter can be materially-based and not necessarily resemble avarice, to associate personal grievances with local contexts and the development of gradual closeness with armed groups, and to inspect the intersection between the needs of the armed groups and those of the individuals that join them.

We draw from Ratelle (2013), who argues that “cross-national and econometric approaches reach the limit of their explanatory capacity as they are not able to provide concrete depictions of these heterogeneous pathways and mechanisms toward and outside of violence” (p. 161); from Cramer (1999), who argues that econometric analyses gain in formality but lose on the understanding of social and group relations; and from Medina (2008), who argues that “while it may be that the data speak for themselves, they speak only about themselves [and in the case of armed conflict] not about its underlying social processes” (p. 56), and we refrain from using econometric or sophisticated statistics techniques in this work with aims to study the social reality of individuals that join insurgencies in

Colombia directly from their own interpretation of it rather than from proxy variables such as GDP, per capita income, or average educational attainment. Correlation between –say– poverty and enrolment into armed groups has been widely documented, but the tenets of the ‘Greed versus Grievance’ theory have relegated the personal experience to the background, based on direct associations between group’s and individual’s means or by establishing outright equivalence between cases in different continents (e.g. African warlords and Colombian insurgencies). Additionally, econometric analyses cannot elucidate the triggering events of the conflict itself, the social trajectory beyond the poverty and hardship, the fluctuations in participation derived from different armed conflict phases, or the influence of political and economic control of determined armed groups in personal expectations and aspirations. Those studies are limited to prove the presence of relation between two phenomena and the intensity of such relation, but not its origins, development, or its inner workings.

A full review of the armed conflict debate or even about the Colombian conflict debate is beyond the scope of this work, but we try to build on previous works to contribute to overcome what we consider the major limitation on the mainstream studies about individual participation in armed groups: the attempt to model the decision to join armed groups in the same way in which traditional economic models depict the decisions of diverse agents as based on a single variable: price (being this the perfect reflection of all the multivariate factors involved in the process). It is perhaps easier to assert that the decision to join armed groups responds to one single compiling proxy variable (read, utility) than to acknowledge that the decision is so complex that is not possible to explain it accurately; in the same vein, it is perhaps easier to assert that insurgents are avaricious people that use violence to attain their goals than to acknowledge that long-standing institutional shortcomings have created, fed, and aggravated social conditions that push them to confront such institutional structures via armed means.

Our main goal is to question if recruits in Colombia are indeed motivated by personal economic benefits and how insurgencies become the potential providers of such benefits, this is, the concatenation of micro and meso factors, and following Thaler (2015), who recommends to abandon “methodological puritanism” (p. 12) in the analysis of violence, taking a distance from both the tenets of the homo-economicus and the data rigidity of econometrics.

For addressing those questions, this work proceeds as follows: in the first chapter we provide a brief revision of historical milestones of the Colombian history that, in spite of not directly forging modern armed conflict, served to shape social and economic institutions that created and aggravated conflicts that more often than not became violent for not being properly addressed. In the second chapter we introduce pivotal notions of collective action theory to analyze the passage from personal conflictive situations to collective ones, and subsequently to violence, and link those notions with the emergence of modern insurgencies (with emphasis on the FARC and the ELN) in Colombia during the middle of the twentieth century. In the third chapter we present a general profile of the political, economic, and social structures that shaped the armed conflict after its official inception, as well as the emergence of new actors and the evolution of their respective goals and strategies, in a view to bring forward the convoluted and volatile context in which individual participation in armed groups takes place. In the fourth chapter we present an overview of the theoretical approaches to the analysis of motivation of human action and the motivation to join armed groups in general, to later present a chronological review of the literature analysis the Colombian case, with the intention of gauging the progression of its arguments and conclusions; we also provide a summary of the latest findings regarding the forms of victimization of the civilian population surrounded by the armed confrontation, which advanced statistical methods also tends to neglect. Lastly, in the fifth chapter we present our data, our methodological approach for its analysis, and the results of the application of the latter in the former.

Our cluster of demobilized combatants allows us to, present a more detailed analysis of individual motivations for participation in insurgencies, not confined to children; the progression of their relationship with insurgencies through their life stories rather than sudden changes of state (e.g. civilian to combatant), mainly by portraying the connection between the surrounding economic and social environment and their preferences (not in the microeconomic theoretical connotation of the word); suggest an overarching story of participation based on personal experiences, that goes beyond the subjectivity of biographies but that does not generalize their realities based on aggregated proxy variables or theoretical assumptions about the formation and participation in armed groups; develop incipient intergroup, intertemporal or interregional comparisons, to open avenues for research that allow make better use of this sort of data beyond the usual statistical or econometric measures; and to shed light onto one key component of such decision that is never mentioned in related literature, namely, personal aspirations.

For us today's leaders were yesterday's rebels, and while the struggles against monarchical, colonial, or imperial trade and credit monopolies, excessive taxes, servitude and slavery, tilted political and law systems, or concentration of wealth were considered heroic and righteous at certain times, recent peasant and worker struggles against trade and credit monopolies, excessive taxes, servitude working relations, tilted political and law systems, and concentration of wealth have been considered subversive and iniquitous by present-day rulers. In the following pages we explore the motivations of a cluster of Colombians to join insurgencies, in pursuit of a clearer vision of why their participation is considered as subversive and iniquitous, while similar behaviors were considered heroic and righteous in the past.

Map of Colombia with administrative division and location of capitals².



Source: Own construction. Adapted from Leech (2011).

² None of the maps in this work include San Andrés and Providencia islands, which is one of the 32 official departments of Colombia, located 710 km northwest of Cartagena and 180 km off the coast of Nicaragua ("San Andrés y Providencia," n.d.). All related studies describe it as the only department of Colombia free of armed conflict.

1. HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMED CONFLICT

“Get off this estate.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s mine.”

“Where did you get it?”

“From my father.”

“Where did he get it?”

“From his father.”

“And where did he get it?”

“He fought for it.”

“Well, I’ll fight you for it.”

—Carl Sandburg (1950)

1.1. Introduction

According to Valencia (1970), in contrast to the ‘classical war’ armies organized around territorial expansion or market domination motivations, ‘guerrilla movements’ are the response to problematic social, political and economic conditions within a singular national society, that, by not being properly addressed by the ruling classes, compel organized groups to engage in a violent struggle for power with a view to transform the society. Provided that, “the history of Colombia [can be seen as] the history of [the] indefinite postponement of many necessary changes, both in the state institutions [and] in the social structures” (Pizarro Leongómez, 2016, p. 20)³.

The literature analyzing Colombian armed conflict has increased its emphasis in interdisciplinary reviews of its historical evolution with aims to unravel its emergence, expansion, protraction and transformation, however, also Pizarro Leongómez (2016) remarks that it is difficult to pinpoint one single event or historical period as an unequivocal inception of the Colombian armed conflict, for the agrarian conflicts of the early twentieth century, the labor disputes of the 1920s and 1930s, the partisan violence of the 1940s, the killing of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948, and the governmental repression used to contain social protest during the 1950s and 1960s are all commonly cited as the circumstance that inaugurated the armed struggle. For its part, authors like Bushnell (1996), Palacios (2003) and Safford and Palacios (2002) prefer to consider all those as interlinked and consecutive unresolved grievances that gradually snowballed and ultimately derived in the military confrontation between the state and civilian armed groups.

One common trait in all the circumstances or episodes recognized by scholars and thinkers as essential for the unfolding of armed conflict in Colombia is that their driving factors are usually traced to circumstances or episodes from

³ All sources in Spanish quoted throughout this document are translated by the author. No explanatory note is produced for each source in order to avoid saturation of repetitive footnotes.

previous periods. Thus, for example, the literature associates agrarian conflicts of the twentieth century with land tenure frameworks established during post-independence, which in turn were prolongations of frameworks inherited from Spanish colony; or explains the partisan violence of the 1940s as the degradation of political dissent not properly addressed during early republican times, et cetera. On the other hand, political, social and economic tensions have tended to overlap and amplify their adverse effects on each other, for which most academic exercises on the Colombian armed conflict coincide in considering “mono-causal explanations insufficient”, while at the same time underscoring a set of recurrent factors as its key determinants: agrarian conflicts, extensive institutional weakness, judicial ineffectiveness, deep income and social inequality, and absence of the state in diverse regions, most of which display remarkable historical continuity (Pizarro Leongómez, 2016, p. 64).

With that in mind, incorporating a historical analysis of the Colombian armed conflict is fundamental in the analysis of the motivations of thousands of men and women to join armed groups, for two main reasons. First, “men make history, but [not] as they please [or] under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances [...] given, and transmitted from the past” (Marx, quoted in MacRaild, 2004, p. 81); second, the insurgence phenomenon in Colombia, understood as a political phenomenon (read, an attempt to transform social, political and economic circumstances), just like “every significant political phenomenon lives in history, and requires historically grounded analysis for its explanation” (Tilly, 2006, p. 536).

Each and every period and dimension presented in the following pages is analyzed thoroughly in specialized literature elsewhere. Here we limit our depiction to some of the most meaningful characteristics of the Colombian political and economic history that —together or separately— contributed to the subsequent establishment of diverse left-wing revolutionary insurgencies.

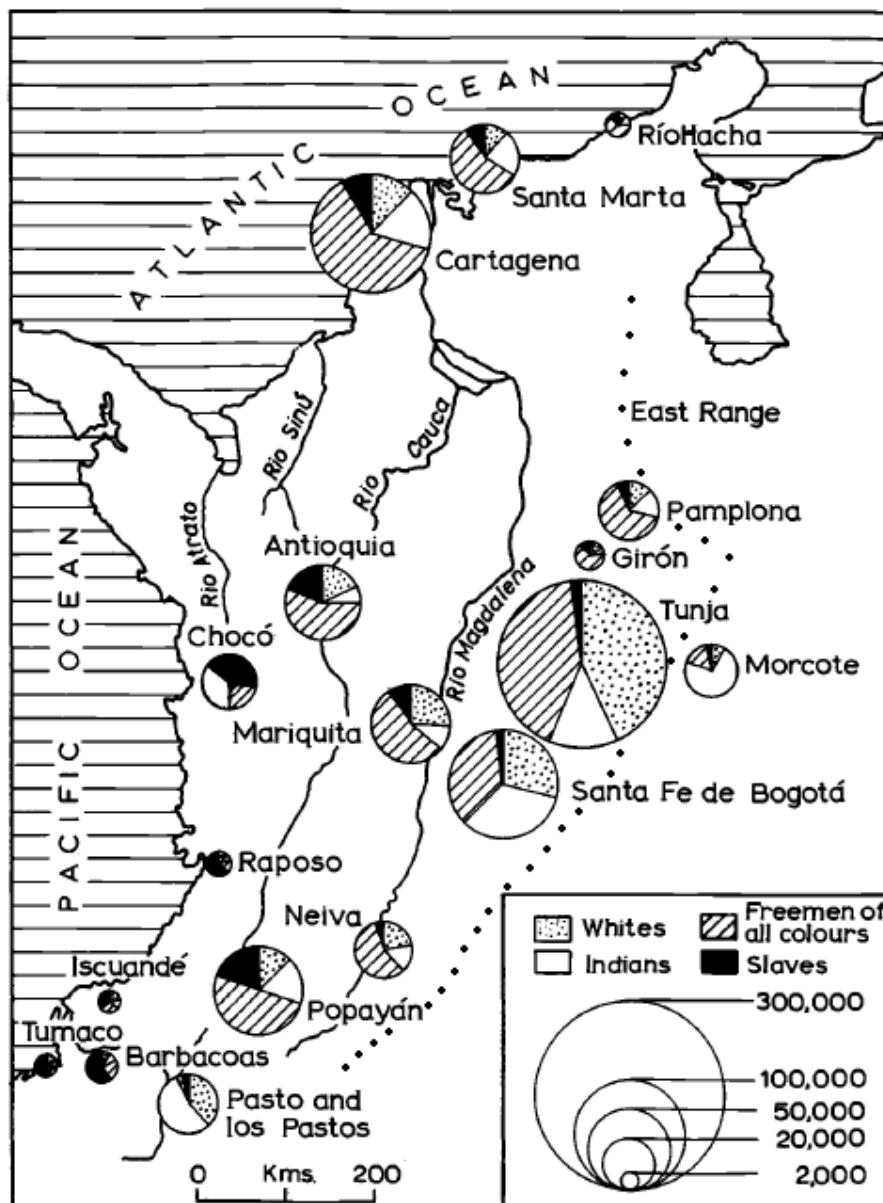
1.2. Colonial era

American colonies were administered under a system of territorial subdivisions with marked administrative and economic hierarchies that tried to maintain the centralized political structure of Spain (e.g. viceroyalty in the highest level and province in the lowest) while at the same time fulfilling the economic interests of the Spanish monarchy in a decentralized way (Bushnell, 1996).

Following that approach, Spanish colonial dominion was initially based on a population-allotment figure called *Encomienda*, intended to extract resources from regions with high concentration of indigenous population, firstly, due to the availability of workforce and the ease to organize and exploit tax systems (Guillén Martínez, quoted in González González, 2016); secondly, because of the presence of nearby gold mines; and thirdly, because of its strategic position either in terms of proximity to rivers or the sea for convenient transportation or seclusion for military defense (González González, 2016). This resulted in the establishment of geographically distant political and economic units rather than an effectively interconnected network (Zambrano, quoted in González González, 2016), or what Safford and Palacios (2002) call “islands of territory” (p. 35) (See Map 1-1).

These ‘islands’ stimulated the emergence of two differentiated microcosms: the centralization of bureaucratic political and economic control in ‘European towns’, and the concentration of native peoples to be used as a labor pool in ‘Indian towns’ (Bethell, 1990) in a process that also concentrated political and economic activity in the west of the East Mountain Range (See also Map 1-1), gradually creating an invisible divide with the rest of the future Colombian territory. The affluence and progress of each ‘island’ was to be determined by its ability to serve the economic interests of the Spanish Crown, ultimately shaping an internal center-periphery structure; in other words, regions with divergent levels of power or economic activity, in which the least developed regions served the interests of the most powerful and developed ones (Ettema, 1984).

Map 1-1: Population distribution in New Granada, 1778-1780.



Source: Mcfarlane (1993, p. 33).

Mahoney (2003) describes the colonial society as one characterized by a social pyramid consisting of Spanish Bureaucrats, monarchs of the Catholic Church controlling financial services (i.e. credit), real estate and social and cultural activities (i.e. evangelization), and export merchants protected from competition by the Spanish monopoly trade system, all in the highest tier; retailers, artisans, lower level bureaucrats, and town clergy (all *Criollos* and

*Mestizos*⁴) in the mid-level tier; and in the lowest tier, indigenous communities and slaves “relegated to social marginality” (p. 66). Besides inequality, the pyramid also promoted the fierce competition for the appropriation of bureaucratic positions –for being one of the few available profitable activities and a secure way to scale up in the social ladder– (Fajardo, 2002) and drove colonial aristocracy to become profoundly parochial and more concerned about the rank of the province and themselves in the territorial political hierarchy than about local social or economic issues (Palacios, 1980).

MacFarlane —quoted in Parada Corrales (2013)— argues that in colonial Colombia there was not anything like a nationwide aristocracy to lead the political course in a clear and unified direction, but rather an unstable network of local elites serving their own local interests: the Catholic Church, safeguarding the profits obtained from landholdings and credit, and the Spanish economic and political bureaucrats and merchants, securing the profits obtained from mass labor exploitation and commodity trade, or what Kalmanovitz (2008b) calls a nepotistic symbiosis of lineage and privileges.

The hierarchical and competitive institutional framework promoted by the colonial rule fostered an struggle for ‘social survival’ that manifested —among other things— in disregard or avoidance of the colonial law, and that normalized predatory behaviors such as labor exploitation, tax evasion, contraband, and bribery, practices with higher prevalence further away (geographically or administratively speaking) from the bureaucratic centers (Parada Corrales, 2013). The combination of those factors gradually instigated the solution of conflicts between groups and the determination of policy through bribery rather

⁴ The Spanish Empire implemented a social system based on racially-determined ‘castes’ in which the primary groups were the *Blancos* (white), consisting of *Peninsulares* (born in Europe from European parents) and *Criollos* (descendants from both European parents, yet born in America); *Indios*, native inhabitants of America; and *Negros*, black people brought from Africa as slaves. The *Mestizos* were the result of the crossbreeding between the primary groups and comprised a dozen of different castes such as Castizo, Mulato, Morisco, Chino, Gíbaro, etc. (Brooks, 2017, oct 12).

than consensus, legality or equity, progressively generalizing, institutionalizing and legitimizing clientelism, corruption and inefficiency (Fajardo, 2002, p. 25).

All things considered, the ranking of colonial provinces in accordance to its location, available resources (human or natural), bureaucratic importance for the Spanish Crown, or even ethnicity of inhabitants, combined with predatory and clientelistic interrelations, as well as with local administrations increasingly unresponsive to central control, built and reinforced a set of institutional arrangements that, on the one hand, instilled social, economic, and political exclusion based on brokered privileges at individual and class level, and in the other, induced regional social, economic, and political atomization at national level; moreover, the ‘survival of the fittest’ logic encouraged unruly competition for political and economic power, a distinctive feature in the character of the country that will have profound influence in the future emergence, dynamics, and management of conflict, both violent and non-violent.

As far as economic matters are concerned, Galeano (2004 [1971]) —quoting Baran— describes the labor division of Latin America during the colonial period as that of a horse and its jockey, and points three products at the center of gravity of economic activity during the period: gold, silver and sugar. The whole subcontinent became the main world supplier of those three products and activities such as agriculture and cattle ranching were only ancillary, intended to internally supply the bureaucracy and the mining and trade companies (Kalmanovitz, 2008b) in a concerted effort to extract the wealth from the horse and strengthen the international political and economic position of the jockey.

Institutionally speaking, Kalmanovitz (2008b, 2010) portrays the Colombian economic system during colonial times as one in which all aspects of economic activity were based on monopolies: trade regulated by exclusivity rights, agricultural production and mining regulated by the *Encomienda* system, and credit controlled by the Catholic Church; as one in which labor was organized from abroad without proper knowledge of the local conditions, commonly under serfdom and slavery relations that undermined productivity and efficiency; as

one with heavy taxes and price controls for the goods traded by the ordinary people (salt, tobacco, liquor) coupled with fiscal immunity for the landholders and the clergy; and as one in which government officials were focused in appropriating for themselves any rents out of the watchful eye of the monarchy. He concludes that “Spanish colonization gave birth to a continent resistant to modernity [because it was built on] an economic system based on servitude, grants and rents, and a political system that exchanged privileges for loyalty” (Kalmanovitz, 2008b, p. 22).

Furthermore, the aforementioned atomization of the political and economic centers (shown in Map 1-1) —result of the particular geographic conditions of the country and the economic interests of the colonial rulers— generated, firstly, extremely high transportation costs that interfered with internal trade, and secondly, uneven regional patterns of social and economic development (Parada Corrales, 2013). Safford and Palacios (2002) consider that “[colonial] success in extracting gold may well have induced local neglect of other export possibilities” (p. 14) forcing Colombia —as well as many other Latin American countries— to enter the independent (commonly called ‘republican’) era without products or exports beyond agricultural and mineral commodities, and inserting it in a path of dependency; a thesis that is echoed by Moncayo (2016) when he remarks that the Colombian society was integrated into global capitalism through Spanish colonialism in a role of raw material producer, albeit of being internally disconnected.

The colonial economic framework resembled the sociopolitical framework inasmuch as the social pyramid, the political hierarchy and the economic tiers (in terms of income, influence, or opportunities) were almost a perfect reflection of each other. Natives and slaves —the lower tier—were relegated geographically, politically and economically; the *criollos* and mid-tier tradesmen struggled to climb the social, political and economic ladder by any means available; and the Spanish Crown, its bureaucracy and the clergy were pinned at the top of the pyramid reaping the benefits of the establishment while trying to keep a safe distance from the rising tensions.

With slight amendments, the same socioeconomic structure remained in force for long enough to feed and sustain conditions that centuries later spurred armed conflict, an argument which will be elaborated ahead.

On another note, given that initially what mattered the most for conquistadores was the individual exploitation of the Indians through the appropriation of, their assets (gold, gems, foodstuff), their person to be sold as slaves, or their labor force to be used in agriculture, mining or hauling, during the early phases of colonial rule land had no major importance—as an asset subject to property or transactions—neither for the native population nor for the Spanish conquistadores (Friede, 1969). For the former, land was just the means for the subsistence of the community, and they seldom fought to recover lands taken by the European colonizers if not considered essential for husbandry. For the latter, formal property was unnecessary and bothersome given the venturesome character of the conquest (more inclined towards the constant search of new profitable discoveries rather than permanent settlement) and the vast amount of available lands that made its potential price derisory, while at the same time making the demarcation of boundaries expensive; additionally, there were no legal or consuetudinary rules or institutions to formalize land property as such (Friede, 1969).

Even though the *Encomienda* system never provided any sort of legal bedrock to make the land occupied by the allotted indigenous community as personal property of the assignee, the Spanish monarchy was gradually forced to formalize the relation of the diverse social groups with land in order to organize (or reorganize) the tribute system and to stabilize its revenue given diverse problems that were undermining it, namely, the process of depletion, disintegration and fusion of ‘encomiendas’ due to demographic declines, and the intestine disputes between conquistadores and bureaucrats that curbed its profitability and gradually modified its economic function responding to new social, political and economic dynamics (Friede, 1969).

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish Crown started to regularize the land tenure structure by separating it between (a) indigenous reservation lands, or *resguardos*, devoted to the subsistence of the natives and blocked from sale or transfer; (b) particular property lands, legalized before ‘Land Judges’ (a figure especially created for that purpose) after the payment of a small fee; and (c) unoccupied or unclaimed lands —known as fallow lands— considered as exclusive property and under free disposal of the Crown (Friede, 1969). Initially, the *resguardos* —as concentration areas of indigenous population— served as a pool of labor and facilitated fiscal and social (read, evangelization) purposes, but gradually became the final destination of the inhabitants of other *resguardos* that were being downsized or closed in order to sell the lands, especially those endowed with fertile lands or strategic locations, under the legal argument that the Spanish Crown granted the natives the right to usufruct the land and not its property. The whole process was summarized by Friede (1969) as a “peaceful and legal dispossession” carried over the course of two centuries (p. 55).

Land tenure gained importance due to its link to agricultural or mineral products for export, gradually making it a core subject for bureaucratic administration. Economic activity gravitated around land, political authority became increasingly subsidiary to economic activity and therefore to land, and social issues such as the rights of the indigenous communities, racial mixture or prestige also became tied to land on the grounds of the regional hierarchies and the institutional framework established by the Spanish Crown.

1.3. Republican era

The period after the independence from Spanish rule in Colombia —entitled by González González (2016) as the ‘conflictive process of state formation’— is described by Palacios (1980) as one marked by instability and strain because

The dominant classes emerging from the Colony faced the challenge of the political management of a newly invented nation [and by] breaking colonial nexuses [...] becoming ruling classes [with the mission of] overcoming colonial parochialism and the fragmentation and dispersion of power (p. 1664).

Palacios (1980) observes that given that the independence movement was based on locally-oriented plutocrat groups trying to defend their local privileges, in spite of being effective expelling Spaniards and gaining command over certain territorial jurisdictions, after independence the core differences between the cities and provinces were reflected in the impossibility of any given political project or province to impose its hegemony over the rest, and in the incapacity to obtain enough legitimacy to implement a unified political project, for which in the words of LaRosa and Mejía (2013) “from its birth, the [Colombian] Republic was, unfortunately, fragmented” (p. 39).

Quoting Tirado, Fischer (1997) enumerates “nine general (i.e. nationwide) civil wars⁵, fourteen regional civil wars, three coups d’état, one failed conspiracy against the president, and countless local quarrels” (p. 41) during the period between independence and the end of the nineteenth century. He explains the prevalence of war with four factors: (a) local regionalisms —embodied in obstinate local elites— that made centralizing projects unable to monopolize public authority; (b) contending views over the role of the Church in the society; (c) ambitions of social prestige and of capture of official positions to secure affluence in a society with few opportunities to do so; and (d) ‘blind hatred’ and desire of revenge for previous transgressions (pp. 41-43).

For Safford and Palacios (2002) in (the newly) independent Colombia “the interest was never to conciliate but to exterminate the counterparty at all cost” (p. 223). We contend that the prevalence of armed confrontation is explained by the compulsion of the well-off interest groups to avoid losing privileges (or even sacrificing parts of them), rendering them unable to compromise or negotiate concessions, and which compels them to commit to the imposition of their will by all means necessary, and to retaliate immediately (more often than not violently) to any progress or gain obtained by the contending parties.

⁵ The original quote mentions nine wars but enumerates only eight: 1839-1841, 1851, 1854, 1859-1862, 1876-1877, 1884-1885, 1895, and 1899-1902. Alternative sources on the matter also list only eight —the same— as major conflicts.

For their part, Kalmanovitz (2010) and Palacios (1980) agree on asserting that the Colombian political institutions built after independence appealed to the democratic-bourgeois design and terminology used in the European and North American state-assembling processes, emphasizing aspects such as human rights, equality, citizenship and the rule of law, but remained inoperative because they were still embedded in (a) a clientelism- and patronage- fomenting political system devoid of solid principles of unity or legal coherence, with weak judicial authorities and constant changes in the rules for the convenience of the legislators (Kalmanovitz, as quoted in Moreno, 2017); and (b) a “society fragmented by geography, history, tradition, ethnic relations⁶, and ultimately, by the material backwardness manifested in the permanence of pre-capitalistic forms of production” (Palacios, 1980, p. 1665); in summary, a ‘parochial’ and ‘archaic’ society —their words— governed by modernistic laws.

In addition to that, LaRosa and Mejía (2013) argue that the independence from Spain did not represent tangible social changes for natives, slaves, free blacks and mestizos —all together absolute majority in terms of population— who remained significantly marginalized from social, political and economic rights⁷.

⁶ Palacios uses the expression ‘ethnic relations’, which, for the conditions of the Colombian society under analysis, might refer to the prerogatives or limitations associated to the political and economic roles commonly performed by a determined racial or ethnic group (e.g. Africans being slaves, native Americans being forced workers, Europeans and *Criollos* being bureaucrats, etc.). Banton (2000) disputes the appropriateness of the adjective ‘ethnic’ as a factor for aggrupation, especially in conflict situations, given that factors like vicinity, nationality, race, religion, language, or political interest are routinely and mistakenly used as synonymous of ‘ethnicity’ in collective action controversies, whereby throughout this document we will refrain from framing group-related conflicts in ethnic terms.

⁷ For instance, Kalmanovitz (2010) remarks that in order to participate in elections citizens should know how to read and write, and have a capital of 100 pesos (or alternatively a ‘respectable’ profession), conditions demonstrable only by few individuals, and that limited severely the concept and exercise of citizenship for the lower layers of the society.

Acknowledging that each post-independence war had particular causes, justifications and development trajectories⁸ (Espinal, 2014), that all wars and quarrels were multifaceted (in terms of the actors) and multilayered (in terms of the topics), and that those wars did not have defined geographical dimensions given that in all cases local, interregional and national rivalries and tensions converged to initialize or amplify the hostilities, it is possible to draw four general characteristics of the prevalence of war as a political process during Colombian nineteenth century that will shape future political struggle and armed conflicts.

In the first place, Espinal (2014) highlights the disengagement of authority scope in terms of local and national levels. The central authorities were in some way detached from the local authorities and the relation of the citizenry with the central government became compulsorily mediated through local bosses (*caciques*), first and foremost by means of the predominant institutional arrangement inherited from colonial times: clientelism.

Second, juridical hyper-development, which the same author defines as the

Expedition, more or less schizophrenic, of laws, legal acts, rules, ordinances, and the constant modification of the constitution [as a process reflecting] in the first place the marked interest of creating [social] bonds through law, and secondly, the use of law to erode and question the legitimacy of preceding governments and substantiate the legality and legitimacy of the new ones (p. 182).

The power transactions mentioned in the first point, between the central government (namely, whoever is in charge of promulgating national law —even if in a *pro tempore* fashion), the local elites (chieftains, or *caciques*), and between the *caciques* and the lay people, were arbitrated by a legal ‘patchwork

⁸ For instance, the War of the Supremes (1939-1841) begun with minor protests when the Congress decided to close some small monasteries in the city of Pasto, but intensified when local elites and indigenous organizations took the opportunity to rise against the central government and vindicate diverse political and economic claims (Santamaría, 2013).

quilt' that produced laws suitable to attack or limit political adversaries, to serve clientelism or to be easily circumvented for personal or group profit.

Third, the wars of this period tended to be instigated by the reduced group of 'real citizens' that were educated about political order, rights and ideologies (and most likely, endowed with vast sums of capital) while the 'virtual citizens' (the majority) ended up involved in the wars just by chance, when not forcibly recruited by their bosses to fight (Hincapié de Uribe, 2001, p. 17). The insurrectionist warriors of one war became civil servants in charge of defending the constitution in the next and vice versa, and all sorts of grievances with particular nuances or geographical coordinates transfigured through new or modified old stories into new conflicts, championed by mutating groups and roles (Espinal, 2014).

Lastly, Santamaría (2013) argues that, be that as it may, the wars of the nineteenth century marked the onset of informal channels of articulation of political interests at local, regional and national level that enabled the emergence and consolidation of 'political imaginaries' and ideologies that later worked to identify political 'friends and enemies', and that gave rise to the archetypal political parties of the country: the Conservatives and the Liberals.

All in all, the governability complications resulting from both the geographical divide and the group tensions regarding power and authority were amplified by the compulsion to pursue military victory and the incapacity to compromise or cede positions, all blended within an inadequate, incomplete or biased institutional framework that for one, exacerbated animosities, and for the other, rendered the pacific means to address the issues sterile, forcing the general public to resort to proactive or reactive violence. All of which materialized in a cycle of (military) imposition of will, objection, (military) retaliation, violent conflict and victory that reflected the prevalent nonconformity with the legal and institutional framework and the vagueness, bias, or plain contempt for previous agreements. The successive wars generated a constant supply of leitmotifs and fighters for subsidiary wars, and vice versa, contributing to the

instability of the social system, for which, in the words of Safford and Palacios (2002) after independence, the Colombian society had “neither liberty nor order” (p. 239) as the Colombian coat of arms proclaims since 1834.

Economically speaking, according to Safford and Palacios (2002) the economy of the newly independent Colombia “retained many of the economic patterns of the late colonial era” (p. 157) but in many areas worsened because of the prevalence of civil war. For Kalmanovitz (2008a), the political instability that prevailed during the Republican era of Colombia was more a result of the tensions between the *criollos* that wanted to join the dynamics of the open-trade industrializing world and the traditional groups within the society that clung to the colonial-based privileges provided by archaic legislation protecting their control over land and workforce (Kalmanovitz, 2008a).

Relevant literature explains the markedly adverse economic conditions of the time and its concomitance with civil war as the sum of several interlocked, mutually reinforcing, and iterative factors, or ‘vicious circles’.

On one side, the public budget experienced substantial pressure thanks to the reduction of the fiscal income resulting from the abolition of colonial taxes, the fiscal vagueness, and the operative incapacity of a state in formation to collect taxes effectively, features that exacerbated tax evasion, capital flight and unlawful registry⁹ not only intended to avoid taxation but also expropriations from antagonizing (or sympathizing) armies with bellicose purposes. At the same time, the new state increased its expenditure because of the increased payroll of officers, judges and diplomats, but specially troops —which reached up to three quarters of the public budget— (Bushnell, 1996; Kalmanovitz, 2008a; Safford & Palacios, 2002).

⁹ In Colombia the term ‘testaferrato’ refers to the action (and felony) by which one person (‘testaferro’) lends his or her identity in a deed or a business to hide the identity of the concerned party or the real holder of its obligations or benefits (“Testaferro,” n.d.). No direct or literal translation to English was found.

To face both the independence war and the increasing expenses, the new state also issued money that either gradually lost value or sporadically lost political backing due to the political conflict and the fluctuating economic legislation (Fischer, 1997), and asked loans from national elites (often forced) and British lenders that was later unable to repay. The former demanded payment with lands —further increasing the concentrating dynamic of its property stemming from the colonial era— or discounted the bonds through loan sharks penalizing even more public finances (Deas, quoted in Kalmanovitz, 2008a), while the latter closed external credit for Colombia during the remainder of the nineteenth century, generating a reputational crisis (Safford & Palacios, 2002).

The inadequate state revenue affected negatively the provision of public goods such as education, health, utilities or infrastructure, increasing social tension, especially in the growing urban centers. Additionally, internal tax collection also suffered because local manufacture had difficulties to take off since Colombians preferred British and Dutch imported products (smuggled through Caribbean ports) for being cheaper and having higher quality, which did not contribute to fiscal revenue neither via sales tax nor custom duties (Kalmanovitz, 2008a). Based on the above, it is possible to talk about a first vicious circle of low fiscal revenue, poor provision of public goods, high social tension, high tax evasion, and public indebtedness.

Safford and Palacios (2002) add that given that population centers remained isolated, internal trade was limited due to the remarkably high transportation costs, and that incentives to improve transportation infrastructure were scant given the relative regional self-sufficiency, the slow rate of growth of the internal economy, the weakness of Colombian products in international markets, the lack of fiscal resources, and the conflict in the allocation of infrastructure budgets caused by political quarrels (pp. 162-163). In this regard Kalmanovitz (2008a) adds that productivity was reduced and production costs increased because of the concentration of labor in high lands or jungles away from ports. These aspects fostered a second vicious circle: transportation costs limited internal trade and the development of an internal market, which reduced the

incentives to improve infrastructure to reduce transportation costs and to broaden and deepen the internal market.

On another side, after independence Colombian exports enjoyed high prices and high demand in the international markets, but thanks to exogenous factors (wars, economic crises, overseas technological developments) quickly lost the monopolistic advantages and entered repetitive swings of boom and crash, making speculative investments more profitable than productive and industrial ones (Ocampo, quoted in Fischer, 1997). Institutionally speaking, privileges or restrictions to imports or exports were mounted and dismantled back and forth by ever-changing administrations, and not only during war time but also in peace time economic institutions were afflicted by corruption and lack of professionalism by their officers (Fischer, 1997), giving way to what we consider a third vicious circle: external shocks or uncompetitive productive methods reduced profitability and displaced capital from one product to another in a speculative fashion. Colombian authorities responded incoherently to those swings in order to meet at the same time the requirements of diverse trading elites (both importers and exporters) and clienteles, while struggling to maintain (urgently needed) customs revenue with contradictory policies, adding more elements of instability to the system.

Lastly, the direct costs of the wars in terms of lives, fled or immobilized capitals, and destruction or theft of productive assets (Bushnell, quoted in Kalmanovitz, 2008a) imposed a heavy burden on the Colombian economic system in terms of interruption of economic activity, termination of productive ventures of all kind, speculation, and predation over property rights, all sponsored by a general perception of uncertainty and ineffective institutions (Kalmanovitz, 2008a; Safford & Palacios, 2002), and for which Kalmanovitz (2008a) considers that “the cost of independency was the loss of the political order [...] and the instability in rules of engagement” (p. 230) which destabilized initially exports and ultimately economic activity, torpedoing economic development, for which—in agreement with authors such as Safford and Palacios (2002), Bushnell (1996), and Tovar (2007)— he remarks that the (unfavorable) economic

circumstances also generated political volatility. A fourth —and general— vicious circle is then manifested in the chaotic and unstable political and economic atmospheres that reinforce each other. The political framework (or lack of it) after independence, disturbed the economic structure (or lack of it) while the country was adapting, frantically, to the social changes brought by self-governance and rapid local and international economic change.

Even though arguing absolute continuity is not possible, economically speaking, the colonial and the republican period share peculiarities such as the concentration of economic privileges and opportunities in the social tiers associated to raw material exports, corruption in bureaucratic positions, and the atomization of economic activity interfering with the development of internal markets. On the other hand, the mutual feedback between political tensions — quite often materialized in civil wars— and public and private economic adjustment brought new elements such as increasing risks, uncertainty, instability and agitation, ultimately promoting further conflictual interactions.

Regarding the agrarian issue, after independence from Spain, the “vast and virtually uninhabited” lands in Colombian territory (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 157) started to get privatized and concentrated in few hands thanks to three circumstances: first, the land vouchers received by soldiers for their service to the cause —which tended to be sold at discounted prices to high rank officers, bureaucrats or loan sharks given the dire need of liquid money of the former group— (Kalmanovitz, 2008a); second, the payment of independence-war public debt by means of the confiscations made by the liberation armies and the liquidation or shrinkage of indigenous *resguardos*, which promoted a new landholder elite, which with the support of the central government was put in charge of the maintenance or development of export agribusiness (Kalmanovitz, 2008a; Safford & Palacios, 2002); and third, that given that only wealthy groups were able to make large disbursements to support (voluntarily or not) the war in the first place, with the repayment of war debts the new government was making the rich richer, especially in terms of land property.

Conversely, Kalmanovitz (2008a) and LaRosa and Mejía (2013) remark three phenomena working in the opposite direction, this is, the democratization of the property of land. First, the governmental repossession of lands previously immobilized by the Catholic Church as collateral for private debts (quoting Jaramillo and Meisel); second, the migration of families and groups —especially *mestizos* and *criollos*, but also free natives and afro descendants— intending to employ colonial fallow lands as means to join the market economy; and third, the conjoined effect of *cimarronaje*¹⁰ and the abolition of slavery, initially causing losses of workforce and increasing labor costs to landowners, and later promoting the fragmentation of large states, either because such difficulties put pressure on owners financial liabilities forcing them to sell, or because the workforce demanded plots of land as a condition to stay as laborers.

Nevertheless, the first trend (concentration) tended to prevail, and despite of the political instability some Colombian producers managed to establish incipient trade links with the world economy “and partake in the international trade bonanza through the exports of tobacco, indigo, leather, coffee, cinchona and tagua” thanks to the improvements in transportation generated by the steam boat companies in the Magdalena River (Kalmanovitz, 2010, p. 90). This situation also began to exert pressure on land property because, on one side, *mestizos* and *criollos* wanted to own lands and start own productive projects, and on the other, landowners wanted to expand their domains in order to enlarge production and submit extra workforce under sharecropping or day-labor arrangements (LaRosa & Mejía, 2013).

In the words of Safford and Palacios (2002) “in the period 1870–1905 more individual titles to public land were granted than in any previous or later period” (p. 263) but land titling processes rarely benefited natives, Afro-descendants or even white *criollos* because authorities tended to grant local

¹⁰ Form of rebellion in which slaves escaped from the colonial authority to form settlements (called *palenques* in Colombia) intended to guarantee their social, cultural and economic freedom (Navarrete, 2001).

elites or new European settlers preferential treatment, and sooner rather than later the abundance of land and its concentration became problematic because of the scarcity of workers to put it into productive use, precisely in a moment in which the importance and the opportunities created by the market economy were growing (Kalmanovitz, 1994). The result was increasing tensions between the landholding elites (read: clergy, bureaucrats, colonial heirs and speculators) that were progressively concentrating the property of land and its benefits, and the bulk of the population facing the dilemma of accepting subordinate roles in large landholdings or colonizing for themselves uninhabited lands.

The first batch (peoples accepting subordinate roles) helped —with regional particularities— in the development of the *hacienda* as a productive and social system in its own right. *Haciendas* were characterized, firstly, by the monopolization of great extensions of land, and secondly, by inhibiting technical development inasmuch as the market demand was small enough to cover the productive needs with nothing more than the submitted population (natives, blacks, poor mestizos) (Kalmanovitz, 1994).

The *Haciendas* also represented some sort of closed social system to the extent that they were governed by internal rules intended to keep the working population under control, such as the payment of salaries through vouchers redeemable only in the *hacienda* store (Bushnell, 1996), the obligation to sell peasant production using the *hacienda* owner as intermediary (Galjart, 1972), the creation of debt (e.g. advanced goods or the construction of the workers' house) with arbitrary interest rates and repayment plans controlled by the landowner (commonly unpayable in the course of a life of work and therefore inherited by offspring after debtor's death), the establishment of fines for 'misbehavior' (usually enforced by withholding payments due), the obligation to both work in the owners land for free and to cede part of the worker's plot production to the owner, among many others (Kalmanovitz, 1994).

One of the most common internal rules within *haciendas* was the explicit prohibition for tenants and sharecroppers of planting commercial crops. The reasons, according to Kalmanovitz (1994) were mainly that:

(1) The tenant would stop meeting his “obligation” [to the owner] for dedicating to his own commercial crops, depriving the hacienda of the required workforce; (2) in the case of eviction the tenant would demand the reimbursement of any enhancements made to the plot (3) even worse, the tenant would claim possession of the land and would challenge the property rights of the plot that has been assigned to him only temporarily; (4) the tenant would develop an independence and self-confidence spirit that would undermine the structure of the social relations essential for the proper functioning of haciendas (pp. 179-180).

For Kalmanovitz (1994) such rules were enforceable only because of the close cooperation between the landholders and the local authorities, who prosecuted and punished offenders and dissenters, an idea reinforced by the fact that “the liberal and conservative parties, the two main political forces in the republic, were both formed or controlled by landowners” (Zamosc, 2006, p. 11).

The legal ‘patchwork quilt’ resulting from the symbiosis between civil wars, constant legal amendments, and clientelistic relations described in the previous section, contributed to the social and political autonomy of *haciendas*, which in a similar —yet not identical— fashion to that of colonial times contributed to the concentration of both the property of land and its proceeds in the hands of a small group of the society; a group which by establishing draconian measures such as forced labor and debt —reinforced legally and practically by local political powers, and mystically by the teachings of the clergy— tried to keep tight control of the workforce without which their accumulation of land would be futile —at least initially. We will come back to this point later.

The second batch (peoples colonizing barren lands) emanated from the *cimarron* and slavery-emancipatory movements, from *criollos* and *mestizos* trying to harness both the abundance of free lands —buttressed by the vagueness of property rights— and specially from the “peasants dissatisfied with [the]

working conditions on the great estates” (LeGrand, 1989, p. 8). In this regard Safford and Palacios (2002) remark that

Peasants emigrated from their places of birth because the level and fertile land had been taken by families of landowners and merchants, and with the increase of the peasant population they could not sustain their families on their small plots of land. So they pushed vigorously to the frontiers of colonization that had opened by 1850, and as these became saturated they went farther on into new territory (p. 263).

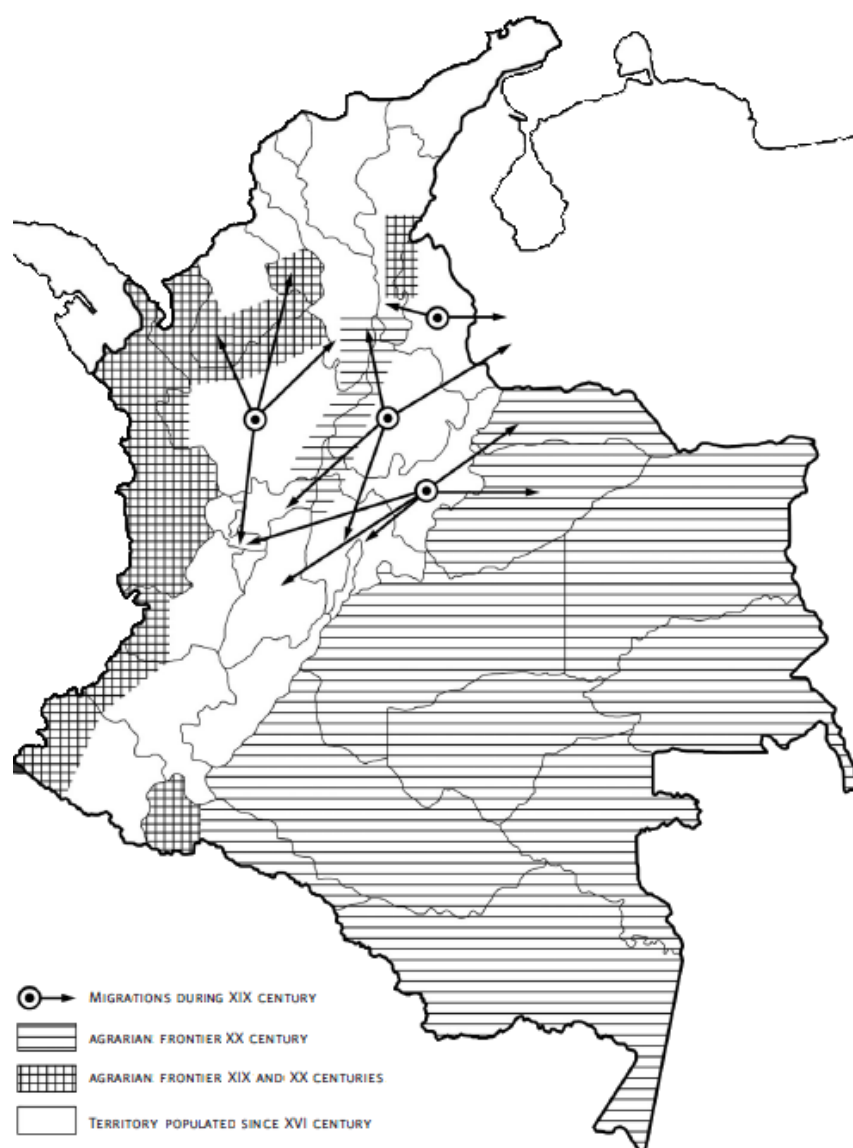
LeGrand (1984) considers that the expansion of the agricultural frontier at the end of the nineteenth century happened in two stages: first, the movement of colonists (what we called ‘the second batch’) attempting (initially) to secure their means of subsistence and better working conditions and (later) to exploit business opportunities to obtain profit (as evidenced in the patterns of colonization: proximity to rivers, roads or railroads to guarantee ready access to markets); and second, the expropriation of the cleared lands (between ten and twenty years later) by powerful landholders hand in hand with local authorities under the auspice of biased or ambivalent legal frameworks and the lack of formal titles, commonly with a double gain: cleared lands plus on-site, ready, knowledgeable, and docile workforce.

She also remarks that despite that the local and central governments encouraged the colonization of lands under arguments of promotion of equality and general economic improvement (read, the gradual transformation and integration of isolated regions with low or none economic value) the reality imposed insurmountable constraints and requisites to poor colonists and peasants. The requirement for any land formalization application to hire —at their own expense— the topographic survey and measurement of the plot (a service often more expensive than the land itself) is one example.

Given that the abundance of public fallow lands together with the ‘land for the tiller’ logic would reduce incentives to be employed in *haciendas*, agricultural entrepreneurs used all available means (money, politics, or violence) to control frontier territories already populated with a view to control both the land and

the workforce in one fell swoop, gradually consolidating a process of dispossession (of all those new lands discovered and cleared by peasant colonists), the concentration of formal property (as it was being developed in parallel), and the consolidation of *haciendas* as the bedrock for the emergence of larger agribusiness (LeGrand, 1984). We would add that the unwillingness of the colonists to leave the lands they worked to develop often made them willing to accept unfair and one-sided sharecropping agreements in order to stay.

Map 1-2: Land colonization movements in Colombia, centuries XIX and XX.



Source: LaRosa and Mejía (2013, p. 67).

LeGrand (1984) remarks that between 1830 and 1930 the Colombian government granted nearly 5,500 land concessions (as repayment for war-, public works-, or infrastructure- financing public debt) comprising 3,300,000 hectares of public lands, out of which more than 80% were properties bigger than 1,000 hectares and only less than 5% were smaller than 100 hectares, consolidating a large-estate model of agrarian property (p. 24). She also observes that in conjunction with the legal procedures, practices such as the violent expulsion, the arbitrary modification of registered boundaries during notarial procedures, the ratification and legalization of squatting, the illegal relocation of fences, or agreements between the appraiser in charge of the topographic measurement and the applicant in order to declare much larger areas, were common.

LeGrand (1984) concludes that the expansion of the agricultural frontier during the late nineteenth century in Colombia was not at all a democratic process, remarking that the growing peasantry¹¹ was always the loser no matter the alternative chosen: migration towards new lands to work tended to result in dispossession, while acceptance of tenancy or sharecropping contracts meant an automatic renunciation to property while losing control of their work and becoming subjected to abusive practices (p. 30); on the other hand, the growing privatization of public lands and the concentration of its property in the higher tiers of society promoted modest economic development without a more egalitarian distribution of wealth.

¹¹ Galjart (1972) notes that the words 'farmer' or 'peasant' are insufficient categorizations, given that they blend together a wide variety of collectives. For him, there are deep differences in the needs and goals of, for instance, small proprietors living at the level of subsistence in their own plots (legally and not), tenants paying a rent for the use of the land of others, laborers working for a salary, colonists and sharecroppers exchanging their work for the right to use a section of land, and seasonal workers. Hereinafter the term 'peasantry' will be used as equivalent to 'non-landowner' just to provide a general idea of the dynamic of the conflicts between social groups in relation to the property and use of land.

The same author also highlights an important transformation in the land question that took place after 1875: the emergence of peasant resistance groups which organized to fight the abuses of landholders collectively, legally and peacefully. Given that the majority of them were poor and/or illiterate, groups of between five to hundred families hired a single lawyer to represent their interests, to translate the law for them, and to draft and present formal complaints to the central authorities, and as the peasants became more aware of the legislation they stopped signing the (one-sided) sharecropping and tenancy contracts, hoping and waiting for the legal decisions to take place. The response of the agrarian elite was everything but amicable:

Landholders called the local authorities to expel colonists [or tenants], threw grass seeds into their crops or sent their cattle to feed from them, destroyed bridges to cut their access to the markets and imprisoned many [peasant] leaders under false charges. [They also] formed bands of vigilantes to intimidate colonists or to make them forget their claims [eventually succeeding in forcing them to either] sign the contracts or abandon the region (LeGrand, 1984, p. 34).

In the majority of the cases the large landholders and entrepreneurs managed to impose their will (more often than not with the connivance of the local or national authorities) and gradually reintegrated the ‘riotous’ peasants into the hacienda system, undermining –at least temporarily– their group consciousness (LeGrand, 1984). The tensions between elites and most of the rural workers grew steadily, especially regarding land issues, but widespread violence will not break out until many decades later, again, initiated by the rich and not by the poor.

1.4. The turn of the twentieth century

The new century began in Colombia with the reinforcement of the centralist state, which granted extraordinary powers to the president, reinstated social and economic privileges to the Catholic Church, exiled liberal leaders and restricted freedom of press and public assembly in order to contain attempts of rebellion (Bushnell, 1996; LaRosa & Mejía, 2013). The objections raised by

federalist confederations to the new government and mutual accusations for causing economic crisis led to the ‘War of the Thousand Days’ (1899-1902), the longest, bloodiest and more socially devastating until then.

Rubiano (2011) summarizes it as a war initially instigated by two elites competing for the realignment of political power –one championing ‘Laissez Faire’, and the other, state-brokered privileges for social ascent– but which by forcedly involving popular classes as soldiers gradually got redirected towards the vindication of popular social, political and economic claims as well as personal feuds often inherited from previous wars. For its part, Bergquist (1986) suggests that there were two wars fought in three war fronts in parallel: the aristocrats’ war, fought –in the press and the congress– through decrees and measures intended to expropriate harvests, lands, and tax the imports or exports from the opposite political party members; in the other hand, the commoners’ war, carried out –in the battlefield– by heterogeneous bands of hacienda workers conscripted either by their patrons or the national government, and whom gradually became less responsive to the military or political commandments of the elites and resorted to ruthless means to harm their adversaries (more often than not, class peers) on personal grounds.

Aside from the political organization of the central government, two major areas of dissent heightened social tension and stirred the political landscape during the first half of the twentieth century: in rural areas, feudal-like and abusive working conditions combined with (further) concentration of the property of land (LaRosa & Mejía, 2013); in urban areas –in spite of being “mobile, disperse and isolated”– the unceasing emergence of labor union movements, hand in hand with the industrialization and under the influence of intellectuals publicizing the ideas of the Bolshevik and Mexican revolution, that claimed for the “improvement in wages and labor conditions” (Palacios, 2003, p. 118). The most renowned example of the social tensions arising from the clash between workers and businessmen was the strike of the banana workers against the United Fruit Company in 1928, in which the workers demanded

Respect [for] labor legislation and [the] payment of collective insurance, payment for work-related leaves, Sundays as non-working days, housing, education, adequate sanitation facilities. Also demanded wage increases, collective [and written] contracts, and the abolition of the payment of salaries in vouchers redeemable only in company's stores. United Fruit refused to negotiate under the argument that by not hiring the workers directly [since all hiring and dismissal processes were made by subcontractors] it was not the legal employer and thus legally exempt of observing labor legislation (Brungardt, 1995, p. 115).

The government responded declaring state of siege, establishing a curfew in the region, and sending the army to contain and dissolve the strike (Palacios, 2003; Safford & Palacios, 2002). The strike ended with dozens of workers dead¹² and extensive material damages to the company administrative and transport infrastructure when the Colombian army opened fire against the crowd for refusing to disband, in what is widely known as 'The Bananeras massacre'. This single event reflected the stress of the era: "requests for improvement in wages and labor conditions led to collective demonstrations that many times ended repressed by gunfire" (Palacios, 2003, p. 118). The popular backlash of the incident precipitated the election of the first liberal president since the 1880s (Brungardt, 1995, p. 117), ending what has been labeled by scholars as 'the conservative hegemony' and opening way to the 'liberal republic', which resulted in the advance of an incipient labor legislation (including contractual regulations and protection for workers' unions), reduced the influence of the Catholic Church in social, political and economic issues, and extended democratic rights like private property or voting to previously-excluded social groups like illiterates¹³, but specially increased the visibility of social problems

¹² All related literature provides different figures. Palacios (2003) says that "the general that commanded the carnage reported 47 deceased [while] the American consul reported hundreds, and one of the strike leaders 1,500" (p. 123), while the local press reported 100 fatal victims. For its part, Bushnell (1996) —quoting Herrera and Romero— considers between 60 and 75 as an accurate estimate of the total of victims. No definite figure can be determined.

¹³ Kalmanovitz (1994) remarks that universal vote in reality became the obligation of workers, tenants and sharecroppers to vote for their patrons (p. 215).

and of some sort of ‘working class conscience’ about real possibilities of collective advancement and improvement (Bushnell, 1996).

Conservative sectors of the society saw the reemergence of liberalism as a threat to their interests and hegemony, especially when young liberals took charge of the public offices previously controlled by conservatives, and began to overrule and modify their policies (Hernández García, 2015), for which both sides engaged in minor scale violent attacks to the counterparty, always raising ‘retaliation’ or ‘prevention’ arguments, both sides accusing each other of being the instigator or of attacking first, both sides justifying their actions on ‘legitimate defense’, and both sides using previous attacks (even hearsay from distant locations) as a justification for revenge, unleashing an automatic process of escalation (Guzmán Campos, Fals Borda, & Umaña Luna, 2005).

For its part, political processes such as elections, appointment of officers or ministers, or party debates were constantly sabotaged by both parties through forced abstention or withdrawal, or through the rejection of any unfavorable result under mutual accusations of forgery or manipulation (Hernández García, 2015), and when the conservative party regained political control in 1946, the exact same repertoire was used by the liberal party to sabotage the governability of their adversary and to avenge previous affronts (Bushnell, 1996).

At the same time the political parties started to suffer, firstly, from internal divisions and clashes between ‘traditional’ and ‘radical’ factions with diverging views on politics, economics and society; secondly, from the emergence of modest but radical socialist and communist parties—in pursuit of alternatives to bipartisanship— (Bushnell, 1996); and thirdly, from the emergence of alternative (read, populist) leaders all across Latin America advocating fiercely for the reduction of the substantial gaps between the elites and the poor and marginalized populations (LaRosa & Mejía, 2013). The Colombian expression of such alternative leadership was Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, whom very soon represented a threat to both the traditional parties, which were losing adherents—until then loyal to the party by birth—to follow him thanks to a closer

identification with his humble origins and the social reforms —even if “vaguely exhibited”— he was proposing (Bushnell, 1996, p. 269).

The threat to the status quo transformed into nationwide havoc when Gaitán was shot in Bogotá on April 9, 1948. Even though many regions were to a greater or a lesser degree experiencing violent partisan confrontations, this time, the violence that erupted because of Gaitán’s death “polluted the country without any discernible course or guidance” (Villamizar, 2017, p. 140). The related literature still debates if this date marks the inception of modern internal armed conflict in Colombia. The next chapter —when the emergence of modern insurgencies is described— will shed more light on the topic, but for now, it is important to mention that (a) it does mark the onset of one of the most violent periods of Colombian history (widely known as ‘La Violencia’), and that (b) public order, political mobilization, and collective imaginaries were definitely transformed in Colombia after that day.

From an economic point of view, Colombia did not achieve enough industrial development during the nineteenth century because of several reasons: the capital accumulation generated in mining, trade and agricultural exports was either low or depleted during the export crises or the wars (Bejarano, 2007, p. 213), the social disruptions created by the state-construction civil wars, the poor insertion of Colombian products in international markets (excepting coffee in the last decade), the insufficient development of infrastructure, the lack of endogenous technological development that forced to import productive processes and industrial goods (which, in turn, depended on the performance of the exports to raise currencies), an small internal market for manufactures, and generalized low personal income, all together with isolated regional economies and high transportation costs (Kalmanovitz, 2010, p. 201).

Nonetheless, besides (or thanks to) political stability, in the first decades of the twentieth century Colombian economy reached record levels of continuous growth thanks first and foremost to the success of coffee exports (even though oil, and bananas also contributed) (Bushnell, 1996; Kalmanovitz, 2010). Coffee

production had a tremendous influence in the development of other sectors like consumer goods and light manufacture (e.g. textiles and tools in Medellín) (Bushnell, 1996), as well as in the development of export infrastructure and the promotion of internal markets (Kalmanovitz, 2010), all given that its profitability was higher than that of any other product of the Colombian economy (LaRosa & Mejía, 2013). On the other hand, during the first two decades of the twentieth century oil, bananas and rubber began to be extracted in enclave economies¹⁴ which supported the emergence of a “modern capitalist economy” in previously isolated regions (Kalmanovitz, 1994, p. 251).

Despite of the positive effect in terms of production and trade growth, the social cost of these enclaves was twofold: an increasing tension resulting from the blatant abuses of foreign companies against local populations (with the connivance of local authorities), and the growing importance of the United States in the evolution and performance of the Colombian economy: it became the main destination of its exports (coffee, oil, bananas, and rubber), its main source of productive and financial capital, and its prime adviser in terms of economic policy through several economic missions (Bushnell, 1996).

During the early twentieth century, Colombian industry of basic goods such as books, footwear, home products, and furniture grew aided by tariffs and war-created disruptions in international production and trade (Kalmanovitz, 2010; LaRosa & Mejía, 2013), but the instability of coffee prices —with a clear downward trend— resulting from (also war-induced) booms-and-bust cycles added to the continuous deterioration of the terms of trade (Ocampo, 2007) and rapidly destabilized the national economic environment, first, by concentrating the scant benefits of the economic expansion in a small group of the population while excluding the majority, and second, by reducing the state capacity to successfully tackle the emerging contradictions between social groups harmed

¹⁴ Defined by Cardoso and Faletto (1979) as those in which a key export sector is ‘fully controlled’ by foreigners in the sense that the capital required for the inauguration of the productive process comes from abroad, in order to produce or extract goods that are also intended to be marketed abroad.

and benefited by what Palacios (2003) calls a combination of ‘economic liberalism with political conservatism’.

According to Kalmanovitz (1994) while in the first half of the twentieth century the politics and economics of capitalist accumulation were set in motion by blending colonial traits with new economic activities carried out by a new “army of temporary wage earners”, those same processes also jeopardized the stability of the widespread hacienda system by (a) exposing the Colombian economy to the swings of the international markets that brought crises and shock along with the business opportunities; (b) allowing the accumulation of money and capital to even more social groups, aided by the development of transport and communication infrastructure, which threatened the “old social building”; (c) intensifying tensions regarding working conditions that favored the emergence of urban labor unions and rural peasant movements to advocate for the rights of the growing proletariat, and (d) calling for a more active role of the state in the economy, which manifested in the creation of more regulation institutions (which reduced the degrees of freedom enjoyed by private actors) and in the increase in the request and collection of taxes (Kalmanovitz, 1994, pp. 138-139).

The emergence of new economic opportunities brought competition for the spaces to partake in them, and for the distribution of their benefits, but some social sectors (read, the elites) were not interested in losing any part of their share, for which, they began to establish obstacles to social and economic reshaping. The most prominent example is land property.

Antonio García (quoted in Machado, 2009) summarized the agrarian situation of Colombia during the first decades of the twentieth century as a “manorial state” characterized by the following elements: persistence of colonial latifundia and landholding aristocracies; allocation of extensive fallow lands to non-peasant individuals as payment for military or political services; lack of agricultural capital markets; absence of entrepreneurs interested in the development of productive projects and the reduction of misused lands; transformation of land in a speculative and investment commodity; large

allocation of lands to livestock grazing; continuous exodus of peasants to urban centers, increasing deficit in food production and emptiness of lands; servitude conditions of agricultural workers or salaries way below the urban averages; and extermination, expropriation and virtual slavery of indigenous communities, among others (pp. 170-171).

The capitalist accumulation (especially helped by coffee production) that began in the end of the nineteenth century —even in spite of its abrupt collapse in 1929— pushed deep and rapid changes in rural life by means of opening new lands, which together with the development of transport and communication infrastructure (intended primarily to support the growth of export trade), encouraged historically subjected workers and tenants to either urge for amendments in labor and land lease contracts, or to strive for freedom to pursue their very own productive projects (Kalmanovitz, 1994, pp. 325-326). Following this trend, many contractually unbound laborers embarked on the colonization of fallow lands to meet the productive demands of a country undergoing economic expansion, but they collided with the “unlimited [and unclear] property rights [and] feudal justice” used by the Colombian elites to keep their control over the means of production (Kalmanovitz, 1994, p. 326).

Ocampo (2007) makes an important observation regarding land issues and the future emergence of violent conflict during the 1930s. Diverse conflicts emerged in each region, depending primarily on the clarity in the definition of land property titles. In regions with clearly defined property rights the peasantry oriented their demands towards the improvement of their contractual conditions, especially the possibility to grow and sell coffee and other products freely, the removal of the obligations to work in the owner’s hacienda, and the transition to paid work (in regular currency, not in vouchers or in kind); in regions where property rights were not clearly defined or enforced, the peasantry demanded the legalization of their colonizations and productive occupations. He concludes that in either case, peasants were simply claiming the right to their independence and/or more equitable working conditions, and that “although the requests were far from being radical, they were equivalent to

demanding the dismantling of the pre-capitalistic hacienda system” whereby inducing acute conflicts with landholders and export elites (pp. 256-257).

During both the 1920s and the 1930s —but especially in the last period— the colonization movements started to converge to previously (legally or illegally) occupied areas, generating conflicts in which many of the lands were ultimately “registered through the force of the machete” (Molano, 2016, p. 582) while many others unleashed juridical battles which “were usually resolved in favor of landholders, backed by a legislation specially favorable to them and by the force of the police” (Bejarano, 2007, p. 229). In that regard, the CNMH (2016a) remarks that “in the first third of the twentieth century there were only six land concessions larger than 5,000 hectares, but its beneficiaries received 6% of all the land titled in 30 years” (p. 63). This process is summarized by LeGrand —quoted in Murillo Posada (2011)— as “the struggle of the “axe versus the sealed paper”” (p. 283).

The reply from the landholding elite to the requests of the peasantry had diverse facets: in one hand, they escalated (legal and not legal) land evictions, layoffs and personal attacks to claimants and their peers in order to dissuade them from raising more demands (Murillo Posada, 2011) while at the same time forcibly turning them into wage earners (Machado, quoted in Fajardo, 2016); on the other hand, they started to hoard lands for the sake of property accumulation or to replace crops with cattle (Moncayo, 2016); additionally, they strengthened their links with the juridical authorities (i.e. police, judges, notaries) in order to tilt the scale (even more) in their favor and/or enhance its legal arsenal to contain peasants’ initiatives (LeGrand, 2016).

As a result, by the mid-1930s only 25% of the productive land was being put for economic use, with 43.7% of available lands being used for cattle grazing, 2.4% for farming, and the rest as forests. In some regions the lands used for cattle grazing exceeded 50% of the total area, and only in two departments the land dedicated to crops was close to 10% while in the remainder of the country it never exceed 3%; also, between the end of the ‘War of the Thousand Days’

(1902) and 1930 the number of livestock doubled while food production stagnated (with the exception of coffee, destined to export) (Bejarano, 2007, pp. 207-208). Further examples are sugar, bananas, and flowers (also destined to export), but conducted in a more industrial manner (Kalmanovitz, 2010).

The combination of land concentration, land evictions and colonizations, urban migration, and economic crisis, impacted negatively (a) the availability of workforce, leading landholders —from both the conservative and liberal parties— first, to push the government to stop public works during harvest time in order to free workers, and second, to tackle any attempts of work mobility and free access to lands by any means available (Kalmanovitz, 1994); (b) agricultural production, which became “insufficient to satisfy the grow of internal demand generated by economic expansion [...] unleashing generalized inflation [in subsistence goods]” (Bejarano, 2007, p. 228); and (c) the social fabric since the ejected peasants were not completely absorbed by the incipient industry nor able to clear and colonize new lands (Moncayo, 2016), which pushed them to demand for social protection that was not available thanks to the economic crisis derived from the Great Depression, the reduced fiscal income, and the institutional incapacity of the state to deal with the diverse regional problematic fronts at the same time.

Higher unemployment (especially in rural areas), biased and hostile mechanisms to claim lands, and the difficulties to improve their working conditions, all ingrained within a poor-response institutional framework, gradually radicalized the popular protest, which was seen as an insurrection threat by the government, who, on the one hand also radicalized its response in the form of repression (Fajardo, 2016), and in the other, attempted a major agrarian reform to contain the growing peasant unrest (Bushnell, 1996). The reform was aimed specially to stop the escalation in squatting and to amend the flaws of a previous minor reform (made in 1926) in which land-related complaints became simply unattainable for colonizers and tenants due to the ludicrous legal requirements (Bejarano, 2007, p. 231).

Literature on the agrarian issue in Colombia remarks that this first attempt of agrarian reform —enshrined in the Law 200 of 1936— was (a) moderate in its coverage objectives (Bushnell, 1996); (b) ambiguous in terms of its approach to ‘economic use’ by at the same time forbidding idle property while granting to large landholders lengthy grace periods (at least 10 years) to start productive projects (Kalmanovitz, 1994); (c) focused on the legalization of property rather than in its redistribution (De Zubiría Samper, 2016); (d) detrimental to the peasantry in the sense that it ended up increasing the concentration of property and the replacement of crops with extensive cattle ranches (Bushnell, 1996; Molano, 2016); (e) counterproductive because when evictions started and production was reduced the country was forced to import staple food products (Murillo Posada, 2011); (f) limited to capitalistic forms of exploitation by leaving aside cooperative and communitarian uses (De Zubiría Samper, 2016); (g) not pertinent to address the troubled relations between work, tenancy and property (Ocampo, 2007); (h) used by well-connected landowners to “strengthen their juridical position” in the question (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 296); and (i) short-lived thanks to the diverse obstacles and subterfuges (legal and not) used by the landholders, and that ultimately turned it into a “meaningless bureaucratic gesture” (Thomson, 2011, p. 338).

According to Moncayo (2016) the hacienda system was the main obstacle for the broad development of capitalism in Colombia given that haciendas perpetuated pre-capitalistic productive practices and work relations while the peasant economy (small plot owners) contributed a great deal to national production, both aspects keeping the majority of the peasantry bonded to land, which was, in one hand, delaying their separation from the means of production in order to make them available and willing to work for a salary, and in the other, precluding them to become proprietors to later become capitalists. For Bejarano (2007), the hacienda system excluded workers from the benefits of the economic booms of previous years, and since it was “based on the submission of the workforce and low wages or payment in kind, [it] started to be severely weakened by the thrust of the higher labor mobility, the development of public works, [and] the opening of new markets” (p. 229).

For being seen as a threat to both their economic and political power, Colombian rural elites interfered and/or reshaped the diverse structural transformations taking place in the rural economy during the first half of the twentieth century (Kalmanovitz, 1994), while the peasantry, “dispersed geographically, [working] under a great diversity of agrarian labor systems, and [living] in varying local cultures” was far from conforming a unified and coherent social movement (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 296).

Inasmuch as the hostility of the hacendados and landholders grew, the reply of the peasantry came in two forms: they “organized their own agrarian reform by colonizing new lands” (Palacios, quoted in Arias Trujillo, 2011, p. 317); and started to articulate their claims to the rhetoric of emerging political alternatives such as the progressive wing of the Liberal Party, the Communist Party, and the UNIR and the PAN¹⁵, that started to participate actively in the peasant mobilizations as a way to winning followers by giving a national dimension to regional conflicts (Ocampo, 2007, p. 257). Peasant protest concentrated (initially) in coffee producing zones especially in the departments of Cundinamarca and Tolima, concentrating 57% of the total of peasant federations and unions with legal status until 1939 (Ocampo, 2007), being noteworthy examples the municipalities of Tequendama and Sumapaz for later becoming incipient insurgency foci (Safford & Palacios, 2002), however federations were not only created to advocate for the interests of the less privileged groups; the landholding elite also formed federations such as APEN and SAC¹⁶ to defend private property, large estates and to “stop the Bolshevik influence” in Colombia (Machado, 2009, p. 200).

Ultimately, the reforms ended favoring the landholding elite rather than the destitute peasantry. LeGrand (2016) illustrates this notion when she describes how landowners surrendered only the least productive lands (if any at all)

¹⁵ National Leftist Revolutionary Union, founded by Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, and the National Agrarian Party, respectively.

¹⁶ National Economic Patriotic Action, and Colombian Farmers Society, respectively.

putting recipients in difficulties to reach profitable levels of production; given that the peasantry did not meet the legal requirements to access financial credit, they were rarely able to invest in the improvement of the property, and when they did get it, they were often forced to sell their assets or farm animals to be able to meet the monthly installments. When they felt behind payments, the lands were repossessed by banks and later sold to large landowners (pp. 242-243). All in all, the lukewarm and/or biased state response, rather than mitigating, tended to worsen rural issues that gradually grew in scope, size, intensity and complexity. Nonetheless, the straw that broke the camel's back will not come until a couple of decades later.

1.5. Conclusion

While neither the colonial structure of land property, social institutions or economic priorities did create the modern armed conflict in Colombia as such, the literature on the matter agrees in tracing the roots of conflict to it by underscoring that it did laid the foundations for the advent and reproduction of conditions that later, under different contexts, fueled conflicts that more often than not became violent for not being properly addressed institutionally.

In this regard, Thomson (2011) categorically notes that Colombian social, political and economic history have been shaped greatly by land issues (rights and property, labor forms, allocation of surplus, etc.) rooted in the colonial era, with ramifications that continue shaping political economy today, mainly because the clashing interests of the peasantry and the landholding elites during the development of capitalism and the integration of the country into world markets have been forged by legal conventions, interest groups, and institutional practices with little or no change since colonial times.

The Spanish colonization created and reinforced a rural institutionality characterized by a reduced group of property holders, an extractive system of production based on monopolies, and opprobrious forms of employing labor supported on class-based, nepotistic, and clientelistic relations that ossified and

repelled future attempts of change by any means available, as means to avoid losing longlasting and highly-profitable privileges.

Additionally, the economic and political centers that emerged during colonial times determined a great deal of the posterior political and economic dynamics of the country by virtue of its remoteness, relative self-sufficiency and detachment from any form of national mindset. European and American whites, indigenous, blacks, and mestizos (in their assorted types) were all spaced geographically and/or economically and/or ideologically, reducing the chances for assembling a society based on common goals while increasing the arguments and scenarios to see other groups as antagonists. Instead of transforming the social, political or economic conditions of the people released from Spanish domination, independence mutated into a structure for perpetuation of colonial privileges and a never-ending process of total extermination of those with different ideals. The voluminous but superfluous development of legislation (founded on precepts produced by more advanced societies) kept most of the social and economic structure intact, drove non-violent political engagement to the mandatory mediation of local chiefdoms —deepening clientelism and nepotism as *modus operandi*— and kept all social groups but the elites under heavy constraints to the effective use of their citizenship.

On the economic side, no profound transformation was seen in the Colombian productive system after its self-governed (read, not mediated by the Spanish Empire) integration into world markets. The property of the means of production, the labor relations, the products, and the scant benefits of economic activity remained concentrated in almost the same segments of the population that enjoyed them during colonial times. For its part, side effects of constant military confrontation during the nineteenth century (dead population, damages to infrastructure, stoppage of productive and trading processes, limitations in the access to productive capitals, destruction and predation of assets, and pressures on fiscal expenditure) radiated a climate of economic and political uncertainty that exacerbated social tensions, in a mutual self-

reinforcing mechanism. The unstable political order added to the instability of the economic system, and vice versa.

The success of coffee production and the deployment of enclave ventures (bananas, oil, and rubber) did nothing more than revealing the growing contradictions of the political and economic system, materialized in progressive laws coupled with regressive practices: open international trade, sustained flow of foreign currencies and capitals, and increasing communication and transportation means in one hand; enslaved or subjected workforce, archaic property structures, anachronistic productive processes, and stagnated technological adoption and development, in the other.

Besides that, the democratization of land that started during the twentieth century also had an ambivalent character. The chambers of the parliament and the legal codes screamed ‘democratization of land’ while in the countryside squatting, evictions, layoffs, abusive hiring practices, notarial and judiciary corruption, and violent attacks (originated or sponsored by the landowning elite) were customary. Additionally, more and more waves of colonizers started to collide and to battle —peacefully and not— for the same resources or for resources already appropriated.

The rapid transformations supervened on account on the irruption of a new economic landscape threatened the backbone of the Colombian political and economic framework: the hacienda system. The accelerated shifts demanded in the primitive productive system and their effect in the rural society renewed antagonisms that were latent —and never properly addressed— since colonial times, exposing what we consider the major contradiction of Colombian history: while the country —even peasants— was striding towards modernity and/or free capitalism, the privileged remained recalcitrant about preserving pre-capitalistic forms of production, labor and accumulation.

2. FROM GRIEVANCE TO WARFARE

“War is what happens when language fails”
—Margaret Atwood (1998)

2.1. Introduction

Scholars and policy makers alike have an ongoing controversy over the normalcy of violent conflict, and particularly over the extent to which violence is a routine practice in human societies –for some, even ingrained in human genetics– or an anomaly and an obstacle in the achievement of the capstone of human civilization. For Collier (2000b), “many societies sustain intense political conflict for many years without this developing into war. Political conflict is universal, whereas civil war is rare” (p. 13). On the other side, Cramer (2006) observes that the history is full of evidence of the use of violence as the rule and not the exception, especially in processes of primitive accumulation associated to capitalist development. Based on the events described in the previous chapter, Cramer’s vision is more consistent with Colombian history.

In this chapter we will bridge some important notions of collective action theory analyzing the passage from conflictive situations to violence with a second major period in Colombian history: the first half of the twentieth century. Firstly, in this period a great deal of the (aforementioned) struggles that began in the previous century (e.g. land property, political representation) far from finding equitable solutions aggravated and pervaded more regions and social groups. Secondly, the dissemination of conflictive relations inspired more aggrieved groups to organize and mobilize in the defense of their interests. Thirdly, the lack of the proper institutions and means to address conflicts of interests (or its bias in favor of determined groups) urged many to resort to violence as means to safeguard their current status or attain a different one. Lastly, distorted, prejudiced and misguided diagnoses of the situations at hand created distorted, prejudiced and misguided measures that set into motion mechanisms that still today represent a heavy burden for the Colombian society.

In the following pages we present a brief recapitulation of how violence begot violence and the ways in which diverse grievances gradually turned into a protracted civil war in Colombia.

2.2. Conceptual groundwork

Before describing the mushrooming of armed organizations in Colombia in more detail, as well as highlighting the elements that marked the evolution of the armed conflict in the country, we analyze briefly two important questions raised by Senechal de la Roche (2001): “why conflicts are handled by violence (rather than by other modes of conflict management), and why conflicts are handled collectively (rather than by individuals on their own)” (p. 126). Afterwards we examine why conflict mobilizations often transform into collective violence.

2.2.1. Conflict, violence and violent conflict

Mitchell (1981) defines conflict as “any situation in which two or more social entities or “parties” (however defined or structured) perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals” (p. 17); where incompatibility means that the concerned parties “think that the realization of one or more of their goals is being, or will be, thwarted by another party” (Jacoby, 2008, p. 19). The latter author adds that conflict may emerge “over material goods [...] or positional goods such as access to political representation and economic management” (p. 20); also, that the substance of the conflict can be realistic (current facts or past occurrences) or unrealistic (misperceptions, confusion, or sophisms) –with evidence suggesting “that the majority of conflictive situations contain both realistic and unrealistic elements” (pp. 19-20)–; finally, that any given conflictive situation can (a) increase (or decrease) its intensity inasmuch as the parties value the goals to a larger (or lesser) extent; (b) broaden (or narrow) its scope if there are more (or less) goals at stake; and (c) escalate (or de-escalate) inasmuch as more (or less) actors become involved (p. 19)¹⁷.

¹⁷ We included in parentheses the opposite notions –not considered by the cited author– to reflect particular circumstances witnessed in the Colombian case that will be presented in future sections of this work.

For its part, Doucet (1997) remarks that “conflict usually has negative connotations [given that] most people think of conflict as destructive and undesirable, as a social aberration to be avoided, contained or eliminated” (p. 177); instead, he argues that from an individual perspective, conflict can be manifested as the dispute between “the impulse to keep existing things the same [...] as opposed to the impulse to change things” (p. 179), while at the social level it can serve as a barometer of the balance between forces of integration and of fragmentation, for which “conflict is not right or wrong, it just is, [the question is] how the conflict is expressed and how it is solved” (p. 179).

In this regard, Mitchell (1981) underscores the salience of ‘conflict behavior’, this is, the “actions undertaken by one party in any situation of conflict aimed at the opposing party with the intention of making that opponent abandon or modify its goals” (p. 29). He concludes that conflicts are better described as “dynamic, interactive social processes” that respond to cycles of alternated phases, which never develop in a linear or predictable fashion (although manifesting in similar patterns), and always involving multidimensional causes and effects (pp. 179-180).

A second core concept for this work is violence, but given that the term has countless semantic, moral, normative and conceptual connotations (See for instance, Degenaar, 1980; Finlay, 2017; Ray, 2011) we will adopt a merger of the minimalistic and comprehensive definitions presented by Bufacchi (2005) and understand violence as ‘an act of intentional, excessive force intended to inflict harm, and that constitutes a violation inasmuch as it infringes, transgresses or exceeds some limit or norm’¹⁸.

¹⁸ These definitions rest most likely on the common association of ‘violence’ with ‘crime’, however –as noted by Felson (2009)– there are crimes (actions that infringe norms or laws) that are not violent while it is difficult to find social or legal systems in which violent acts are not crimes, with the possible exception of suicide. We accept this conjoined definition inasmuch as it represents adequately the actions analyzed throughout this work.

Also, throughout this chapter we will incorporate Imbusch's (2003) conceptualization of violence, which aims to give a more comprehensive meaning to the concept by asking the following questions regarding its exercise: *Who exercises violence?* (isolated individuals, groups, institutions, organizations, or other bodies); *What happens when violence is exercised?* (sequence of events, effects, spread, scale and intensity); *How is violence exercised?* (type and means used); *Who is the violence directed at?* (target and context); and *Why is violence exercised?* (reasons, instrumentality, objectives, justifications, and clarification regarding if it is product of incidental or repeated circumstances) (pp. 20-22).

The same author presents a significant distinction between types of violence. Firstly, between *physical violence* which "always causes open, visible harm or injuries [and tends to have more or less predictable results]; and *psychological violence*, which is aimed at the mind, the soul, [and] the psyche of a person, [intending] to force others into subjugation through intimidation and fear [and whose effects are revealed only after a certain time] and cannot be precisely predicted" (p. 23). Secondly, between *institutional violence* "directed toward lasting relations of dependence and submission", commonly intended to serve a regulatory function, and whose prototypical form is "the state's claim to sovereignty" exerted by bodies such as the police, the secret services or the army; and *structural violence* –originally formulated by Johan Galtung–, which "encompass[es] all those kinds of violence which result from systemic structures and are reflected in the various forms of anonymous mass impoverishment and death [...] due to basic inequality of opportunity, [and in which] the blame can no longer be individually apportioned" (p. 24). Thirdly, between *individual violence*, which tends to be committed in private spaces (out of sight of the public eye), with a clear individual responsibility, and which he characterizes as "overwhelmingly nonpolitical" (p. 27); and *collective violence*, which tends to be exerted more in public spaces, with a diffuse responsibility, legitimized through moral and social-interest arguments that "attenuate, relativize or erase taboos on violence", and which for being "exercised more functionally [...] in most cases has a strong political component" (pp. 27-28). Finally, he characterizes *political*

violence as a special case of collective violence in which the objective is “winning political power or changing established conditions of government [in order to] replace a political, social, or economic system, [for which] it is primarily directed against the state or a political regime (or its institutions) and its representatives” (p. 30).

Imbusch (2003) remarks that “no society, no region of the world, no culture is free of violence” (p. 14), however, it is also noteworthy that it is not the majority of humans who display violent behavior but the minority, even when coming from impoverished or violent environments or exhibiting mental pathologies, and despite of giving the opposite impression, humans are inclined to avoid killing each other for two reasons: they are genetically programmed to it, and in reality the bulk of humans is –besides predominantly reluctant– incompetent to fight (Collins, 2009b). In general,

Whatever the motive or interest that individuals or groups might have for fighting, the overriding empirical reality is that most of the time they do not fight. They pretend to get along; they compromise; they put up a peaceful façade and maneuver behind the scenes; they bluff, bluster, insult, and gossip, more often at a distance than to their opponent’s face (Collins, 2009b, p. 337).

Based on such assessments the same author concludes that violence is the exception and not the rule; “violence is difficult, not easy; whatever the background conditions may be –the motives, grievances, hotheaded feelings, material incentives, or cultural ideals– most of the time violent situations abort” (p. 449). The reason is that for requiring a mixture of physical capacities (force, speed, agility, endurance, etc.) and emotional stability (read, the ability to keep cool and not being affected by anger, fear, anxiety, etc.), effective violence is attainable by very few. In general –Collins remarks– only a minority of humans is “actively violent, and ever fewer are competently violent” (p. 375). For this reason, when facing potentially violent situations, humans experience a ‘confrontational tension’ that compels them to, initially “stag[e] an impression of violence, rather than the violence itself” (p. 339), this is, to employ hostile gestures (verbosity, blustering), and only in exceptional cases to actually use

violence, case in which they prefer to do it from the distance or through tools (e.g. weapons) that provide security. Blustering is then “the final step before violence [in the sense that it is] a move to intimidate, to force the opponent to waver, to gain an advantage, an opportunity in which to strike [so that] the enemy will back down and back away from fighting” (Collins, 2009b, p. 347).

Violence can also be used for “self-preservation or self-enhancement by individuals or groups who perceive themselves to be threatened, challenged, or devalued” (Conteh-Morgan, 2004, p. 69). Additionally, violence is “the most common emotional reaction to crime”, as noticeable in events such as theft or rape, in which often the victim (and/or their family and friends) experience profound “anger towards the perpetrator” and a strong desire of delivering immediate (violent) punishment, rather than fear (Silke, 2001, pp. 120-121); in other words, violence can be exerted both for attacking and defending, but also for delivering (whatever one considers) justice¹⁹. Interestingly enough, Baumeister and Vohs (2004) remark that, in general, violence fails to work as expected in the sense that “assassination and terrorism fail to bring about the government one desires; domestic violence fails to create the loving relationship one seeks [and] robbers and drug pushers do not retire as rich, happy individuals” (p. 91).

In view of the above, we briefly address the first of the questions that opened this section (and that was not responded by the cited author), namely, why conflicts are handled by violence rather than by other modes of conflict management.

Albeit it sounds evident, conflict turns violent when “disagreements and incompatibilities are resolved using physical violence, even unilaterally” (ILO, 2010, p. 2). The clarification is made because “conflict and violence are often used interchangeably” (Doucet, 1997, p. 175) despite that only a small part of

¹⁹ Further ahead we will show that in Colombia violence itself has been used for ‘blustering’, this is, to intimidate in order to force withdrawal in a conflictive situation.

everyday conflicts becomes violent. We gather that violence is just one form of addressing conflict, it becomes a tool used by the contenders in the midst of a conflictive situation to establish dominance (real or apparent; physical, emotional or both), with aims to make one's opponent cede or retreat in their opposition to one's attainment of objectives, ultimately allowing the aggressor to reach a position that facilitates the realization of those objectives. Our contention is supported by Addison (2002), who remarks that

Acts of violence can either have a demonstrative effect –saying that you are not the bosses, we are, and we are giving you an order: look what will happen again and again if you don't obey; or they can have a tangible effect –the capture of territory, money, weapons, people, or other resources (p. 5).

The most common argument in the explanation of violence is that of the frustration-aggression mechanism, described as “a psychological state [resulting from the] interference with an individual's pursuit of a desired object” (Jeong, 2008, p. 48). The rationale is that a strong frustration level experienced –as a combined function of the value attained to the goals, the expectations of realization, and the manifest reality– in conjunction with “a lack of alternative means to obtain the blocked goals, induces a stronger urge to act [in a violent manner]” (Jeong, 2008, p. 48).

For its part, Kerrison, Bachman, and Alvarez (2015) review the different theories examining the emergence of violence and portray it as the result of the combination of negative emotions such as shame, fear, frustration or anger emerging from adverse conditions such as joblessness, public humiliation, or negative labelling (at a micro level), with structural, institutional and cultural scenarios (at a macro level), in which “individuals [...] cannot pursue their goals through legitimate means [and] seek alternative [means to do so, for which they] attach themselves to others who approve and encourage the use of those means” (p. 128).

Jacoby (2008) also remarks that the focus in the analysis of the emergence of violence in conflictive situations varies in function of what is considered as the

primary unfulfilled ambition, therefore, analyses from Maslowian tradition consider concrete and biological –as opposed to abstract or emotional– needs (sustenance, shelter, procreation and bodily comfort) as imperative, while writers from Marxist tradition emphasize on economic issues (poverty, inequality, etc.), and scholars following Arendt accentuate political needs (participation, self-determination, freedom of expression, and so on) as major generators of conflict (read, clashing interests), and as the strongest predictors of violent response to it (p. 105).

In short, a conflict turns violent because the incumbents feel frustrated when their (highly valued) goals are being blocked, threatened or challenged; when – as stated by Addison (2002)– the first four of the “six main ways to change people’s behavior (persuasion, shame, reward, prevention, fear or force)” (p. 4) fail to steer the situation in one’s favor; and when alternative means to settle the situation are not available. We would add when the resolution mechanisms are biased towards one of the parties, a situation that will be illustrated later.

2.2.2. Collective mobilization

Regarding the second opening question, namely, why conflicts are handled collectively rather than by individuals on their own, the leap from ‘individual’ to ‘collective’ incompatible interests and grievances can be understood with the help of the following notions: communal identity, solidarity, and framing.

The first concept, according to Demmers (2017) –who borrows from Azar, Gurr, and many others– is manifested in the relationship between the individual and its immediate environment. For her, most human needs approaches tend to extrapolate the needs or grievances from the individual onto the group because all human identity formation happens irrevocably in the social sphere, and whenever that specific identity –communal identity– suffers a violation by frustration or deprivation of basic needs, emotional collective outbursts lead the group (the members of that specific identity) to mobilize in its defense (p. 91). Conflicts that started as individual issues transform in collective issues thanks

to the efforts of “‘first movers’ who one day may decide ‘enough is enough’ and begin to organize rebellions [through] the active involvement of ‘followers’” (Demmers, 2017, p. 84). It should be mentioned that “identities may be formed by religion, ethnic ties or racial affiliations, or [any] other salient factors which bind groups of people together” (Stewart, 2008, pp. 12-13).

The second mechanism related to the communal participation in conflicts is solidarity, which Senechal de la Roche (2001) describes as the ensemble of social distance and interdependence. The overall idea is that third parties will support the side of a conflictive situation that is (socially) closer to them by leveraging from solidarity among supporters, for which a conflict in which third parties are socially close to one of contending sides or the levels of solidarity are high is likely to collectivize. On account of the feeling of solidarity to causes, collective violence represents a “social-control process by which people responds to what they consider as a deviant behavior” (p. 127).

The third concept is framing, which can be summarized as

[The process of] selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment’ [as part of an agenda for] ‘naming’ grievances, connecting them to other grievances and constructing larger frames of meaning that will resonate with a population’s cultural predispositions and communicate a uniform message to power holders and others (Snow and Benford, quoted in Demmers, 2017, p. 100) [and which tries to] ‘redefine social conditions as unjust and intolerable with the intention of mobilizing potential participants (Tarrow, as quoted in Demmers, 2017, p. 100).

Framing also helps in the construction of the core motivations to undertake collective action: instrumentality (the individual belief in the group efficacy towards the attainment of the goals), identity (the sense of group identification), emotion (the group-based anger towards unfairness), and morality (the sense of moral righteousness of the cause) (Van Zomeren, 2013, p. 379).

Aside from the above, the theory most commonly associated with collective mobilization in conflictive situations is Gurr's theory of relative deprivation, which describes

A variety of conditions experienced by people who lack certain resources in relation to others in the community, thereby making them 'deprived', compared to others in the population. 'Relative deprivation' can occur in comparison to the condition of others. These conditions may be material, such as [income], home environment, housing and clothing. Alternatively, they might be social conditions, referring to the rights of employment, community integration, recreation, education and so on (Shaw et al., 2007, p. 5).

In essence –and cautioning that subjective wellbeing sustains a wide literature discussion on its own– people compare their present and past, both individually and as group, with other constituents of the society in order to determine if they are doing better or less well compared to the reference point in terms of status, power, wealth, rights, and so on (Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013; Kingdon & Knight, 2006), and, consequently, they mobilize in pursuit of an improvement in their condition. Jacoby (2008) makes an important distinction in regard to the motivation to action under relative deprivation circumstances by remarking that:

Egoistic deprivation is internally experienced and thus tends to lead to individual responses such as a lowering of expectation, withdrawal or, conversely, a reinvigorated pursuit of personal goals [while] fraternal deprivation is experienced collectively and is therefore likely to produce [collective] participatory responses including social movements, political parties, trade unions and the like (p. 122).

Even though the aforementioned common identity, social closeness, solidarity and framing (among other mechanisms) service the transformation of individual actions into collective ones, the process requires an intermediate stage that we call 'consolidation', and that we borrow from Dolata and Schrape (2016), who differentiate from non-organized and organized collectives by remarking that while the former do aggregate similar decisions and behaviors of individuals based on the shared perceptions or approaches to the issues at hand,

they do not have an organized or action-guiding core, for which they do not really act as an unified entity and tend to remain spontaneous and volatile. On the other hand, organized collectives are those that besides shared objectives and identity, establish more concrete rules and patterns of organization that help them to conduct intentional strategic actions, forge a more coherent identity, and differentiate internally between hardcore activists and mere followers (p. 3). For us then, there are two leaps: from individual action to unorganized collectives and from unorganized collectives to organized ones. We will exemplify this notion when recounting the emergence of armed groups in Colombia in the next section.

Lastly, the works of Francis Stewart relating inequality and (armed) conflict stress that the probability of collective mobilization increases if perceived injustice –called ‘horizontal inequality’– is related to economic or political issues, and all the more if the group perceives that one of the disparities reinforces another²⁰ (Stewart, 2008; Stewart, Brown, & Langer, 2008; Stewart & Langer, 2008); for this reason, Van Zomeren and Iyer (2009) consider that “collective action is one of the core mechanisms of social change” because it traditionally encompasses actions “that aim to improve the status, power, or influence of an entire group, rather than that of one or a few individuals”, while noting that it does not “necessarily require actual collectives. What matters is the aim of the action –to change the status of a group– rather than the number of people who are participating” (pp. 645-646).

In view of the above, whenever two entities have incompatible goals conflict emerges, but not necessarily as a negative, destructive or violent phenomenon; those characteristics emerge inasmuch as the opposition, the levels of threat and frustration of parties with opposing interests escalate, considering that conflict entails the modification and/or re-accommodation of previous social, political,

²⁰ “For example, a lack of access to education (a social inequality) may lead to low incomes (an economic one) and both may be responsible for and also caused by lack of political power” (Stewart & Langer, 2008, p. 55).

economic and cultural structures. Personal conflict can assume a collective form and mobilize hundreds or thousands of aggrieved individuals on grounds of a (real or imagined) communal identity and of solidarity, both emanating from a perceived injustice or the intention to preserve a determined status quo, most often thanks to a convenient framing of the issue at hand supplied by initiators (read, individuals or bodies firstly affected by the conflict).

For its part, violence can emerge in attempts to demonstrate superiority (to make an antagonist recede) or to achieve tangible gains of the confrontation (e.g. goods, territory), or when alternative (more amicable) means to settle the situation are not available, although –at least theoretically– is the last resource. The literature on violence tends to emphasize that it commonly emerges from short-fused emotions; yet, this suggestion loses substance when violence is collectively implemented and/or when it is organized around long term goals. We will address that question in the next section, which describes the generality of the movements that assemble to use violence collectively for conflict resolution.

2.2.3. Collective violence²¹

According to Littman and Paluck (2015) “a violent group is a collective that uses violence to achieve its political, economic, or social goals [and which] ranges from state-sponsored militaries to underground terrorist cells to neighborhood gangs” (p. 80). The question then is if those collective goals cannot be achieved without violence, or if using violence helps in their achievement, even more under the assumption that “violence is a result of rational calculations, [because in that case] perpetrators of rational violence can be negotiated with, “bought off, or deterred” (Hawdon, 2014a, p. 251).

²¹ Hawdon (2014b) differentiates between ‘collective violence’ and ‘group violence’ by stating that the second term includes both acts of violence committed by groups and acts of violence that target groups, even if committed by individuals (p. 9). We stick to the first term, clarifying on the typology of a specific event if necessary.

The answer to those questions is explored from many perspectives (sociology, psychology, anthropology, biology, etc.) and connected to many social domains (politics, economics, culture, etc.), for which its volume is considerable and cannot be discussed here. We limit our presentation to one major strand of literature that links the collective use of violence to conflictive situations, and that later will help in the portrayal of the emergence and evolution of revolutionary insurgencies in Colombia.

According to Klandermans (2015) there are “three fundamental reasons why people participate in collective action: people may want to change their circumstances, they may want to act in concert with the group they identify with, or they may want to express their views [all of which can be abbreviated as] instrumentality, identity, and ideology” (p. 223), none of which –in our view– is inherently violent or requires violence to be exercised. Tilly (1978) concurs when he remarks that the characteristic collective expressions of discontent, materialized in “contentious gatherings such as the demonstration, the strike, the so-called food riot, and the tax protest are not, on the whole, intrinsically violent [and] in fact, most of them occur without violence” (p. 183).

Tilly also stresses that a great deal of the development of a conflict situation (in terms of the use of violence) depends on the nature of the claim that the group is making: competitive claims, which are made over resources also claimed by an antagonist group (for instance, territorial control); reactive claims, intended to reassert or defend previously established claims when someone else challenges or violates them (for instance, land invasions); or, proactive claims, which are group claims which have not previously been vindicated (for instance, a strike claiming for higher wages or better working conditions) (Tilly, 1978, pp. 144-147). Here again, none of those typologies of claim is intrinsically violent or requires violence to be submitted.

For us, Mansley (2014) partially provides the answer to the question of the leap from collective mobilization to collective violence when he suggests that “the extent of violence in modern forms [of protest] depends on the reactions of

opponents” (p. 31). We say ‘partially’ because following Tilleian postulates the majority of the literature associates collective action and/or collective violence directly with (harsh) state response, usually in the form of repression. For us, those views miss one crucial factor: the use of violence to settle conflicts in private spheres before the state gets involved. To make our point, we provide one (aforementioned) example.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century peasant movements emerged in rural Colombia to confront and end the abuses of landholders towards rural wage earners, which included the prohibition to grow coffee (the most profitable product of the time), the obligation to work for free in the crops of the landowner, the obligation of the worker or tenant family (commonly, the women) to provide domestic service in the house of the landowner, the payment of salaries in vouchers redeemable only in the store of the hacienda owner, the obligation to trade their other products using the store of the hacienda owner, the tampering of the scales used to weight those products (in order to pay the peasants less for their sales and charge them more for their purchases), among many others (Kalmanovitz, 1994; Molano, 2017).

Molano (2017) and LeGrand (2016) observe that the first collective mechanisms used by peasants to address those situations were the organization of fundraisers to buy non-rigged scales, and the hiring of lawyers to inspect contracts or to defend them collectively in land or labor disputes, given that almost all of them were illiterates. Those initiatives gradually gave way to what later became ‘peasant leagues’ focused in the defense of the rights of peasants and indigenous populations, thus far, all conducted within pacific and lawful channels. But the response of the landholders –as aforesaid– was not amicable or conciliatory: unjustified layoffs, forceful evictions, the destruction of workers’ and tenants’ crops, the sabotage of their trading infrastructure (roads, bridges), false accusations to get them imprisoned, and the open conformation of armed groups to threaten or injure them, were common repertoires used to intimidate the rudimentarily organized peasants to retreat and decline their pretensions. The threat over the potential re-accommodation of the prevalent social and

productive structure of their businesses, and/or the frustration generated by the negative from the peasants to forgo their requests compelled landholding elites to attack (violently) first, or to –as described before– use violence as blustering.

We consider those actions as ‘violent’ not in the traditional sense of inflicting physical and/or psychological harm on individuals –with the exception of imprisonment and the repertoires used by the armed groups to intimidate the peasants of the example–, but because, firstly, the landholders tried to maintain dependence relations (institutional violence, following Imbusch), secondly, they most likely employed excessive force and/or actions that constituted blatant violations to law (following Bufacchi), and thirdly, because as observed by Krug et al. (2002), “attacks carried out with the purpose of disrupting economic activity, denying access to essential services, or creating economic division and fragmentation” constitute economic violence (p. 6). As remarked by Keen (1998), “much of the violence in contemporary conflicts has been initiated not by rebels seeking to transform the state, but by elites trying to defend vested interests” (p. 12), an idea supported by Collins (2009b) who suggests that the stronger party tends to attack the weaker first, and by Jeong (2008) who remarks that “in an overwhelming power imbalance, a weaker party tends to be hesitant to initiate confrontation” (p. 31).

The conflict between landholding elites and peasants –taken as private collectives– in Colombia turned violent thanks to the initial (violent) response of the former to the (arguably pacific) requests and initiatives of the latter, which supports Mansley’s assertion. In addition to that, violence was not started by the complainant or the weaker party in the confrontation, but by the offender and stronger one, which supports Keen, Collins and Jeong’s remarks. Finally, violence emerged before the involvement of the state, which supports our contention: in many conflicts, collective violence is exerted privately first, for which the automatic association of collective violence as that directed towards the state is –in our view– inaccurate.

According to the related literature, the state becomes the target of violence for two main reasons: first, for arbitrating, since the majority of normal (and inherently pacific) events of political life such as protests, strikes and demonstrations turn violent only when the state intervenes to extinguish them – typically using force²²– in an attempt to maintain its monopoly on the use of violence (Tilly, quoted in Mansley, 2014, p. 31)²³; second, because the violent acts are directed towards the state for being held responsible either for causing the grievance or for its remediation (Addison, 2002; Jacoby, 2008). For those reasons “collective violence almost always involves governments as monitors, claimants, objects of claims, or third parties to claims” which turns the analysis of collective mobilization and violence into “a special case of contentious politics” (Tilly, 2003, p. 10), although –for the above reasons– most often ‘collective violence’ is outright considered as synonym of ‘political violence’.

Based on those premises, an important notion is presented by Merari (1993) in the following table, in which political violence is portrayed as limited to two groups (the state and the citizens –which are not clearly defined), and their interactions are characterized on account of who is the initiator of the violence and who is its target. The author is careful to clarify that the table does not include (a) instances of violence between citizens that obey to personal economic gain purposes or personal animosities, for not considering them ‘political’ in essence (p. 219), nor (b) demonstrations, labor strikes, hunger strikes, merchandise boycotts, or refusals to pay taxes, for considering them nonviolent, and thus, outside of the political violence spectrum (p. 223).

²² Mansley (2014) remarks that “the majority of the killing and wounding in those same disturbances is done by troops or police rather than insurgents or demonstrators [while] demonstrators, on the other hand, do the majority of damage to property” (pp. 31-32).

²³ Common examples of private violent confrontations between groups that start privately but eventually call for state intervention include gang rivalries and skirmishes between supporters of sports teams. Tilly (2003) considers them both as violent rituals with low political content, however alternative and deeper analyses can be found in Spaaij (2006) for the case of sports supporters, and in Sullivan (2001) for the case of street gangs.

Table 2-1: Basic classification of political violence.

		Target	
		State	Citizens
Initiator	State	- Full-scale war - Belligerent activities during peacetime (e.g. espionage, sabotage, etc.)	- Law enforcement - Legal repression - Illegal repression
	Citizens	- Riots - Guerrilla - Insurgence terrorism - Coup d'état	- Vigilantism - Terrorism - Ethnic rivalries - Extremist ideologies

Source: Adapted from Merari (1993, p. 218).

As we will show later ahead, these distinctions are essential for the analysis of the Colombian armed conflict because, along with the questions presented earlier (namely, who exerts violence, how it is exerted, towards whom it is directed, what happens when it is exerted, and why it is exerted), they help to provide a better overview of the political, economic and social environment in which the armed conflict germinated and evolved to develop new scenarios, the entry and transformation of actors that developed new interests, and the power relations between them that generated new conflicts.

Finally, even though academic and non-academic observers question the utility of violence in the achievement of goals for considering it irrational (read, the result of volatile feelings such as hatred, resentment, anger, or fear) and counterproductive (for generating irreparable and costly damages to the people, their property and the society) –both of which often come from demonizing media coverage that induces the alienation of the public opinion (Seferiades & Johnston, 2012)–, it is also possible to assert that violence is rational –in the sense of responding to logic and reason– because, first, it can be used

strategically to (a) recruit adherents, (b) attack opponents and their property, but also the symbols they represent, (c) direct the public to approve or disapprove the doings of either side through staged actions (e.g. attacks on self, false flag attacks), and (d) display disobedience to rules or dominant institutions as well as to advertise the movement as genuinely disruptive (Piven, 2012). Furthermore, it gives “assurance that at least one of the parties to the collective action took it seriously [and makes] collective action visible: authorities, participants, and observers tend to set down some record of their actions, reactions, and observations” (Tilly, 1978, p. 188).

Two final arguments –which will gain relevance ahead in our work– are presented by Seferiades and Johnston (2012) when analyzing the shift of protest and collective mobilization from pacific to violent. First, they remark that the use of violence is more a reflection of “systemic channel deficiency” rather than of irrationality (p. 4) because at some point there can be a growing “perception that authorities and the political system as a whole are not responsive” to some social demands (p. 16). Second, they observe that “irrespective of whether or not violent action is instrumentally counterproductive [...] assuming it to be irrational prevents us from adequately comprehending, let alone interpreting and explicating it” (p. 4); an argument that has strong implications in terms of how violent collective mobilization is seen and addressed. The most common attitude is the stigmatization of their participants, the invalidation of their claims, and the stripping of the legitimacy of their identity or ideology even before the protest reaches violent dimensions, and (paradoxically) even employing violence to prevent the protest from progressing and becoming violent.

While it is still not clear if violence is instilled by individuals into a collective that otherwise would have remained pacific, or if it sprouts in many individuals at the same time, it is possible to gather that violent actions from one party (either used for blustering or for attempting to force retreat) do transform collective action in collective violence, especially when “feelings of deprivation, injustice, inequity, and frustration” are involved (Jeong, 2008, p. 15). In the

following section we briefly describe the main forms in which collectives organized in Colombia to employ violence as means to deal with conflict: vigilantes and insurgencies.

2.2.4. Non-State Armed Groups

According to Schlichte (2009) armed groups come into being –in most cases– under three typical –and non-mutually exclusive– circumstances: violent repression exerted by governments that forces groups of civilians to resist and/or fight back; crises on patrimonial systems that exclude citizen groups from political rights or from access to vital economic resources (because those usually work as clientelistic networks), compelling them to take by force what is not given peacefully; and government-created groups from which control is lost. In addition to that, he stresses that “the formation of armed groups seems to be bound to pre-existing milieus, locales, and micro-arenas” (p. 261), in other words, they never materialize in a vacuum or out of nowhere.

It is worth noting that in all three circumstances the government (most probably used as synonym of ‘the state’) is a protagonist, a circumstance that hinges on the dominant Weberian/Tilleian vision of the state as the sole legitimate bearer of the so-called ‘monopoly of violence’²⁴. As a corollary, all armed groups not assembled, mobilized and/or controlled by a recognized state are classified as ‘Non-State Armed Groups’, ‘Illegal Armed Groups’, or simply as ‘Armed Groups’, implying in all cases that they operate without state authorization and/or do not have a legal standing²⁵, and while acknowledging that

²⁴ Civic and Miklaucic (2011) note that “in reality, no modern state, strong or weak, has an absolute monopoly on the use of force; however, the legitimacy of the use of force is central to the modern concept of governance [which also confers it the power to] delegate the legitimate use of force, [even if] it remains the unique owner of that prerogative” (p. 16). A deeper analysis on the conception of the monopoly of force can be found in Grimm (2003).

²⁵ Throughout this work we will use “Non-State Armed Group” –or NSAG– to refer to the groups under analysis to avoid normative inferences or judgmental positions about them. Even though armed groups opposed to the state (and not) do have a clandestine character, commonly resort

unequivocal definitions are impossible given their diverse roots, goals and characteristics, Hofmann and Schneekener (2011) define Non-State Armed Groups as:

Distinctive organizations that are (i) willing and capable to use violence for pursuing their objectives and (ii) not integrated into formalized state institutions such as regular armies, presidential guards, police, or special forces, [for which they] (iii) possess a certain degree of autonomy with regard to politics, military operations, resources, and infrastructure (p. 2).

While there are divergences in the classifications, the relevant literature tends to categorize armed groups according to dimensions such as motivation and purpose, military strength and scope, funding methods, organizational structure, role of violence, relationship with the state, and utility for their supporting constituencies (Williams, 2008, p. 8). The resulting taxonomy features the following as the most representative forms of armed groups:

- *Warlords*: charismatic individuals that use their military experience to exercise control over certain territories through private armies intended to privatize state functions and profit from diverse forms of illicit or informal economy, commonly aided by patronage systems that increase local acquiescence.
- *Militias*: Groups predominantly conceived to provide security or institutional control in areas in which the central government has not been able to, and constructed around specific ethnic, religious, or other communal identities. The ambiguous mix of criminal and political

to illegal economic activities (theft, contraband, drug traffic, etc.) to finance their operation, and do commit crimes (killing, kidnapping, etc.) as part of their intentions, first, it is evident that confronting the state (and any of its ancillary activities) is illegal by default, although in principle, the legality of an action depends on the eye of the beholder: in the same way that the rebel groups that fought for independence were considered 'illegal' by the colonial powers, modern armed rebel groups are considered 'illegal' by official governments for challenging the current establishment. Second, official state-controlled armed groups also commit illegal acts and crimes while fulfilling their mission.

activities tends to grant them –quoting Reno– a dual role of protectors and predators.

- *Paramilitary forces*: Groups akin to militias that differ from those in the sense of being –initially at least– created, encouraged or consented by the government, and which regularly act as an extension of official forces.
- *Insurgencies*: organized armed movements aimed at the overthrow and replacement of a constituted government, the secession of a determined territory for political, economic or cultural reasons, or the achievement of political concessions unattainable through pacific means. They typically establish alternative forms of governance to those provided by the ruling state in order to reduce its legitimacy and endorse their establishment as a viable and legitimate governmental alternative. The ‘high ideals’ they spouse are often contradicted by their coercive methods and the parasitic economic relations they establish with the population, eventually undermining their legitimacy.
- *Criminal organizations and youth gangs*: developed to obtain profit from diverse illegal activities although with more volatile organizational structures than other movements. Besides their criminal activities per se, the biggest challenge to the states where they operate is the use of corruption to co-opt authorities that ultimately interferes with law enforcement and has debilitating effects on the rule of law (Williams, 2008, pp. 9-16)²⁶.

²⁶ The same author includes ‘terrorist groups’ as a separate category, but defines them as “groups [that] seek political change through the use of violence” and which for not having “the capacity to mount an insurgency campaign” resort to terrorism to challenge the state and undermine its authority (pp. 14-15), which resembles his own description of militias. He also quotes David Rapoport to allude different facets of terrorism (namely, anarchist, anti-colonial, leftwing and religious), which again, embody political, economic and cultural reasons alike to those of his own description of militias. Besides, we do not include it as a separate category for considering terrorism as a war tactic with an ample set of repertoires (e.g. mass destruction attacks, sabotage, bombings, etc.) essentially intended to cause (collective) psychological harm (Drake, 1998), but that can be employed by any of the cataloged groups, and even the state.

Many scholars –especially when studying the Colombian armed conflict– frequently allude to two additional varieties within the categorization of armed groups: vigilantes and guerrillas. Hereunder we briefly explain why we will consider them, respectively, as, a special case in armed groups typologies, and as a form of warfare, rather than a class on their own.

In the first case, vigilante groups are defined as “either ‘citizens who organize themselves into groups to take the law into their own hands in order to reprimand criminals’ or ‘associations in which citizens have joined together for self-protection under conditions of disorder’ [with a view to exert] ‘crime control and/or social control’ [or] to defend the community against external threats”” (Schuberth, 2015, pp. 301-303). Nevertheless, the ‘taking the law in their own hands’ implies that they “uphold established norms” –which sort of provides them an aura of legitimacy–, while at the same time they “act outside of established institutions” –which calls into question their legitimacy (Kowalewski, 2003, p. 340). Those characteristics match the description of militia presented above, for which we hold those organizations as a special case or as a subtype of militia groups.

In the second case, it is common to use the word ‘guerrilla’ as a collective noun²⁷; as a synonym of ‘terrorist group’ or ‘communism’ (Joes, 2011), of ‘revolution’ and ‘subversion’ (Valencia, 1970), and of ‘left-wing armed group’ (Laqueur, 2017). This is so because guerrilla warfare has been widely used “by small bands of irregulars fighting a superior invading army [...] or in the preliminary stages of a revolutionary war that aims at overthrowing the existing political authority” (Kalyanaraman, 2003, p. 172).

The specialized literature also points that guerrilla tactics are used by groups manifestly inferior to their enemies in terms of numbers, training, equipment,

²⁷ “Military formation not organized as an army that fights for political motives with aim of imposing a determined political, economic or social system in a place or country” (“Guerrilla,” n.d.).

logistics or international recognition and support (Joes, 2011, p. 98), that commonly employ “hit-and-run operations and ambushes [to disrupt enemy’s] control over territory and population [and at the same time] impose costs on the adversary in terms of loss of soldiers, supplies, infrastructure, peace of mind, and most importantly, time” (Kalyanaraman, 2003, p. 173), whereby in the light of the noticeable military asymmetry, the weaker contender always avoids direct confrontation with the stronger one since it would probably result in a rapid defeat (Kalyvas, 2006). As stated by Henry Kissinger (American diplomat and former Secretary of State of the United States) –quoted in Kalyanaraman (2003)– “the guerrilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win” (p. 173).

Weinstein (2007) compiles diverse authors to remark that guerrilla warfare has four main tactics that differentiate it from other types of combat: forces organized “in small and highly mobile units” rather than large battalions with heavy weaponry; infrequent traditional or ‘pitched’ battles aimed at a definitive victory over the opposition; continuous operation in “territories that are under the control of their military opponents”; and imperative reliance on “local populations for the resources needed to sustain fighting, including food, shelter, supplies, and intelligence” (p. 29). Nevertheless, it should be noted that “the techniques and organizational forms of guerrilla warfare have varied enormously from country to country” and from one era to the next (Laqueur, "Summing," para. 33) because guerrilla tactics –contrary to common claims– were not originally conceived neither by Spanish or Portuguese partisans fighting Napoleonic troops nor by Mao Zedong fighting Japanese occupation in China; there are anecdotes of its use from as early as hundred and thirty years before Christ (Laqueur, 2017) and evidence thereon from the times of Alexander the Great (Asprey, 1994). Based on the above, Laqueur (2017) concludes that “not all unconventional warfare is ‘guerrilla’ war, nor should it be used as a synonym for revolutionary politics, civil war, or terrorism” ("Preface," para. 5).

Altogether, guerrilla²⁸ is then, above all, a method of warfare rather than a category of armed group and by virtue of that it can be used by different kinds of armed collectives, even by the state and its official forces.

2.3. The forge of armed groups in Colombia

2.3.1. The politics of violence

The period between 1946 and 1957 is universally branded in Colombian history as ‘La Violencia’ (The Violence, as in a proper noun), although its origins cannot be precisely dated (LaRosa & Mejía, 2013; Pécaut, 2016), although it is difficult to account for a single violence-free period in the history of the country (Bailey, 1967; Molano, 2016), and although the disperse and intermittent violent incidents of the specific period resulted from unlike circumstances such as “land property litigations, disputes over water access, inter-family feuds or petty crime” (Guerrero Barón, 2007, p. 47). The term responds to both its widespread and normalized character as well as to its anarchic and unforgiving nature.

For authors like Zackrison (1989), Murillo Posada (2011), and Hernández García (2015), it resulted from the clash (at national level) between the modernizing program of the liberals and the fierce defense of the colonial-like status quo made by the conservatives, while for González Arana and Molinares Guerrero (2013a) it is the late and byproduct consequence of the state violence used to repress the early workers’ movements of the 1920s when measures such

²⁸ The related literature commonly uses the term ‘guerrilla’ to refer to a (single) irregular armed group that uses guerrilla tactics in pursuit of their goals, and ‘guerrillas’ as both its plural (read, multiple guerrilla groups) and –in the case of English– the combatants of such groups (as in ‘guerrilla soldiers’); in Spanish the word ‘guerrilleros(as)’ is used to refer specifically to its combatants. We consider all but the latter incorrect based on the ideas presented in this section, yet almost all of the sources used here adhere to such custom, making citations and textual quotations conceptually problematic. For the sake of conceptual consistence, from now on in this work we will refrain from using ‘guerrilla’ and ‘guerrillas’ with those meanings, and adjust citations and textual quotations to stand by this guideline as much as possible.

as the prohibition of strikes and unions failed (with previous precedents such as the ‘Bananeras massacre’). For its part, for Guerrero Barón (2007) ‘La Violencia’ is the result of the ‘social unrest’ caused (at local level) by, first, the rapid and profound social and political transformations experienced by the country since the 1920s –and that were perceived as ‘unholy foreign impositions’ and hardly assimilated by heavily traditionalist rural communities– and second, the economic turmoil generated by the growing importance of coffee, that swiftly displaced economic and political activity –neglecting many other economic sectors and marginalizing multiple regions from the benefits of the agroexport economy and public investment in infrastructure and social services– and later, rekindled land conflicts and exacerbated rural unemployment when the coffee boom was battered by the crisis of 1929.

The same author remarks that

In the span between the ‘War of the Thousand Days’ [1899-1902] and 1948 the political violence [remained] in many places of the [Colombian] geography, in the form of local conflicts of fluctuating intensity, articulated with other conflicts of different origin and nature from the specifically political, yet emerging almost always as problems between liberals and conservatives (p. 45).

‘La Violencia’ –the same author suggests– represents an ‘enshrinement of politics’ in the sense of the radicalization of political ideologies forged back in the republican era (after independence) under the influence of the Catholic church in the majority of aspects of people’s lives (education, civil registry, holidays, etc.), including political mobilization, and which often unfolded bloodshed by mere rumors and malicious information with devotional tone rather than from concrete offenses or clear political intentions.

Several commentators concur in remarking that the liberal political and economic project of the beginning of the twentieth century threatened the privileges that the Church and the conservative elites had; namely, tax exemptions and social control for the former; jurisdiction on the economic policy and legislation (labor, tariffs, infrastructure development, subsidies) to

favor the economic activities of the latter; and land property for both. One and the other closed ranks to amplify the belligerent reaction and encouraged political sectarianism by calling “to fight to the death against the reforms of the pro-communist and atheistic liberalism” (Villamizar, 2017, p. 131), to “spill all the blood necessary in defense of traditional principles” (Molano, 2016, p. 576), and to avoid succumbing to the temptations of modernism and secularization, for “liberalism is a sin” (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 286). Time and again priests authorized the use of their churches as weapon warehouses or sniper nests, or directly participated in the distribution of guns to form anti-liberal vigilante groups (Molano, 2016). The enthusiastic involvement of the Church in the issue rapidly granted the confrontations a dogmatic character redoubled by an individual political affiliation “generally hereditary and geographical, rather than ideological” (Zackrisson, 1989, p. 10), for which allegiance to either party (liberal or conservative) was inherited by birth and its principles were defended to death with unprecedented viciousness²⁹.

‘La Violencia’ has been characterized as predominantly rural and seldom urban, as partisan but not discernibly organized (for which many scholars dub it as ‘anarchic’), and as seldom anti-establishment yet encouraged by the establishment (Zackrisson, 1989, p. 9). Caro (1987) remarks that in spite of being frequently endorsed by rich countrymen, the violence was perpetrated mostly by and against the poor peasantry, a circumstance that was also exploited by the leadership of both parties to label members of the groups not under their direct control or not aligned with their objectives as ‘bandits’, debasing any real underlying socio-political claims while justifying violent means.

²⁹ Bailey (1967) mentions decapitation, scalping, dismembering, hanging, crucifixion, burning, rape, and forced C-sections to induce abortions as the most common repertoires to harm, terrorize and retaliate antagonists, to which Guzmán Campos, Fals Borda, and Umaña Luna (2005) add killing children, cutting males genitalia, and killing pregnant women as means to –at the same time– “eliminate any future seeds” of political opposition.

One key feature of ‘La Violencia’ was its ‘para-institutional’ character, manifested in

The superseding of the main state functions [by which] at local level, the parties exert[ed] a power that in determined moments over[ran] the state and supplant[ed] its functions in the political, administrative, judiciary, and even police and military fields (Guerrero Barón, 2007, p. 48).

All of that resulted in the perception of figures such as “the army, the police, judiciary investigators, magistrates, notaries and judges as private staff of the adversary and not as [neutral] institutional agents” (Guerrero Barón, 2007, p. 20), for which initial disregard for and confrontation to any form of institutional authority –or ‘civil disobedience’ in proselytizing language– ultimately transformed into ‘armed self-defense’ through the formation and propagation of (conservative) “civic police corps” (Guerrero Barón, 2007), “politicized police corps” (Murillo Posada, 2011) such as ‘The Chulavitas’ and ‘The Pájaros’ (González González, 2016)³⁰, and (liberal) self-defense groups.

‘La Violencia’ is commonly interpreted as an expression of extremist politics, but it agglutinated politically-motivated violence –often deformed into banditry and petty crime– with personal retaliations for old or new aggressions, and with diverse interpersonal feuds disguised under political flags, for which as remarked by Safford and Palacios (2002), “it is always difficult to establish what connections there are between political violence and other forms of violence” (p. 346). Additionally, aside from the political and militaristic side of the confrontation, González Arana and Molinares Guerrero (2013a) –quoting Oquist– remark how in open connivance with local authorities, “the police and

³⁰ According to Guzmán Campos, Fals Borda, and Umaña Luna (2005) ‘The Chulavitas’ (also known as ‘The Chulavita Police’) were the combination of police officers that rebelled after April the 9th of 1948, former inmates that were set free many jails in the country during the mayhem of the same date, and peoples extracted from towns with renowned political belligerence. The names of the groups stem from, the municipality in which they emerged and became famous (Chulavita-Boyacá) in the case of the former, and from the fact of being commanded by a radical conservative nicknamed ‘El Cóndor’ (The Condor) in the case of the latter (Sánchez, 1985).

‘The Pájaros’, serving partisan political committees and sectarian caciques, found it profitable to ransack houses and farms, to steal harvests and cattle, and to buy urban and rural properties of threatened persons at low prices” (p. 19), which further motivated those affected to use preemptive or retaliating violence.

The political, the economic, and the particular violence all mixed into what many call ‘chaotic and dysfunctional’ (Bailey, 1967), but it was far from random or purposeless. Be it the control of the state (LaRosa & Mejía, 2013), the defense of the ancient bipartisan political model (Arias Trujillo, 1998), the clash between the ruling and the ruled classes (Sánchez, 1985), the small local conflicts that gradually reached national dimensions (Lozano-Gracia et al., 2009), the swift economic transformations generated by the change of the century (Guerrero Barón, 2007), the unresolved agrarian conflicts of the 1930s (Thomson, 2011), the state repression attempted to proscribe the emerging peasant unions and leagues (Caro, 1987), or the preservation of the predominant work relations and hacienda-like productive systems in the countryside (Kalmanovitz, 1994), the violence of ‘La Violencia’ reflected the multiple conflictive domains not properly addressed by the established institutional arrangements, for which Lozano-Gracia et al. (2009) argue that the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán –which is commonly mentioned as its definitive trigger– just aggravated conflicts that were already present decades ago in middle-size urban centers, and disseminated them to rural areas.

With an estimated death toll close to 200,000 people and with tens of thousands more directly affected (injured, displaced, or plundered) by it, Guerrero Barón (2007) questions the substantial service of ‘La Violencia’ to the Colombian society given that no structural transformation took place, no alternative political or social model was implemented, and no revolution was at stake (p. 38). Despite of that and of the fact that the most notorious insurgencies emerged almost two decades after the scourge of ‘La Violencia’, for this work some of its particularities will be assumed as primary constituents of the modern armed conflict in Colombia considering the following.

First, some scholars observe that one major difference between ‘La Violencia’ and previous civil wars or the future insurgent conflict is that both of the latter had specific goals while the former was rather anarchic and lawless. We differ. Even though the methods used and its effects seemed so, the background and the facts denote attempts to eliminate and dissuade political competition, and violence was more often than not used by some groups or individuals to obtain or maintain political or economic gain or privileges. The violent acts might have been reckless, but the underlying intentions were clear for its perpetrators. So much so that the violence was branded as ‘political’ or as ‘banditry’ depending on the referee, very much in spite of all and sundry appealing to the same methods. Following that distinction between the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ violence, one especially relevant circumstance is worth noting:

April the 9th [and the ensuing violence] was for the elites a further opportunity to delegitimize the [voice] of “the social”: the rabble, the riotous, and the savages. In that sense history has not changed much fifty years later, for the mobilized peasants, the workers in strike, the human rights advocates, and many more groups and individuals remain being seen by the state and a by part of the society as elements manipulated by communist guerrillas, and for that reason, dangerous for the country [and for the appropriate status quo] (Arias Trujillo, 1998, p. 45).

Second, whether as the progression of previous tensions or as the outburst of new ones, the confrontations that took place during ‘La Violencia’ planted the seeds for future violent conflict by means of the political, economic and personal grievances they created and the ways in which political, economic or personal animosities were handled. The national party leaders, the local political caciques, the landholders, the working peasants and colonists, or the urban workers that were displaced, injured or robbed –politically, economically, physically or morally– or whose interests were adversely affected during the hostilities, became potential militants of future belligerent movements. The Commission for the Study of Violence concurs with us when they remark that in Colombia “each form of violence have created the conditions for the production of the next ones” (CEV, 1988, p. 83).

From that perspective, the violent confrontations experienced more or less continuously in Colombia after its independence responded to a failed attempt to “unify by force societies that did not reproduce the same socio-cultural and political values” (Murillo Posada, 2011, p. 299), and which manifested, first, in the nationwide civil wars of the nineteenth century, and later in the local rural skirmishes of the twentieth century.

As described above, at the national level—in the congress and through the press—the leadership of the political parties and large business syndicates strove to consolidate their dominance in the higher spheres of political power to steer Colombian politics and economics towards particular models of development, mostly by means of the physical elimination of contradictory political actors. At the local level the caciques and businessmen strove to consolidate longstanding prerogatives (oftentimes acting in contradiction to the political dogmas of their own party affiliation and without regard for the methods) aided by local authorities such as judges, notaries and police corps, which by imposing every day more on diverse social groups (natives, urban and rural workers, liberals, conservatives, etc.) opened more and more conflict areas (political rights, due process, justice enforcement, law observance, etc.). The incapacity of the state to mediate and/or its bias towards certain interest groups in those disputes forced every day more factions to employ violent means to express frustration over unattained goals, to settle disagreements, or to coerce or resist coercion, aggravating or spreading the smaller scale conflicts.

On the other hand, confrontations over economic issues such as land property, working relations, public investment priorities, or welfare expenditure continued to be addressed through violence in the light of, again, the incapacity of the state to mediate and/or its bias towards certain interest groups. At both the national and the local level, land disputes dating since colonial times—like the reservation areas for natives— or more recent such as the conflicts related to colonization and legal property remained unsettled and every day more actors opted for violent ways to champion their position. In addition to that, the work relations between landholders, tenants, sharecroppers and workers remained

conflictive thanks to the bias in the legislation and the perpetuation of despotism in the contractual and working conditions. The public investment in infrastructure and the protective economic policy was concentrated in favoring the development of the most tax-profitable sectors of the Colombian economy (read, coffee, oil, and bananas), which coincidentally were the same with the most unfair contractual and working conditions. In parallel, the disarray generated by the rampant violence gave space to opportunists and speculators to take economic advantage from the instability, forcing more people to use violent means to protect both their lives and property.

As noted in the precedent chapter, during the nineteenth century the wars over the formation and control of the state marked the future of political confrontation in Colombia by virtue of the emergence and development of (a) struggles with similar roots but with dissimilar manifestations and local particularities that responded to the relative isolation of regions in economic and political terms; (b) radical boundaries between liberal and conservative ideologies, both trying to impose their will by force rather than reaching consensus or compromising; (c) violent means as the most common form of conflict resolution, commonly in the form of small and fractionated militias using guerrilla tactics and commanded by local chieftains; and (d) self-reinforcing violence dynamics that aggravated or protracted conflicts by leaving trails of destruction, trauma and personal hatred. Along this lines, Villamizar (2017) remarks that after every Colombian war of the nineteenth century was ended, the combatants returned to their farming and ranching activities as if nothing had happened, but that the two main causes for reinitiating armed confrontation afterwards were revenge for previous transgressions and non-compliance with peace agreements.

2.3.2. The organization of violence

Coercion and resistance to it, as well as aggressive, defensive or preemptive violence in Colombia has been organized in all the aforementioned representative forms, however, insurgencies (the focus of this work) as such, are

the result of a long-standing process of collective mobilization –briefly described below– in which diverse armed groups flourished and metamorphosed in different regions, often displaying combinations of the elements of the diverse armed group typologies presented above, and in most cases as a response to preexistent circumstances which, for the most, became untenable during ‘La Violencia’.

Even if the motivations, repertoires, development or consequences of the violence unleashed during the 1940s cannot be generalized for all regions, two distinctive elements are underscored in the literature as key determinants of the emergence of sustained armed conflict in Colombia. The first one is political, summarized by Safford and Palacios (2002) as follows:

Political violence is best understood as a galaxy of social conflicts, in which each case acquires its full significance in a history of local and provincial contexts, which may be unique [without forgetting that] these local conflicts, with all of their regional particularities, nonetheless occurred within a shared national political history (p. 346).

And for that reason, the same authors conclude that

Seen as a national political process, ‘La Violencia’ resulted from two interwoven causes: first, from an aggressive confrontation of elites of opposing parties seeking to impose through the national state a model of modernization, conforming to conservative or, contrarily, liberal norms; and, second, from a local partisanship that affected people of all groups, classes, and large regions of the country. In addition, the Cold War exacerbated the Liberal-Conservative division from the top to the bottom of society (p. 345).

The first (known) militia group of the twentieth century in Colombia was formed by Victoriano Lorenzo, a Panamanian indigenous who started it to avenge the atrocities committed by conservatives against his family members, close friends, and members of his ethnic group; other –commonly forgotten– militiamen such as Avelino Rosas, Ramón Marín (a.k.a. El Negro), and Tulio Varón (a.k.a. El Machetero) kept fighting because signed treaties of previous

conflicts never satisfied their demands in terms of lands and food, or were blatantly infringed or reneged afterwards. Their scale was derisory: the group formed by Tulio Varón, consisting of artisans, poor peasants and workers armed only with old rifles and machetes, was resoundingly defeated when they attacked local authorities under the false belief that there was a nation-scale insurrection (Villamizar, 2017).

Another important militia was led by Manuel Quintín Lame –also indigenous, and former conservative soldier of the ‘War of the Thousand Days’– who launched a political movement to tackle the enlargement of cattle haciendas that threatened the *resguardos* after the depletion of gold exploitation in the southwestern regions of Colombia (namely, Cauca and Valle). Lame was imprisoned in multiple occasions (under accusations like “suspicion” or “vagrancy”), banished from the region, his correspondence confiscated by the local telegraphist, his property destroyed, and his lands illegally usurped by local landholders, all in order to sabotage his political activities in the organization of indigenous groups; his followers –known as The Quintinada– were also prosecuted, fined and/or imprisoned for attending reunions or even mentioning his name (Nuñez Espinel, 2008). As remarked by Rappaport (1990), while the political movement was primarily peaceful, governmental reports and newspapers of the day collaborated in a smear campaign. The militias were promptly dissolved by Lame himself, because he “still believed that the solution was within the law and agreed to open negotiations with liberal politicians in order to participate in the elections of 1917 [...] only to be betrayed and incarcerated again” (Bonilla S., 2015, pp. 42-43).

According to Villamizar (2017) the triumph of the Russian revolution inspired multiple local leaders and small political groups in Colombia to articulate their claims into expressions and movements such as small-scale newspapers, workers unions and strikes, but authors like Torrejano Vargas (2006) and González Arana and Molinares Guerrero (2013b) show that social protest was growing in Colombia even as early as the 1900s over topics as diverse as better salaries, rising unemployment, the construction of public infrastructure,

denunciations against corrupt politicians, or the increases in the prices of housing, public transportation, energy and chicha³¹. According to the most widely read Colombian newspaper of the time those protests were nonetheless “very honorable and civilized” as well as characterized for not “using aggressive screams, or any shadow of rioting [and] with the serenity one could expect from the most cultivated peoples” (González Arana & Molinares Guerrero, 2013b, pp. 172-173), nevertheless, the automatic response of the Colombian authorities was legal and armed repression.

In 1919 the police killed seven and injured eighteen artisan demonstrators who were protesting in Bogotá against the import of fabrics for the independence celebration parade while the Colombian textile industry was having difficulties; in 1924 the first strike of the workers of the Tropical Oil Company ended with the governmental authorization to lay off 1,200 “dangerous” employees, the forced dissolution of the union, and the incarceration of the union leaders (González Arana & Molinares Guerrero, 2013b; Villamizar, 2017). In 1928, the Colombian Senate passed the ‘Heroic Law’ (Law 26) prohibiting strikes and protests, and forbidding “communist propaganda, attacks to religion and to private property [and] allowing the detention of suspects of planning to commit such crimes” (Villamizar, 2017, p. 120), as well as authorizing the police forces to dissolve such demonstrations by any means; for which the same author concludes that countless peaceful social groups had to become clandestine in order to avoid apprehension.

On the other hand, the geographical isolation along with the poor means of communication made coordination difficult, forcing social movements to remain primarily local, a situation that was also experienced by the burgeoning self-defense armed groups and revolutionary juntas that were emerging in diverse regions, and which without unified command were forced to carry out isolated struggles and more often than not disappear (Villamizar, 2017). The few

³¹ Chicha is an indigenous alcoholic beverage resulted from the fermentation of maize in sugared water, commonly used in South American countries ("Chicha," n.d.).

remaining social organizations in the late 1920s began to coalesce, firstly, with radical sectors of the liberal party that promoted “civil war or armed revolution to finally end the conservative government”, and secondly, with the recently created Communist Party of Colombia (PCC), yet never reaching an armed character (Melo, 2017, p. 194). In general terms, diverse unorganized and scattered aggrieved individuals and associations began to mobilize collectively around common issues, although still, in a pacific manner.

Melo (2017) and Villamizar (2017) risk to place and date the official start of epidemic violence on December of 1930, when a confrontation between a conservative and a liberal group in the town of Capitanejo (Santander) left a handful of people –reportedly all conservatives– dead³². The reproduction of small local skirmishes alike resulted in the aggravation of the confrontations specially in the surrounding departments (Boyacá, Santander and the eastern plains), giving birth at the same time to conservative and liberal self-defense groups (Villamizar, 2017) that turned what initially was a political confrontation over electoral issues into a “holy war over social models” (Melo, 2017, p. 200). Later, in 1931 fourteen liberals were killed in the town of Guaca (Santander) and in 1939 twelve conservative civilians were killed and some more injured by the (liberal) police and civilians in Gachetá (Cundinamarca) (Hernández García, 2015). Between the events of Capitanejo and Gachetá, hundreds of scarcely-documented politically-motivated massacres took place across the length and breadth of the Colombia, always under the rationale of retaliatory, preemptive, or legitimate defense violence, reinforcing the idea of the need of organization of armed groups in diverse social collectives.

³² The number of victims varies. Guerrero Barón (2007) speaks of 8, 9 or 14, Hernández García (2015) speaks of 15, and Melo (2017) says 11. On another note, the latter work apparently contains a geographical mistake because it refers to Capitanejo-Boyacá even though officially the town is located in the department of Santander. A possible explanation is an outdated political division of the country when Boyacá department comprised a great deal of the east of the country.

Murillo Posada (2011) remarks that those episodes experienced in Boyacá and Santander during the 1930s are widely considered by analysts as a “small violence” that linked the partisan civil wars of the nineteenth century with the “great violence” of the 1950s, to which Vázquez Piñeros (2007) agrees in the sense that it showcases continuities such as its underlying causes, its prevalence in rural areas (although also its increase in the cities³³), and its response to an idea of “physical elimination of contenders”; but in the other hand, displays an anomaly in the sense of the proliferation of singular armed groups such as self-defenses, insurgencies, paramilitaries and politicized sectors of the armed forces, being the most renowned of them the pro-status-quo groups (read, supporters of the government) such as ‘The Pájaros’ (civilians encouraged by conservative leaders to intimidate and kill liberals), ‘The Chulavita Police’ (formed by radical peasants from Boyacá region), and ‘The Peace Guerrillas’ (formed to support the official armed forces in the pacification of the Eastern plains) (pp. 312-313). Additionally, in 1947 the (conservative) government created the ‘Political Police’ (POPOL) as a special squadron conceived to deal exclusively with public order issues (read, demonstrations and protest), only to gradually become another armed wing of the conservative party to persecute liberals (Villanueva Martínez, 2011).

While many armed groups emerged and coexisted prior to it, the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán is commonly mentioned as the detonator of a nationwide wave of violence that brought them to the surface. According to Sánchez (1992) and to Melo (2017) the majority of the liberal armed groups came to light in the midst of the outrage generated by Gaitán’s assassination because radical supporters of the martyr seized numerous national radio stations and along with the news about the tragedy transmitted revolutionary slogans and instructions to gather arms and establish defense posts, which resulted in the overthrow of

³³ One grim example is presented by Villanueva Martínez (2011) who reports how in September of 1949 the senators Gustavo Jiménez (Liberal) and Amadeo Rodríguez (Conservative) drew their guns in the midst of an argument at the Chamber of Representatives and started a shooting. The former resulted dead and the latter was praised by the conservative party in a special dinner; war chants were made later on his name by conservative armed groups.

the local institutional authorities in multiple rural districts of the country in the weeks following. The first author adds that in the majority of cases the armed rebellions lasted only few days before the government rapidly regained control or the rebels dispersed again for the lack of a political plan and clear leadership.

For its part, the conservative party, under the command of the radical Laureano Gómez³⁴ –who time and again urged his followers to “arm by all possible means” in order to apply an opposition program based on “direct actions and personal attacks” with aims to “make the republic unlivable” until the power returned to them (the conservatives) (Caballero, 2016b, p. 6)– responded by propagating the presence of its armed groups outside their traditional bastions (Boyacá, Nariño and Antioquia) and sent ‘Pájaros’ and ‘Chulavitas’ to departments such as Tolima, Valle and Caldas in order to “kill the *chusma* (rabble) –meaning liberals– and the *nueveabrileros* (people involved in the uprisings following the assassination of Gaitán) throughout the country” (Sánchez, 1992, p. 85). More and more, liberals were compelled to arm for defense, being the ‘Guerrillas Liberales del Llano’ (liberal guerrillas of the plains) one of the largest, most famous, and most important for future insurgency development in the country.

The first liberal insurgencies in the eastern plains emerged between 1949 and 1950 and were formed by families armed only with machetes, clubs and small firearms with the intent of defending their lives and properties from the escalating abuses of the estate officials and the conservative party. In the majority of cases the groups were funded and led by rich liberal landholders and cattle ranchers from either Boyacá or the eastern plains, and while similar groups also emerged in other regions (read, Cundinamarca, Antioquia, Santander and Tolima), ‘Los Llaneros’ enjoyed higher supply and mobility capacities, allowing them to reach larger dimensions (Villanueva Martínez,

³⁴ Notorious Colombian politician known for his open adherence to Nazi Germany and Italian fascism, widely supported by the ecclesiastic hierarchy, landholders, entrepreneurs, industrials, and tradesmen after the 1920s, and fervent advocate of the thesis that liberalism was equal to communism, atheism and masonry (Molano, 2016).

2011). The largest group –commanded by Guadalupe Salcedo– had between 2,000 and 3,000 armed men that combined their farm chores with armed actions (Melo, 2017, p. 218), but –as remarked by Villanueva Martínez (2011)– due to the geographical distance between the commands³⁵, the armed movements were far from organized and resembled more groups of ‘fighters on demand’, the very same reason to adopt guerrilla tactics.

The response of the government –especially after the election of Laureano Gómez as president– was the reinforcement of the official armed forces³⁶ and the relocation of two battalions to Apiay (Meta) and Sogamoso (Boyacá) with the intention of regaining political control of the eastern region, but that only resulted in an escalation of violence and compelled militia leaders to unite forces and to issue an official resolution to, first, divide the eastern plains in demarcated areas of influence –each under the military surveillance of one group–, and second, enact formal mechanisms to finance the resistance: the “revolutionary tax” (payable in money, cattle or both) in which liberals would pay 10% of the traded cattle, and conservatives 20% in exchange for protection from violent attacks (Villanueva Martínez, 2011, pp. 171-172). Every day more stricken communities sought refuge from the official and unofficial violence within the ‘guerrilla centers’ as means to escape the mixture of official terror and partisan sectarianism, and which was taking a heavy toll in their physical safety, psychology and possessions (Sánchez, 1992, p. 88). The most common approach was working as civilian collaborators³⁷.

³⁵ Villanueva Martínez (2011) lists not less than fifteen militia groups based in multiple localities, all operating in a disjointed manner with groups of between 100 and 500 men (pp. 165-166).

³⁶ At the beginning of 1950 the government accounted 30,000 men in the police, 15,000 in the Army, 3,200 in the Navy, and 1,200 in the Air Force (Villanueva Martínez, 2011, p. 169).

³⁷ Children commonly served as spies or messengers; women as cooks and clothes craftswomen (Villanueva Martínez, 2011, p. 184).

While the ‘liberal guerrillas of the plains’ were the largest, most organized, and geographically broadest militia group of the time –and therefore the most important military objective of the official armed forces and the conservative vigilante groups–, several militias were forming in parallel in other regions. Guzmán Campos, Fals Borda, and Umaña Luna (2005) enumerate assorted militias embracing “en masse self-defense” in multiple municipalities across Colombia: in Huila a group called “Los Muchachos” (the boys) started to recruit workers, to collect donations (ranging from 5 to 500 pesos from the richest people of the area), and to publicize political slogans regarding “revolution, avengement of the blood of Gaitán and opposition to the government, the Chulavitas and the Police” in October of 1948 (p. 54); in Tolima, at least seventeen militia foci emerged in the first years of the 1950s following common and long-standing causes such as land tenure, working conditions, sabotage and forgery of electoral processes, and absent or inadequate investigations over crimes committed by diverse armed actors in the region³⁸, combined with specific causes like atrocities committed by police members against the civilian population (massacres, torture, rape, theft, arson), and sectarian confrontations between liberals and conservatives (pp. 61-78); in Antioquia a handful of militia groups emerged to avenge the brutality with which police officers together with “strangers imported from Spain” butchered the population and/or confiscated their identification documents for preventing them to participate in elections (pp. 111-112), being the most famous the ‘Revolutionary Forces of Southwest and West Antioquia’, guided by Juan de Jesús Franco (a.k.a. Capitán Franco) –a

³⁸ Guzmán Campos, Fals Borda, and Umaña Luna (2005) annotate –like many other authors– that more often than not the climate of violence and disorder was used by people and groups to settle personal scores or to derive economic gain from violent actions disguised as politically-motivated, complicating the differentiation between political violence and banditry. They present two examples: A powerful landowner fires a young laborer and denies wages due; the worker presents the formal claim to the authorities but the case is never investigated nor solved; weeks later, in the midst of the turmoil, the dismissed worker kills the landowner and the community lays the blame on a partisan attack. An army officer (lieutenant) steals 3,000 Pesos from a farmer just after the latter received them as a loan from the Caja Agraria (Colombian public bank for Agriculture) and blames bandits for the act.

former police officer–, and dozens of smaller groups known as ‘Los Campesinos Enmontados’ (The Riding Peasants) (Villamizar, 2017).

In Cundinamarca (especially in the region of Sumapaz, bordering Huila and Tolima), Juan de la Cruz Varela –agrarian leader since the 1930s– commanded the resistance against the hostile attempts of the landowners to evict sharecroppers and colonists from coffee-producing regions using governmental colonization programs as cover for a ‘war against communism’, and which displaced thousands of peasants to the surrounding regions (Safford & Palacios, 2002). The ‘Sumapaz movement’ had two important characteristics: first, a large proportion of the peasant colonists in the region were former combatants of the ‘War of the Thousand Days’ which conferred them experience in military affairs (Molano, 2016), and second –in apparent contradiction with the first element– a long tradition of pacific and legal struggle in defense of the interests of the peasants: “land, freedom and justice” as the emblem of their movement reads (Varela & Romero, 2006, p. 273). De la Cruz had been elected first as councilman and later as deputy, and despite the mockeries and threats of traditional politicians and local landholders never succumbed to the temptations of clientelism; when the violence started to scourge both the region and his agrarian movement he was forced, first to hide, and later, to form a self-defense movement (Varela & Romero, 2006).

Last but not least, in Santander and the northeast of the country, as in other regions, revolutionary juntas were formed after the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, being the one of Barrancabermeja –oil production center of the country by the time– the core of the uprisings. Encouraged by a worker of the Tropical Oil Company that climbed an aviation fuel storage tank and threatened to make it explode as retaliation for Gaitán’s death, a group comprising oil workers, lawyers, physicians, and local politicians formed a revolutionary junta to retaliate against the conservatives and voted Rafael Rangel –Gaitanist councilman– to be appointed as major. Besieged by the army trying to regain control of the town a few days later, Rangel and fifty men fled into the mountains and formed the ‘Liberal guerrilla of Rangel’ to defend the local

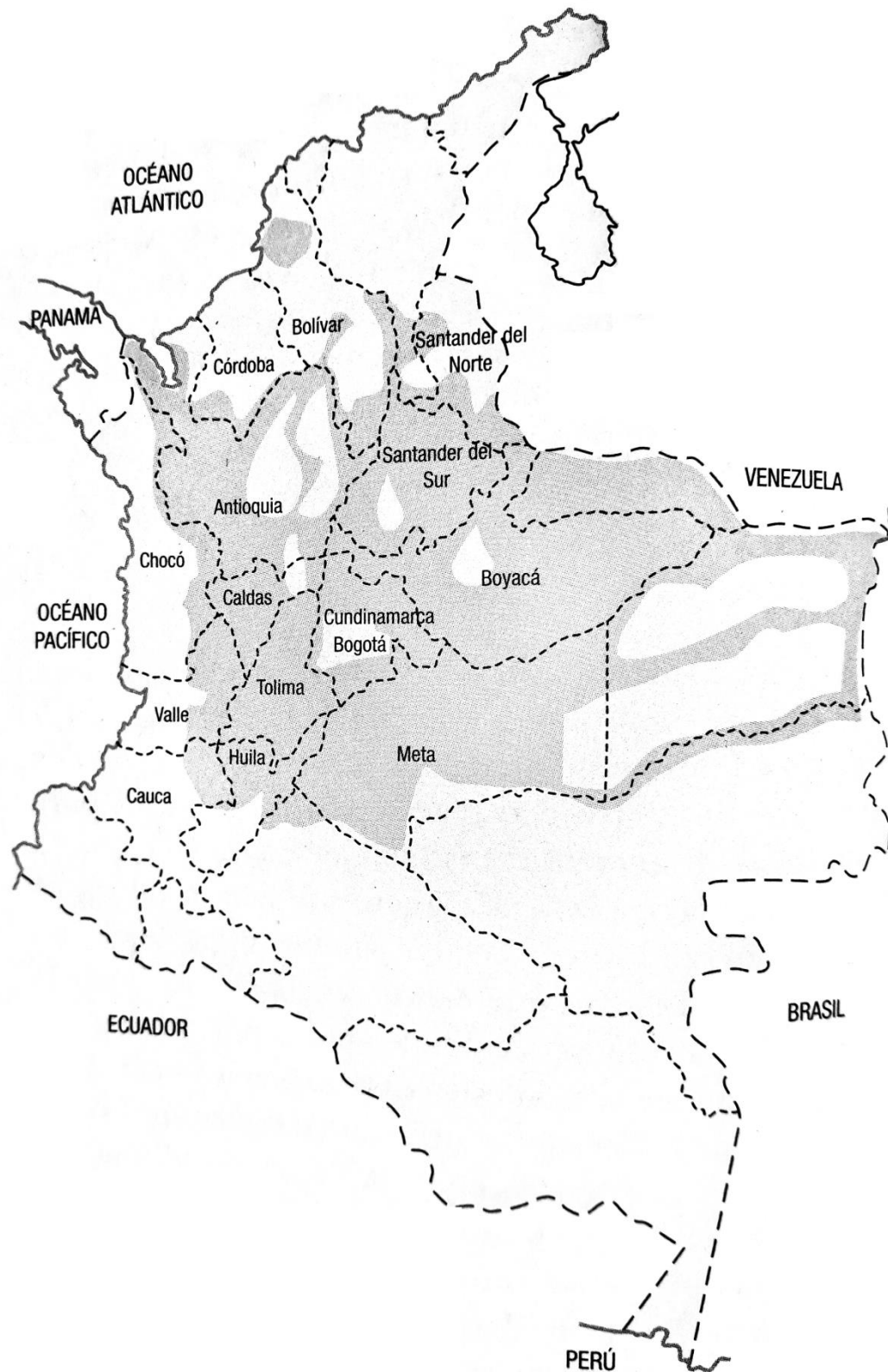
inhabitants from the repression of the official armed forces and the 'Chulavita Police' (Sancho Larrañaga, 2001).

The Map 2-1 (below) illustrates the areas with the highest concentration of violent acts after the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and, as a corollary, the areas in which the pioneering self-defense groups (commonly referred to as 'guerrillas') emerged and operated.

Villanueva Martínez (2011) and Guzmán Campos, Fals Borda, and Umaña Luna (2005) consider the aforementioned as the first of two phases of insurrection, namely, a reactive phase in which militias were formed to defend the lives, property and honor of diverse afflicted groups, to solidary counter the actions of conservative armed wings, and to resist against the onslaught and abuses of the official armed forces. The former author remarks that the majority of those bands operated without any kind of political, economic or social program to be presented to the peasant society, nor any intention of seizing power, for which they are best described only as 'self-defense armed groups'. The latter authors remark that the ample variety of militias (or 'guerrilla commands' in their words) never managed to coordinate or execute combined actions because "their vision seldom went beyond the nearby mountains they knew" (p. 182).

Despite of not reaching the size, organizational level or scope of the 'Liberal guerrillas del Llano', the 'Sumapaz movement' and the 'Rangel guerrillas' will become important inasmuch as those three movements will harbor the genesis of FARC and ELN, the largest and longest insurgencies in the Western Hemisphere, topic that we will describe in more detail in the next sections.

Map 2-1: Geographic reach of the violence 1948-1953.



Source: Guzmán Campos, Fals Borda, and Umaña Luna (2005, p. 114).

2.3.3. The (not so) calm before the storm

Safford and Palacios (2002) consider the aforementioned events as a “germinal period [in which the] myths, representations, and modes of behavior” of future violence were sown all across the country (p. 346), while for Pizarro Leongómez (2016) they subsume the aftereffects of the sectarian violence inherited from the 1930s and from the sectarian confrontations mixed with social, political and economic banditry resulting from the outrage caused by Jorge Eliécer Gaitán’s assassination, yet neither constituting real insurgency or counter-insurgency up to that point. A subsequent phase of insurrection is presented by Villanueva Martínez (2011) and Guzmán Campos, Fals Borda, and Umaña Luna (2005), and characterized by (a) the transformation of the relation between the militia groups and their initial sponsors and supporters (cattle ranchers, landholders and liberal party leaders), and (b) a profound change in the orientation of the struggle.

Regarding the first point, the cattle ranchers and landholders of the eastern plains initially supported the militias in order to stop the abuses of the official armed forces and the ‘Chulavita Police’, but changed their minds when the rebels issued the ‘Leyes del Llano’ (Laws of the Plains) advocating for more civil rights and social and economic justice. The laws, for instance, attempted to expropriate idle latifundia from the hacendados and distribute it amongst the poorest peasants, to which –in cooperation with the conservative government and the official armed forces– the former launched a campaign to prosecute and exterminate all the –henceforth considered– ‘subversive groups’ (Murillo Posada, 2011; Villanueva Martínez, 2011). “The masters that emboldened, endorsed and concealed the men under arms, now call them bandits” (Guzmán Campos, Fals Borda, & Umaña Luna, 2005, p. 88). With that in mind, the elites supported a military coup in which the General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla was appointed president in 1953, a decision with contradictory effects in terms of peacemaking and social transformation, as we will see below.

The second point (the shift in the orientation of the struggle), responded to the first shift combined to, first, the violence not being anymore the manifestation of a confrontation between sectarian political parties but of a confrontation between the elites (conservative and liberal alike) and any group that threatened their political and economic interests (Murillo Posada, 2011; Thomson, 2011; Villanueva Martínez, 2011), and second, the fact that “the spaces of solidarity, resistance, and insurgent power were not exempt of internal contradictions and conflicts” (Villanueva Martínez, 2011, p. 163), for which insurgencies started fragmenting internally or warring with each other, adding another transformational element to the situation.

The internal divisions of militias have been explained by two –often intertwined– factors. First, personal differences among leaders regarding “who obeys who and how to resolve everyday conflicts, [but also] love affairs, [and] money management” (Villamizar, 2017, p. 156). Secondly, and more importantly, the differences in the approach of armed resistance, given that the liberal leaders (the same who supported militias in the eastern plains) urged for upper-level political solutions, while the fighters, their followers and protégées tended to favor the establishment of armed defense given that they were the physical victims of governmental repression (Pizarro Leongómez, 1991). The same author remarks that while the Colombian Communist Party (PCC) started activities in diverse regions of the country since the 1930s –with a marked involvement in agrarian struggles– and advocated strongly for armed actions, not everywhere the resulting self-defense groups evolved into insurgencies (“mobile guerrillas” in his words) because in some places the self-defense was enough to contain the official violence, while in others, there was not enough organizational or material capacities for it. As a result of such differences, armed insurrection started to split –especially in southern Tolima– into two divergent strands: liberal militias (known as ‘Limpios’) and communist militias (known as ‘Comunes’). For Molano (2014, may 31) “the ‘Limpios’ were some sort of armed

bossism³⁹ against the conservatives and [their paramilitary groups, namely ‘the pájaros’ and] the ‘Chulavita Police’ [while] the ‘Comunes’, under the orientation of the [PCC] had a social program demanding rights to fallow lands and political guarantees to political opposition” (para. 3). Pizarro Leongómez (1991) concludes that communist militias emerged particularly in the aforementioned regions –Tequendama and Sumapaz (located in the department of Cundinamarca) as well as in the south of Tolima– because of the long tradition of struggle, the remarkably hostile actions of the elites in those areas, the governmental illegalization of protest, agrarian and workers movements, and communist ideologies, and –quoting Medina– the lesser definition of land rights, that could increase the willingness to abandon a determined territory and become a mobile army.

Initially the self-defense movements integrated both liberal and communist groups, but trivial conflicts such as the use of the spoil of a bank robbery or the (individual or communal) property of seized weapons gradually eroded the cohesion of the resistance movements. Additionally, the ‘Comunes’ accused the ‘Limpios’ of personally enriching at the expense of the organizations (for instance by appropriating the cattle or funds looted from conservatives) (Molano, 2017)⁴⁰.

³⁹ The author uses the term ‘gamonalismo’ which has no direct translation into English. It is defined by Ibarra (2002) as a form of political power commonly exercised by local figures in rural spaces and based on the social and economic domination resulting from the property of large extensions of land and the complementary control of large segments of local work force. It differs from ‘caciquismo’ in the fact that the second lies more on clientelism (loyalty in exchange for favors and services), nepotism (favoritism for friends and relatives), and/or despotism (power abuses).

⁴⁰ The same author recounts a related anecdote: the armed group led by ‘Mariachi’ used to tax coffee sales in Tolima, and one day the group killed the representative of the National Coffee Federation (FNC) while attempting to steal the money destined to pay local producers, for which the FNC stopped any transactions immediately. Soon after, the army joined forces with a bandit nicknamed ‘Peligro’ to kill ‘Mariachi’. The latter got captured but agreed with the army to deliver more members of the insurgencies general command in exchange for an amnesty (Molano, 2017).

Nevertheless, the main discrepancy was the political orientation of the struggle, and the confrontation reached its peak when in a national conference held in 1952 the communist militias agreed to pursue broader objectives, this is, beyond the defense of individual property or integrity (Pizarro Leongómez, 1991). After the conference, the participant groups agreed on the

Construction of a popular government to reestablish the democratic liberties, enact an agrarian reform based on a 'land for the tiller' logic, restore dignity to indigenous communities, nationalize mines, separate the church from the state, create a national army, and adopt an independent international policy (Molano, 2014, may 31 , para. 4).

Following that program, the PCC proposed the unification of the defense policy against the ongoing and upcoming military actions of the government; the establishment of a 'democratic front' (read, a formal political party) headed by the working class and intended to organize, strengthen and back diverse popular organizations; and the gradual fusion of militias and popular movements in order to steer the struggle towards a "prolonged popular war" while at the same time tackling adventurism and banditry in the insurgent movements (Pizarro Leongómez, 1991, pp. 75-76). In reaction to this, the 'Limpios' side joined forces with governmental troops and the police to oppose the communist militias, precipitating the intensification of the state and paramilitary military offensive –anticipating a definitive victory over the fragmentation of self-defense groups (Pizarro Leongómez, 1991).

At the same time, conservatives, liberals, industrialists, entrepreneurs, landholders, the church and the communication media alike started to blame Laureano Gómez for the generalized and protracted climate of violence, to criticize his decision to send Colombian soldiers to support the United States in the Korean war, and to blame him for the poor economic performance of the country, and all together campaigned to appoint General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla as president after a jointly organized coup d'état aimed to reestablish peace (Bushnell, 1996; Melo, 2017; Safford & Palacios, 2002).

Regarding violence, the first measure of the General Rojas was to offer amnesty to militias in exchange for depositing weapons, and while authors like Caro (1987), Bushnell (1996), GMH (2013) and Flores (2014) claim that the vast majority of the liberal militias willingly accepted the proposal while the communist ones did not due to their radicalism, Murgueitio (2005) observes that a great deal of the advertised success in the “pacification of the country” was also the result of repressive measures. He observes that for instance

The bosses of the ‘Guerrillas Liberales del Llano’, before acceding to the unconditional surrender of their weapons, asked to meet the president personally, but instead of the interview their arrest was ordered. The purpose of the order was to force them to deliver the weapons. [Eventually] 32 guerrilla leaders were [incarcerated and] the pressures, threats and impossibility to communicate to each other to agree on the surrender terms led the eastern plains militias and those operating in all the national territory, to deposit their weapons. [It was later informed that] in October of 1953 “3,500 men surrendered their weapons to the government of the General Rojas as an act of faith of peace-hungry men” (Murgueitio, 2005, “Populismo militar,” para. 4).

As remarked by Villamizar (2017), during Rojas administration the response of the diverse militias and insurgencies to the dictatorship and the amnesty programs was not homogenous: many groups welcomed the terms offered by the government without objections, while others accepted demobilization but without surrendering their weapons; many others joined forces with the state to engage enemy groups, while a couple more became mobile armies by virtue of their distrust in the agreements. In his view, each case responded to the regional reality of each militia. Regarding the first group (those who demobilized), the same author observes that many former guerrilleros –especially those that worked more closely with the government to capture or decommission other militias– devoted to livestock farming, trade and, in some cases, public offices, while the communist ones were persecuted fiercely, which increased further the tension between the two major strands of insurgence. Among the cluster that did not demobilize –or did it partially– “the militias of Marquetalia, Riochiquito, Pato, Guayabero, Tequendama and Sumapaz –influenced by the PCC– did not deposit their weapons with Rojas’ amnesty of 1953. They ceased

fire to dedicate fully to their crops, yet [stood ready to fight again] depending on the direction taken by the dictatorship” (Caro, 1987, p. 290). This process also represented a displacement of the centers of violence, that moved from Nariño, Santander, Boyacá and Cauca (somewhat pacified during Rojas' dictatorship) towards the Sumapaz massif, Urrao in Antioquia, the lower Cauca, the middle Magdalena and Tolima (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 348).

Several commentators observe that even though the violence was reduced considerably it was not completely extinguished, mainly because the amnesty programs did not incorporate –or did it only marginally– key issues such as rural wages and access to land, which in turn, was the result of the long-standing pre-capitalistic forms of production built on the collusion of bourgeoisie, landholders, economic power and political clientelism (Caro, 1987). Pizarro Leongómez (1991) adds that in diverse regions conflicts persisted because many demobilized and refugees found their lands occupied and their properties seized upon return (p. 97). Ultimately, as remarked by Sánchez (1998), the priority given to the termination of armed conflict tended to make the warring parties neglect “the real political and economic implications of political reinsertion” which almost always resulted in no substantial or comprehensive solutions (p. 50), to which Villamizar (2017) adds that quite often the resources allocated to the development of violence-affected regions were misused, misappropriated by local corrupt politicians, or concentrated in militia leaders, leaving the poorest combatants and victims aside.

On the other hand, in spite of Rojas’ appeal for peace he never put an end to the militaristic approach to pacification, and loyal to its ‘anti-communist’ philosophy, first, did not deter liberal militias and army officers from continuing their attempts to exterminate amnestied militia leaders (Pizarro Leongómez, 1991), and second, launched diverse diplomatic missions intended to obtain military equipment (namely, military aviation and Napalm) and assistance from the United States Department of State. Such missions failed but nevertheless he increased military expenditure up to 20% of the yearly national budget, well above agriculture, health and education (Murgueitio, 2005). In 1954 the army

attacked the towns of Cunday and Villarica (last bastion of some of those small inactive communist militias that demobilized without surrendering weapons) with “scorched earth”⁴¹ operations, killing hundreds of non-militia peasants, and forcing thousands of people to hide in surrounding mountainous highlands (Melo, 2017, p. 222). The displaced (close to 20,000 non-fighting peasants) together with the armed bands that protected them during evacuations came to be known as ‘columnas de marcha’ (marching columns) that migrated to avoid the bombardments and the constant siege of the army, and later founded in eastern Huila the peasant zones known as ‘Pato’ and ‘Guayabero’, future epicenters of the formation of the FARC (Safford & Palacios, 2002; Villamizar, 2017). As remarked by Melo (2017), “the violent actions of the government confirmed the conviction of the peasants of those areas that only weapons would defend them from the official arbitrariness” (p. 225).

The General Rojas was ultimately deposed by a coalition of the traditional parties (liberal and conservative), the Catholic Church, and economic elites, on account of his censorship to mass media, the increases in taxes to the wealthier citizens in order to cover social welfare programs, the surreptitious maneuvers to prepare the way to his own reelection, accusations of increasing corruption (e.g. his personal involvement in real estate and cattle businesses), and especially because his advances in the creation an alternative political party called ‘Third Force’ to raise opposition to the traditional bipartisanship –in close collaboration with labor unions– (Atehortua Cruz, 2010; Bushnell, 1996; Melo, 2017; Safford & Palacios, 2002; Villamizar, 2017). Colombian traditional parties leadership –under the assumption that the whole public opinion was (or had to be) either liberal or conservative– agreed to alternate presidency and share all public offices during the following sixteen years in a pact called ‘Frente Nacional’ (National Front), which was legitimized by a plebiscite widely approved by a population tired of violence (Arias Trujillo, 2011). Initially the

⁴¹ Act of an army destroying everything in an area such as food, buildings, or equipment that could be useful to an enemy (“Scorched-Earth Policy,” n.d.). Safford and Palacios (2002) note that the operation was aimed to terminate the militias of Juan de la Cruz Varela, accused of threatening hacienda owners, collecting “taxes” from them, and controlling coffee sales (p. 323).

pact did have a positive effect in terms of the reduction of violence (Chernick, 2005), nevertheless, after the deposition of Rojas “the elites –whether or not part of the National Front– continued considering popular organizations (still fragile nonetheless) as threats to public order, and responded violently even to small claims” for which during the rule of the National Front violence went through multiple minor-scale upsurges and resurgences in various regions of the country (Pécaut, 1997, p. 903).

The National Front worked, in the first place, as a tacit agreement of silence, amnesia and responsibility avoidance regarding matters like the causes of violence or their long-term solutions (Ortiz Sarmiento, 1992; Pécaut, 2016); secondly, as a tool for political exclusion: two thirds of its duration were lived under declaration of state of siege, all alternative political forces aside from the liberal and conservative parties were proscribed from participation in the bureaucratic administration, and more than 5,000 popular leaders were killed during that period (De Zubiría Samper, 2016; Villamizar, 2017).

Moreover, the political culture of the country and the relation of the electorate with the elected officials were transformed radically. Elections became pointless because the winner (party and/or candidate) was determined beforehand (Arias Trujillo, 2011); political opposition became impractical and/or radicalized given the negative of the regime to consent alternative political movements, and electoral abstention rose to 60%, reinvigorating clientelism as the dominant style of public administration (Pécaut, 2016; Safford & Palacios, 2002); the traditional parties became ideologically and programmatically indistinguishable from one another (Wills Obregón, 2016); distrust and detachment from political parties, representation organisms and governmental institutions (such as the military or the judicial system) grew among the population under perceptions of uselessness, bias and favoritism (Giraldo, 2016; Pizarro Leongómez, 2016); and in some ways, instead of reducing it, the National Front regime increased sectarianism in politics, by reinforcing political exclusion, anti-communist and pro-status-quo ideologies (CEV, 1988; Giraldo, 2016).

Regarding armed groups, the PNUD (2003) concludes that Rojas Pinilla's amnesty programs –presumably combined with the iron hand described by other authors– demobilized only the militias of the eastern plains (the largest), while the implementation of the National Front demobilized the remaining liberal armed groups and the majority of the conservative paramilitary groups (e.g. 'The Pájaros'). Nevertheless they remark that remnant foci of violence decayed into banditry mainly because 'La Violencia' erupted in geographical and political centers but spread and perpetuated in the rural periphery, feeding self-reinforcing cycles of personal retaliation and economic opportunity (p. 26).

Among the few non-demobilized armed groups, the installation and progression of the National Front gave time and space to the aforementioned 'columnas de marcha' (initially conceived to escape the siege of official and paramilitary armed groups) to find sanctuary in southern Tolima and eastern Huila, to merge with other armed groups, and to gradually settle in a process called 'armed colonization', which in general terms is described as follows:

Armed colonizers were peasants expelled from their native lands and [which] due to their filiation to the Communist Party had been excluded by the political elites from the traditional parties, and persecuted by the military. In summary, they were forced to arm themselves to defend their lives and their families. [...] They organized themselves in communities in which plots of land were distributed so that they could work and live peacefully (Ramírez, 2001, p. 68).

The CNMH (2014) observes that in those communities the militias gradually transformed from self-defense armies into 'local governments' in the sense of exerting territorial control, defining clear relations between the combatants and the civilian population, mediating in conflicts, administering justice, and instituting civilian authorities to guarantee social order and economic sustainability within the community (e.g. land and cattle distribution, collective work, and taxation). Flores (2014) refers to those groups as "peasant enclaves that sought land ownership and autonomy from the state" (pp. 20-21) while radical sectors of the government (most notably the Senator Álvaro Gómez Hurtado, son of the radical conservative Laureano Gómez) denounced them as

“independent republics escaping all state control” (p. 178). In 1964 the conservative president Guillermo Valencia decided to liquidate by force all those ‘independent republics’ that also served ‘as sanctuaries of communism’ and ordered a full scale attack with aims to pacify the region and end political violence in the country once and for all (Pizarro Leongómez, 2006).

Paradoxically, the pacification effort of president Valencia and the reaction of the targeted autonomous communities instead of resolving it protracted violence. The attack marked the beginning of the second major phase of armed insurrection in Colombia, when the orientation of the struggle switched from reactive self-defense to proactive confrontation to the state in pursuit of seizing power. Despite that –following Collins (2009b)– violence can be considered as the exception and not as a rule, or as the last resort in conflictive situations, apparently in Colombia the opposite is true: violence has persistently been used as means to intimidate, coerce and/or repress individuals or groups opposing one’s objectives, to guarantee self-preservation or promote self-enhancement, and to avenge offenses or deliver (whatever one considers) justice. We now present an overview of the progression of violence in Colombia in diverse historical periods by answering the questions proposed by Imbusch (2003) on Table 2-2 (below).

2.4. The official onset of the armed conflict

2.4.1. The birth of the FARC

The attacks ordered by the president Valencia to eradicate the so-called ‘independent republics’ that were emerging in multiple municipalities of the departments of Tolima (Marquetalia, Planadas), Cauca (Riochiquito), Huila (El Pato) and Guaviare (Guayabero), responded to an initiative called Latin American Security Operation (or Plan LASO) in which the Colombian governm-

Table 2-2: Questions about violence in Colombia for diverse historical periods.

Question / Period	Colonial times	19th Century	20th Century (1900 - 1945)	20th Century (1946 - 1960)
Who exercises violence? (Outline of violence)	State → Citizens Spanish authorities controlling population Citizens → State Independence war	Citizens → Citizens State → Citizens Citizens → State Persistent civil wars over political models and/or forms of government	Citizens → Citizens State → Citizens Private repression (supported by state forces) of uprising peasants and workers	Citizens → Citizens State → Citizens Partisan violence
Objectives of exercising violence	-Subjecting and controlling population	-Securing political and economic control of the country -Elimination of political competition	-Appeasement of increasing complaints and demands over abuses in haciendas and enclave businesses -Control and coopting of land colonization -Revenge for previous aggressions	-Appeasement of increasing peasant, worker and student complaints and demands -Containment of the influence of communist ideologies in the country -Elimination of political competition -Economic profit and revenge for previous aggressions

Who is the violence directed at?	-Indigenous population -Slaves -Creole population	-People with opposing political views -The state and its representatives	-Peoples attempting to colonize (already occupied or fallow) lands -Unionists, workers and/or peasants requesting changes in labor or land property conditions -(Past) Aggressors	-People with opposing political views -Unionists, workers and/or peasants requesting changes in labor or land property conditions -Groups considered as 'subversive' for embracing left-wing, socialist or communist ideologies -Emerging armed groups -The state and its representatives -(Past) Aggressors
How is violence exercised? (General forms)	Institutional violence, attempted to sustain relations of dependency and domination.	Collective violence, exerted in public spaces; organized, and justified primarily on political grounds.	Private institutional violence combined with individual violence, exerted in private spaces (e.g. haciendas, houses), attempted to	Combination of private and state institutional violence attempted to sustain relations of dependency and domination; combined

				sustain relations of dependency and domination; partially organized, and justified primarily on economic grounds.	with individual violence exerted in private spaces (e.g. haciendas, houses); partially organized, and justified primarily on political, economic or personal grounds.
What happens when violence is exercised? (effects, spread, scale and intensity)	Indigenous population, slaves and creole population submit and –broadly speaking– imperial rulers can do their will. Domination expands all across the soon to-be Colombian territory* reducing the scale and intensity of violence required for several centuries. *Given that during the Spanish colony the country did not exist as such.	Victor group institutes particular political, legal, social and economic systems. Defeated group submits temporarily but reorganizes to object and defy victor’s rules in the short term. Both groups attempt to dominate and/or eliminate each other, and a nationwide cycle of war-peace-war ensues.	Subjected or aggrieved groups (e.g. peasants, land colonists, workers) appeal to legal/pacific means to settle conflicts and terminate violence. Powerful groups (and the state) escalate violence in order to keep their dominant position and/or dissuade claimants. Subjected or aggrieved groups organize self-defense groups to counteract or avenge violence.	Powerful groups sponsor and/or organize private militias to dissuade and/or eliminate claimant groups. Self-defense groups grow through geographical expansion and mergers. The state intensifies violence attempting to regain control of the society. Self-defense groups engage in open war to the state.	

Source: Own construction based on Imbusch (2003) and Merari (1993).

ent –militarily and economically supported by the United States– adopted more decided counter-insurgency strategies with a view to improve the internal security situation and to combat the growing communist influence in the country (Leech, 2011). For Pizarro Leongómez (2006) the adoption of the LASO plan in Colombia constitutes

An strategic mistake of the Colombian elites [because it was] the ultimate trigger in the emergence of the FARC [since] if not for the attack to Marquetalia [...] the communist-influenced self-defense groups would have stayed as such, and over time would have slowly extinguished (p. 180).

The same author adds an opposite vision (the inevitability of its emergence) given that leftist insurgencies existed in Colombia already since the 1950s thanks to what he calls a ‘long-standing tradition of armed struggle’ instigated long before the Cuban revolution that for many authors promoted revolutionary movements in Latin America, and allegedly compelled the continental counter-insurgency initiatives under John F. Kennedy’s ‘Alliance for Progress’.

Be that as it may, while the vast majority of scholars trace the origins of Colombian insurgencies to the 1950s peasant self-defense movements described above, ‘Operation Marquetalia’ is the most commonly cited event for the onset of the modern conflict in Colombia, for providing the foundational myth⁴² of the FARC, and for promoting the transformation of residual, small and localized self-defense movements into mobile and offensive insurgencies (commonly denominated in the literature as ‘mobile guerrillas’) which later became revolutionary armies openly challenging the state (Pizarro Leongómez, 2006; Safford & Palacios, 2002).

⁴² Olave (2013) remarks that regardless of the historical accuracy of the historical description of the facts, the myth in groups formation –and specifically the FARC's foundational myth– defines the protagonists, the antagonists and the prevailing conception of ‘justice’ that motivates action; it also describes the general conditions that precede the myth and provide a causal logic in the unfolding of events; and also, serves as a rationale to fill a previous vacuum, to establish a new order (opposed to a previous chaos), and to reorganize the power relations between actors (pp. 150-151).

For the incipient insurgencies the attacks to Marquetalia also served to (a) evince the power relations between the social groups (armed or not) making demands and the state, by confirming the repressive and non-conciliatory character of the latter; (b) exalt the image of ‘Marquetalianos’ as a model of (peasant) tenacity, rebellion, and persistence; (c) adopt the roles of “spokesmen of the rural peasantry” and “defenders and observers of the rights of civilian population” by responding to a “historical call” to achieve real social transformations; and (d) justify the armed insurrection as an eventuality in which they were forced into (Olave, 2013, pp. 155-156). The rationale was that “the [insurgent] movements did not declare the war to the state, but, on the contrary, it was the state who declared the war to the agrarian organizations that were forced to defend their lives by means of weapons” (Pizarro Leongómez, 2006, p. 181).

For the GMH (2013), the transformation of self-defense groups into ‘guerrillas’ (read, insurgencies) reflects the combination of multiple factors:

The perpetuation of the 1950s violence; the attempts of the army to regain control of the territory militarily; the limited capacity of the National Front to insert marginalized groups other than bipartisanship; and the difficulty to break the relations that local powers kept with armed groups akin to their parties (p. 117).

On the side of the establishment, there were conflicting diagnoses and approaches to the national problem: for some it was an agrarian issue, for others a class issue, for others a political access issue, and for others peasant movements were just part of an international complot to disseminate communism in the country (following the example of China and Cuba), for which the solution involved military actions exclusively (GMH, 2013). In an additional note, the general Alvaro Valencia Tovar (who was in charge of military operations against the ELN guerrillero Camilo Torres in 1966) remarked that:

Militarily speaking it was thought that [the government was dealing with] small banditry strongholds, but there was not decided or categorical action regarding political issues, and the state did not solve the diverse social and economic problems in the regions of the 'old violence', for which the lack of solutions to that violence put the country, inadvertently, in a new era of violence (Sánchez, 1998, p. 45).

Despite of the fragmentary military victories of the official armed forces –that regained territorial control of many former 'independent republics'– several armed groups (and frightened civilians) managed to flee towards neighboring regions. Following those events, the PCC organized a full committee to analyze the situation of the rural regions under its influence and called for a shift towards guerrilla warfare to respond to the official aggressions, while simultaneously, the group commanded by Manuel Marulanda (a.k.a. Tirofijo) organized an assembly in which they defined general guidelines to advance their armed struggle in a document called 'agrarian program of the guerrillas': "[a struggle intended to achieve] a revolutionary agrarian reform, land for the tiller, credit and technical assistance, price stability for agricultural products, respect and protection for indigenous communities and the formation of a broad popular front" (Villamizar, 2017, pp. 269-270).

In September 1964, while the Colombian army was busy attacking Riochiquito (the second largest 'independent republic' in the eyes of the government), the 'Marquetalianos' (led by Tirofijo) convoked a meeting of diverse insurrectionist groups in order to join forces and counteract more effectively the governmental siege. The result of the meeting was the 'Bloque Guerrillero Sur' (Southern Guerrilla Bloc) which henceforth would be guided by a unified plan of political organization, propaganda, financing, and military operations, and which, in order to show to the government that far from extinct the insurgencies were growing stronger, attacked and took over the municipality of Inzá (Cauca), in which became the first official military action of the newly created insurgent guerrilla bloc (Pizarro Leongómez, 2006; Villamizar, 2017).

In April 1966, after suffering severe military reverses (due to lack of coordination), an approximate of 350 fighters from diverse groups (Marulanda's Marquetalianos, Trujillo's Riochiquito group, and Guayabero self-defense, etc.) gathered –in what is known as the 'II Southern Bloc Guerrilla Conference'– to consolidate a general command and to stress the need to adopt a long-term offensive strategy with a view to seize power through an armed revolution. At the end of the meeting (in May 1966) the name Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC (Armed Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) was adopted unanimously (Villamizar, 2017).

2.4.2. The birth of the ELN

The related literature stresses three circumstances as key for the emergence of the second largest insurgence in Colombia. First, the changes in the patterns of migration within the country, that since the 1950s gradually shifted from rural-rural (also as repercussion of 'La Violencia') to rural-urban, thanks to the growth in commercial and export agriculture and mining, the emerging manufacturing industry, and the concentration of social infrastructure and financial and administrative services, especially in middle-size urban centers that served as bridge between the countryside and the large cities (Abel & Palacios, 1991). With fast and profound social and economic changes, the social demands grew while "politics seemed to be frozen in nineteenth-century-like bipartisanship and clericalism", provoking everyday more social protests from student and workers groups across the country (Melo, 2017, p. 233).

Second, the preeminence of enclaves⁴³ (notably bananas in the Northwest and oil in the Northeast) as a form of operation of capitalism in underdeveloped

⁴³ Vega, Núñez, and Pereira (2009) present a more critical description to that mentioned above by Cardoso & Faletto; for them, under enclave systems, an imperialist country provides productive facilities and essential infrastructure to a country in which a key agricultural or mineral resource is found (e.g. oil, saltpeter, tin, gold, silver, rubber, bananas, sugar, cacao, etc.) in order to extract the resource, using local workforce, commonly under abusive schemes of subcontracting and outsourcing intended to avoid labor guarantees or social responsibility. The

countries (which in Colombia adopted the legal form of ‘exploitation concessions’) and that as a side effect also provoked substantial increases in the workers and students movements claiming for fairer conditions from the very moment in which they started to operate, in the 1920s (Vega, Núñez, & Pereira, 2009). Specifically in the ‘Catatumbo’ region (located in the Northeast of the Santander department, and near to the Venezuelan border) a long tradition of protest and collective mobilization against the abuses of the international oil companies translated between the 1930s and the 1950s into a growing –yet scattered and incoherent– union movement that was interpreted by the local elites as the expansion of communism in the region and served as justification to commit abuses against the workers and their families (Vega, Núñez, & Pereira, 2009).

Third, the influence of the Cuban revolution in South America; although the CEV (1988) and Pizarro Leongómez (2006) note that communist-inspired armed organizations (‘guerrillas’ in their terms) emerged in Colombia at least one decade before the Cuban revolution in the form of self-defense groups –and not as insurgencies or revolutionary armies– both sources remark that even if the events in Cuba disrupted the regional context and stimulated revolutionary movements throughout the continent, in Colombia, partisan violence from the 1940s and governmental repression had a far greater influence in the formation of armed groups than the Cuban revolution. In the political arena, radical members of the liberal party formed the Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal (Liberal Revolutionary Movement) MRL to challenge the methods of the bipartisanship and to start a “social revolution” against oligarchy and imperialism, while simultaneously university students and former members of

economic benefits for the enclave country tend to be negligible, since there is no interest in the development of the local market or its productive capacities, but rather to extract and market internationally the resource with the lowest possible cost. The functioning of enclave systems relies on the connivance with local authorities through compensations and bribes that allow the foreign company to operate without being subject to local laws, constituting “states within a state”. More often than not violence is used to repress social groups demanding changes in the aforementioned unrighteous conditions (pp. 31-32).

the PCC started to promote armed revolutions between 1959 and 1963 through small-scale armed insurrections that were easily defeated by the armed forces and their leaders killed or exiled (Melo, 2017, p. 233).

In 1962, the Cuban government offered scholarships to young members of communist parties across Latin America to complement their studies and get first-hand knowledge of the revolutionary process and progress. The Colombian delegation consisted of more than sixty members of the JUCO (Juventudes Comunistas, or Communist Youths) and the MRL, and among them, the Vásquez brothers: Fabio, bank employee, and Manuel, law student (whose father was violently killed during ‘La Violencia’⁴⁴), who conformed –while still in Cuba– the ‘Brigada Pro Liberación José Antonio Galán’ (Jose Antonio Galán Liberation Brigade) with the mission of setting in motion an armed revolution in Colombia. They returned in 1963 and strengthened relations with the leaders of the MRL, the JUCO, and diverse university associations in Santander (Aguilera Peña, 2006; Villamizar, 2017).

After exploring diverse mountainous areas in the departments of Boyacá, Quindío, Bolivar and Caldas, the members of ‘the Brigade’ located their operations in San Vicente de Chucurí, Santander, because of its rugged geography, for being decades ago the epicenter of the ‘Liberal guerrilla of Rangel’, for the long tradition of protest and collective organization of its inhabitants (especially linked to the fact of being an oil producing region), for the growing peasant land colonization in the surrounding areas, and for being the epicenter of the growing student struggles of the time (GMH, 2013; Villamizar, 2017, p. 237).

In January of 1965, after months of underground training, they attacked the town of Simacota (Santander), killed all the police officers in service and gathered the town inhabitants to read ‘the Simacota Manifest’ in which they briefly vindicated general ideas against the privatization of education, the

⁴⁴ El Espectador (2019, dec 12).

concentration of land property, the abuses of the elites, and the loss of economic autonomy to foreign powers (Villamizar, 2017). The group called for “the unity of peasants, workers, students, professionals and honest people” to liberate the country from the grasp of the oligarchy, and renamed themselves Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army), ELN (Hernández, 2006, pp. 57-58).

2.5. Conclusion

Malaquias (2001) –analyzing the case of Angola– remarks the paradoxes that have transformed a resource-rich country into an “unlivable and violent” place because of what he calls the “inability to reconcile pre-colonial aspirations with post-colonial realities” (p. 522). Analogously, the advent of the twentieth century brought to the Colombian society new tensions in the political, economic and social spheres, which overlapped with unresolved tensions of the previous century and worsened what we already called ‘scenarios of antagonism’, especially because the desire of change of some sectors and social groups clashed with the reluctance to it of some others (read, the most powerful, affluent and better settled groups).

In this regard, Murshed (2002) remarks that while conflicts might emerge over topics as diverse as religion, ethnicity, political and civil rights, or economic opportunity –and combinations of those–, the key to their transformation into violent conflicts is the presence (or not) of effective institutions that allow to both express and resolve them. Other authors speak about group inequality (Stewart, 2002, 2008), the past and/or recent occurrence of violent conflict (Walter, 2004), economic agendas and personal enrichment (Collier, 2000a; Zartman, 2005), or the incapacity of the state to provide security, basic services, or to safeguard the rule of law (Keen, 2000) as determinant factors in the emergence and protraction of violent confrontation. Apparently in Colombia, and during the majority of its history as a nation, all those mechanisms have operated at the same time.

Table 2-3: General outline of the Colombian armed conflict 1920-1965.

Aspect / Period	1920 - 1930	1931 - 1945	1946 - 1955	1955 - 1965
Profile Political and economic environment	Rapid and broad transformations in the economic sphere that clashed with established modes of production and distribution of wealth inherited from colonial times. Strong preeminence of commodity exports. Relative political calm compared to the constant civil wars of the previous century, accompanied by incipient institutional development. Increasing influence of foreign ideologies both to the organization of peasants and workers movements, and to the contention approaches of the elites.	International economic crises disrupted Colombian export dynamics yet propelled incipient industrial development and the development of internal markets. Replacement of the long-lasting conservative hegemony by liberal governments attempting to pursue progressive reforms and programs intended to increase political participation, civil and economic rights, as well as governmental intervention in economic policy.	Generalized economic stagnation, palliated by increased participation of state agencies in economic matters and public investment in infrastructure projects. Outbreak of widespread violence (especially in rural areas) due to the rejection of traditionalist sectors to the progressive reforms intended by liberal, leftist and communist movements. Radicalization of political ideologies both as cause and consequence of the violence, and widespread formation of civil militias.	Widespread state support and protection to local industry to promote the production of intermediate and capital goods. Biased tariff and trade policy. Partial pacification of militias formed in the previous period and reduction of political conflict on grounds of a pact between the traditional political parties to split political power. Increase of state repression to claimant movements (workers, peasants) under accusations of subversion guided by ideological principles of the Cold War. Reemergence of militias.

Actors, objectives and strategies	Economic elites (hacienda owners and foreign entrepreneurs) pursuing increases in profit margins and/or production levels of commodities and minerals destined to foreign markets through exploitative labor practices and monopolization of land property. Political authorities, striving to guarantee higher revenues, tend to be partial towards the interests of the economic elites; even using force to contain nonconformist groups. Peasants and workers presenting claims to both their employers and the authorities, and initiating communal mobilization in the absence of lawful and fair reply.	Political and economic elites (especially from conservative extraction) attempting to regain political control and to reestablish perks and prerogatives that were being dismantled by major liberal reforms (especially those related to the redistribution of the property of land) through operations of social and political destabilization and sabotage. Formalization of alternative* political movements (e.g. UNIR. Communist Party) with aims to formally incorporate the claims of peasant and worker movements into the political system. *To the liberal and conservative parties.	Local sectarian political groupings often armed and/or with support of official armed forces attempting to eliminate all political opposition through threats, coercion and brutality. Civil militias organized to defend from the attacks of both the state and paramilitary forces. Incipient insurgent groups organized by or adhered as armed branches to alternative political parties (e.g. Communist Party). Individuals avenging past or present atrocities committed against themselves or their families, and/or seeking economic profit in the midst of the generalized turmoil.	Political and economic elites sharing perks and prerogatives that were reinstated by a nationwide pact between the traditional political parties to split political power. Members of the political elites and of the official armed forces exerting pressure to confront the growing influence of communism, especially through military means. Civil militias organized to defend from the attacks of both the state and paramilitary forces.

Dynamics Aspects that make the situation transform into new scenarios	Aggrieved population presented claims through legal and pacific ways (requests, lawsuits and demonstrations), but the authorities tended to rule in favor of elites and foreign corporations and to use force to repress claimant groups, for which both claimant groups and official forces resorted every day more to violence as means to defend a position.	Leaders of the opposition party (conservatives) openly fostered private violence in order to torpedo governance conditions and create social turmoil as means to regain political control.	The violence promoted in the previous period got into a spiral of mutual retaliation, out of the control of any leader figure or institution, in which (especially in its later stages) political motivations were often replaced by personal ones.	Failure to comply with previous agreements, along with the insistence of radical establishment groups to end violence with violence, reinvigorated the formation of civil militias, in a mutually reinforcing process. Formally organized political groups were every time more pushed to violence by the closure of democratic or institutional mechanisms to present opposition or claims.

Source: Own construction based on Herbert (2017).

The Table 2-3 (above) shows a brief version of the characterization of the Colombian conflict we have presented, following the conceptual framework proposed by Herbert (2017) to study of conflict: (a) the profile, meaning the political, economic, social and environmental institutions and structures that have shaped conflict; (b) the actors and their interests, goals, strategies, expectations and motivations, the kind and level of power they have, and the relationships among them; (c) the causes, be they structural or circumstantial; and (d) the dynamics, meaning the aspects of the conflict profile, actors and causes that reinforce or undermine each other, or that can lead to the development of new scenarios (p. 3).

The historical account presented thus far, allows us, first, to concur with Kay and Salazar (2001), when they conclude that land tenure and violence are related in Colombia because of three major aspects: the formation of large landholdings monopolizing the best soils and resulting in the concentration of property and in the confinement of non-elite communities (the majority of the population) to marginal areas; the emergence of various forms of servitude and abusive labor practices in agricultural production that later provoked unrest between workers and patrons; and the concentration of the economic surplus generated by the emergence of lucrative export markets for agricultural production. Secondly, to remark that what initially were peaceful claims turned into widespread violence inasmuch as involved parties refused to negotiate, cede, or comply; being the most emblematic example the unilateral decision of the Colombian government to bomb the refuge places of diverse agrarian self-defense communities, driving the situation into a point of no return: the formation of armed insurgencies.

In the words of Conteh-Morgan (2004), radical changes in environmental conditions bring disequilibrium to a society, which in turn de-synchronize the predominant values of the society with prevalent systems and rules of justice, equity or distributional fairness, forcing its transformation; case in which “the elites either (a) allow the system to undergo structural change, or (b) maintain the system through coercion, repression, or oppressive means” (pp. 51-52). In

Colombia –as shown above– the contests for the control of the state, the defense of a determined political or economic model, the tensions emanated from skewed labor relations, the disputes for the property of land, the nationwide and local disruptions generated by large-scale economic changes, and even personal feuds over past or present issues, all combined and reinforced each other into a system with multiple interlinked disequilibria within a society strongly resistant to structural change. What is more, institutions to express and resolve conflicts –and to soothe the disequilibria– were insufficient or biased towards one actor, making many incumbents frustrated when their goals were blocked, threatened or challenged, compelling them to use violence as a tool to press opponent's retreat or to attempt to impose their standpoint.

Oddly enough, and in a manner similar to that –described in Chapter 1– in which during the nineteenth century the landholders initiated the violent attacks against the peasants (destruction of crops and trade infrastructure and intimidation through vigilante groups, etc.), in the twentieth century, the upper classes, landholders, foreign entrepreneurs, and political leaders also opted for violence (official and not) when peasants, workers or students mobilized (initially peacefully) around social, political or economic demands. At first, political dissent was constrained with compulsory adhesion to either of the traditional political parties (liberal and conservative) through the marginalization of alternative political movements; later, peaceful and legal mobilization was gradually proscribed under ‘anti-communist’ and ‘anti-subversive’ slogans; and ultimately, mass violence was used in an attempt to banish any dissent or resistance foci. The attempt failed and more than sixty years later, diverse groups keep employing violence in Colombia to achieve their social, political, or economic goals.

In the next chapter we deepen the analysis of the actors, settings, and dynamics of such process, placing special emphasis in the ways in which insurgent groups (namely, the FARC and the ELN) addressed conflicts and grievances apparently not solvable by peaceful means.

3. CHARACTERIZATION OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMED CONFLICT

“A war is fixed with another war”
—Javier Guerrero Barón (2007)

3.1. Introduction

According to Collinson (2003) “conflict is usually associated with particularly acute political and economic change[s]” that reshape the “fortunes” of diverse social groups (pp. 5-6), commonly, serving the interests of some groups while penalizing others. For its part Herbert (2017) recounts four core analytical elements for the study of conflict: (a) the profile, meaning the political, economic, social and environmental institutions and structures that have shaped conflict; (b) the actors and their interests, goals, strategies, expectations and motivations, the kind and level of power they have, and the relationships among them; (c) the causes, be they structural or circumstantial; and (d) the dynamics, meaning the aspects of the conflict profile, actors and causes that reinforce or undermine each other, or that can lead to the development of new scenarios (p. 3). We will refer to this analysis as a whole as the ‘characterization of conflict’.

Both approaches have in common the analysis of interactions between diverse interest groups defending specific interests through diverse mechanisms, and the constant transformation of those interactions based on the partial results of the struggle. In the following chapter we review essential elements of those interactions and changes in the Colombian case in order to place the individual “decision” to join armed groups in context.

Three caveats need to be made prior to such characterization. First, given the complexity of the subjects, the multiplicity of actors, the overlapping of problematic dimensions, and its relentless transformations, no analysis –no matter how thorough– is complete in the sense of being able to fully elucidate or to conclusively explain all the intricacies pertaining the Colombian armed conflict or its social or individual causes or effects; nevertheless, the integration of those analyses –even if incomplete– can help in the construction of a richer image, in the same way that a jigsaw with a couple missing pieces can still provide a valuable portrait of the situation at hand, as well as to open way for better or proper questions aimed to pinpoint the missing pieces. Second, many

topics that are an important part of armed conflict (e.g. justice administration, violence repertoires, weapon technology, war protocols, human rights conventions, etc.) are omitted or presented superficially given that detailed scrutiny will divert the research off its scope or swell it beyond length adequacy. Third, rather than evaluating the soundness or validating the empirical plausibility of the diverse analytical standpoints and premises presented, the focus of this stage is to use the current state of the art to describe the means by which armed groups have thrived, persisted and transformed for more than fifty years in the Colombian society, ultimately providing the settings for individual enrolment into such groupings.

After violence emerged (or intensified, given that seems to have been always present in the Colombian society, albeit with diverse degrees), it was allowed to broaden and escalate into what Richani (1997) calls a self-perpetuating system, characterized by three key peculiarities: (a) institutions and political mechanisms that failed to mediate between the antagonistic groups and to settle social, political and economic conflicts; (b) antagonistic actors that adapted to the war situation successfully, even making it beneficial for their interests; and (c) a correlation of forces in which neither of the actors is able to completely dominate others (p. 38).

In the following pages we describe the process of adaptation of those antagonistic groups to the ever-changing social, political and economic context during the last six decades, and especially the ways in which that adaptation has helped to transform and protract the armed conflict.

3.2. A marginal war

Following Addison (2002) –and based on the historical account of their development– the miscellaneous armed groups (or unarmed groups supporting armed means) that emerged in Colombia seem to have been the response to one or more of the following ‘rationales’: slow and/or ineffective conventional politics; a government (or elite) that refuses to hear; systematic unrectified

wrongs; particularly valuable ends worthy the violent means; a closed system run by hegemonic oppression despite claiming being democratic; and accommodative legal modifications or biased decisions (p. 23).

Even though the attacks to Inzá (Cauca) and Simacota (Santander) are said to mark the official birth of the FARC and the ELN and their open declaration of war to the Colombian state, in the two decades following their creation neither insurgency was really in position to threat the establishment or to produce significant changes in the matters they were fighting for.

On the political side, the FARC defined and advertised two essential pillars for their armed struggle: an agrarian reform intended to eliminate latifundium property, guarantee the right of peasantry to work in their own lands, the protection of the lands of indigenous communities, the return of expropriated lands to poor peasants, the formalization of land titles to colonists, tenants and sharecroppers, the nullification of peasant debts, technical assistance for agrarian production, and basic income guarantee for agrarian workers, among many other things; on the other hand, social demands such as the lifting of the constant state of siege, indemnifications for the material and personal losses caused by official and paramilitary actions, the reduction of the military budgets in favor of health and education public investments, wage increases for industrial workers, authorization of strikes to public servants, governmental respect for union organizations, tax reductions, and gratuity in basic health and education (CNMH, 2014, pp. 64-66).

During these first years the FARC relied on the resources provided by the communities of the colonization zones they were inserted, since they became guarantors of the basic social order and overseers of the communal resources (Pizarro Leongómez, 2006). The movement received considerable social support in those regions with a long history of agrarian struggle (like Tequendama and Sumapaz) but also in those regions recently colonized by peasants that were evading state repression and landholder violence, for example, the departments of Caquetá and Meta, and the so-called Magdalena

Medio (lands surrounding the central section of the Magdalena River) (GMH, 2013, p. 125), particularly thanks to the local power forged during the times of agrarian self-defense in which besides the military protection, the nascent militias organized agrarian leagues, lead collective actions against the estate and landholders, promoted communitarian development programs, arbitrated in conflicts, and established public and private cohabitation rules, all of which, in time, granted them control of a sort of ‘insurgent jurisdictions’ (Ramirez Tobón, 2001, p. 74). Additionally, in their rearguard zones the group cultivated cassava, plantains and sugar cane in their own plots, and hunted all kinds of local animals for subsistence (CNMH, 2014, p. 86).

For its part, the ELN –following Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara’s foco theory⁴⁵– considered that all the objective conditions for a revolution were already given, for which the priority of the movement should be the consolidation of military activity, which ultimately did not allow the group to grow because it got isolated from the peaceful social movements of the time (Aguilera Peña, 2006, pp. 214-215). In the words of Safford and Palacios (2002) “the ELN seemed to give much more importance to guerrilla military tactics than to political strategy [most probably for] not having clarified the relationship between their military activities and their political objectives” (p. 359). In addition to that, the ELN settled in poor, marginal and only recently colonized regions that limited their funding sources, forcing the group to pay for local goods and services with the so-called ‘bonds of revolutionary hope’ to be repaid after the triumph of the revolution, or failing this, to break their own regulations and take goods from local peasants without payment (López, quoted in Aguilera Peña, 2006, p. 216). The second most important source of income of the group at the time were robberies to the payroll of public offices and to the local branches of the Caja Agraria (Colombian public bank for Agriculture), which forced them to

⁴⁵ Based on the experience of the Cuban revolution, Guevara wrote in his book –entitled *Guerrilla Warfare*– that (a) popular forces can defeat an officially established army; (b) it is not necessary to wait until all the necessary conditions for making a revolution exist, but that each separate nucleus of the insurrection movement (read, *foco*) can create them; and (c) the basic arena for armed struggle in Latin America is the countryside (Guevara, 2006, p. 14).

constantly relocate (Medina, quoted in Sánchez & Chacón, 2006, p. 360), probably undermining its ability to establish stronger links with local communities. Thanks to these factors the ELN did not grow steadily, and in some way it was forced to focus in survival rather than in expansion strategies (Aguilera Peña, 2006).

In spite of the momentum gained by the insurgence movements in Colombia during the peak of governmental repression and because of the significance of the Cuban revolution in Latin America, during their first years the so-called 'guerrillas' were constantly in the verge of extinction thanks to the following: (a) in 1966, the president restricted the right to assembly, forbade strikes and visits of any sort to Cuba, authorized the intelligence departments to compile lists of citizens suspected of being engaged in subversive activities, and ordered to cancel any publications deemed as 'harmful for public peace' (Villamizar, 2017, p. 291), which would probably deter many citizens to get in contact with such groups; (b) the nascent insurgencies chose their initial strongholds according to local political and armed history, the possibilities of political influence (e.g. strong unionization, abundance of poor peasants, or ongoing land colonization processes), and topographical conditions that facilitated their movement while complicating it for the state armed forces, which likely relegated them to remote and/or scarcely populated areas, reducing the national visibility of their struggle (GMH, 2013, p. 126); (c) their organizational structures were primarily pyramidal and (especially in the case of ELN) the discourse in defense of democratic ideals was contradicted by internal authoritarian practices such as unilateral expulsions, demotions, and executions that created a mixture of loyalty and fear that soon evolved into internal divisions regarding the groups proper ideologies and methods, as well as discussions about the real interests of the people and of the group (GMH, 2013, p. 126); (d) the sympathy gained by the insurgencies thanks to the peasant, workers, and students movements, started to decline inasmuch as their discourse was often perceived as detached from the Colombian realities for being highly imbued by imagery and stories of the Cuban, Chinese and Russian revolutions (CNMH, 2014, p. 76); (e) in many regions "peasants were in no mood to respond to revolutionary calls for what

they regarded as a continuation of violence” (Zamosc, 2006, p. 39); and (f) the clashes between different insurgent groups from different ideological orientation, the heavy military and judicial pressure exerted by the government in order to undermine their incipient military capacity and social bases, and the internal conflicts that compelled many fighters to surrender to the authorities and reveal intelligence information (location, numbers, weaponry, etc.), all which resulted in captures and resounding military setbacks (GMH, 2013, p. 126). Based on these assessments, the related literature summarizes the outlook of FARC and ELN during these years as a situation of ‘marginality’.

During their first decades of existence the two most prominent Colombian insurgencies had contrasting experiences: the ELN, that started with 18 men in 1964, had 270 in 1973, and by 1978 only 36 (López, quoted in Aguilera Peña, 2006, pp. 215-216), while the FARC, that took form as the merger of diverse self-defense groups and began with a couple dozens of men led by Manuel Marulanda during the exodus caused by the military operations in Marquetalia, managed to gather about 350 men for their second conference in 1966 (Villamizar, 2017), and ended up conforming a “small army of 3,000 [combatants] with a centralized hierarchical structure, a general staff, military code, training school and a political program” between 1970 and 1982 (Molano, 2000, p. 280). Nevertheless –or precisely because of those initial difficulties– during these years neither group achieved a position to truly threaten the establishment and on the contrary suffered military blows that seriously threatened their survival.

It is worth noting that the FARC and the ELN were not the only groups that decided to take up arms and challenge the state during the same period. Villamizar (2017) enumerates the following as minor and short-lived insurgencies (‘guerrillas’ in his words) that emerged between 1960 and 1980: the Worker-Student-Peasant Movement -MOEC (1960), the Colombian Revolutionary Army -ERC (1960), the United Front of Revolutionary Action -FUAR (1961), the Liberation Armed Forces (FAL) and Liberation United Front -FUL (1966), and the Workers Self-Defense -ADO (1976). According to the

related literature, the majority of the assorted insurgencies that emerged in Colombia in those years disappeared by virtue of the lack of social support, inadequate resources, and/or the containment strategies implemented by the Colombian government. Two notable exceptions besides the FARC and the ELN were the EPL and the M-19⁴⁶.

The Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army) or EPL, declared its emergence as the armed branch of the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Colombia (PCC-ML) in 1967, and after failing to establish insurgency zones in small municipalities of diverse departments switched to political activities in the limits between the departments of Córdoba and Antioquia (Trejos Rosero, 2013a, p. 381); The EPL began its activities with the creation of 'Patriotic Juntas' intended to congregate peasants, roustabouts, work migrants, local leaders, and former fighters of the liberal militias, in order to promote armed uprisings aimed to reclaim lands and to "deliver justice" to abusive landholders. Their first operation was the attack to the municipality of San José de Uré (Córdoba) in January 1968, as part of a raid intended to execute a local landholder (Villamizar, 2017, p. 307).

For its part, the Movimiento 19 de Abril (April 19 Movement) –widely known as M-19– was an urban insurgency inaugurated in 1974 in response to what some analysts consider "the biggest fraud in the Colombian political history"⁴⁷

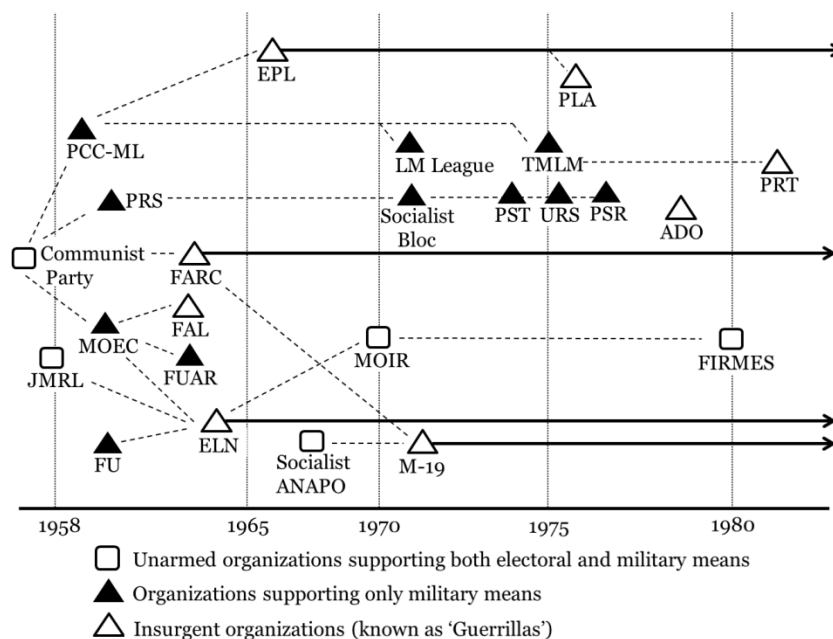
⁴⁶ While the focus of this work is on the FARC and the ELN –given that data about motivations to join was available only for these two groups– both the EPL and the M-19 also occupy a significant role in the history of armed conflict in Colombia, nevertheless, henceforth mentions to these latter groups will be limited to those directly related to the study of the former.

⁴⁷ In the presidential election held on April 19 of 1970, when the (former dictator) General Rojas Pinilla was leading the vote counts (with 54% of the ballots accounted), the live transmission of the results was mysteriously interrupted, a curfew was declared, and days later the official report gave the victory to the conservative candidate Misael Pastrana. Decades later multiple statements and confessions from former government officials and from workers of the National Registry Service (the office in charge of the electoral processes in Colombia) admitted and described the different forms of fraud employed to mark down the votes for the General Rojas and to guarantee the conservative victory (Villamizar, 2017, pp. 335-338).

(Villamizar, 2017, p. 337), and after which the most radical members of Rojas Pinilla's political party (ANAPO), along with former members of the FARC and with many more youngsters from urban radicalized groups, formed an insurgency (León Palacios, 2012) "to take the war to the cities and to prevent that frauds like that of the presidential election of 1970 would occur again" (Villamizar, 2017, p. 346). The first action of the group was to steal the sword that belonged to Simón Bolívar from a museum in Bogotá (Pizarro Leongómez, 1992).

Even though four groups (FARC, ELN, EPL, M-19) drew most of the limelight, diverse revolutionary movements emerged in Colombia during the first years of the second half of the twentieth century, with diverse levels of proclivity to use violence to reach their goals, and with diverse levels of (markedly low) effectiveness. Figure 3-1 (below) shows a partial image of the kinship between some of those groups, and suggests that the complexity of the phenomenon (read, the emergence and development of rebel armed groups) is much higher than is often assumed.

Figure 3-1: Revolutionary left-wing organizations in Colombia, 1958-1980.



Source: Adaptation from Buitrago Roa and Suárez Gutiérrez (2017, p. 205).

This reality calls into question some of the conclusions presented by the former World Bank economist Paul Collier, who considers that “rebellion is unrelated to objective circumstances of grievance [and rather] caused by the feasibility of [resource] predation” (Collier, 2000b, p. 4). Through various articles he insisted that “the motivation of conflict is unimportant; what matters is whether the organization can sustain itself financially” (Collier, 2000b, p. 4), and that despite being commonly presented as the legitimate consequence of widespread grievances such as inequality or political repression (2000b, p. 12), rebellion is just a special case of crime (Collier, 2000c, p. 841) in which rebel group leaders “inculcate a subjective sense of injustice whether or not this is objectively justified” (Collier, 2000b, p. 12) in order to manufacture a narrative that helps them to overcome the collective coordination and commitment problems that tend to make “grievance-motivated rebellions by small minorities [...] quixotic” (Collier, 2000a, p. 100). According to him, grievances are just the pretexts used by rapacious groups to satisfy hidden economic agendas, or greed.

The historical description we have presented so far controverts Collier’s claims –at least for the Colombian case– inasmuch as, first, the formation of rebel groups was not contingent upon financial sustainability; the CNMH (2014), Molano (2017) and Villamizar (2017) –among others– account for the multiple difficulties experienced by the insurgencies to keep afloat in their first years, for instance, the imperative of primitive insurgencies to capture weapons from the enemy (the state) in order to arm themselves and to establish amicable relations with local populations in order to secure foodstuffs for the troops and to safeguard the location of their strongholds during many years prior their official foundation date, which allows us to suggest that none of the armed groups formed in Colombia during this period were *ex-ante* economically feasible; second, the ‘economic agenda’ of the first wave of Colombian insurgencies was not hidden: at various opportunities (and well before taking arms and becoming insurgencies as such) organized social groups requested agrarian reforms to redistribute the property of land and formalized titles in favor of poor peasant and indigenous communities, as well as improvements in the working conditions and contractual provisions for the emergent enclave and urban

proletariat, in the form of higher wages, insurance for work-related accidents, and access to decent shelter, health and education services. The local elites and the state responded with belligerence, in what Keen (1998) calls ‘top-down violence’.

According to Conteh-Morgan (2004) structural change can take two forms: conservative change initiated by the elite, or revolutionary change (p. 52). The refusal of Colombian elites to structural change fostered (or somewhat pushed) the emergence of rebel insurgencies that, even if quixotic –in Collier’s words– managed to survive those first twenty years of military failure and economic hardship, only to transform into a massive threat to the state and to the society during the 1980s, because at the end of the 1970s the military and political panorama of guerrillas was somber: the FARC had at most 900 combatants⁴⁸ with rudimentary weaponry (Wills Obregón, 2016), and the ELN had only 36 men and no leadership, given that its commander was expelled (due to mistakes that led to the confiscation of strategic documents revealing names, nicknames and communication codes of the group, and to the capture of a considerable number of militants in 1972) and fled to Cuba (Aguilera Peña, 2006). As noted by Pécaut (1997), insurgencies were not novel (since they emerged since the beginning of the National Front), but until the 1980s they were just a peripheral phenomenon, and “somehow, part of the landscape” (p. 901).

3.3. War expansion and new actors

Colombia matches the portrait presented by Stewart, Brown, and Langer (2008) when they remark that “in Latin America, inequalities were caused by the privileged settlers taking the best resources for themselves and sustaining their

⁴⁸ Although it is not a negligible figure for a group consisting of farmers and peasants, it can be regarded as insufficient to pose a real threat to the state armed forces, that at the time counted with at least 60,000 men –according to Santos, quoted in Chaparro Rodríguez (2017, p. 35). Jaime Bateman himself –expelled from the FARC and commander of the M-19 at the time– criticized the fact that most combatants (of all insurgencies) were unarmed and locked in the jungles with a passive and reactive attitude towards the revolution (CNMH, 2014, p. 88).

privilege through discrimination and unequal access to every type of capital [while aggravating the situation with] postcolonial policies [that] have done little to correct these inequalities” (p. 296), and the best example of this notion is land.

For Berry (2017) land use and property are the main generators of injustice to the peasantry given that during most of Colombian history “a significant share of total income [...] was generated by agriculture and hence from land [for which] the unequal distribution of land [was also a source of] a very unequal distribution of agricultural income” (p. 279); he adds that land theft and agricultural policy bias, often materialized with the aid of the financial or the legal system when they ruled in favor of stronger parties (commonly the wealthy), constitute two additional “vehicles of illegitimate wealth and income transfer” linked to land (p. 281). Based on the above, it is not surprising that a common “slogan of the revolutionary movements of Latin America during the 1960s was “land or death”” (Kay & Salazar, 2001, p. 169).

Ocampo et al. (2007) point out that “during the 1960s the tendency of concentration of land property prevailed”, which, combined with changes in the forms of tenancy, pushed a larger proportion of agrarian workers to either migrate to the cities or to colonize ever more remote areas in the eastern plains, the Amazon region, the Pacific coast, the Magdalena Medio and the Catatumbo⁴⁹ (pp. 314-316). This occurred because despite that in the early 1960s Colombian authorities commenced the institutional organization of agrarian issues with a view to the redistribution and formalization of unproductive lands and to the protection sharecroppers and tenants from

⁴⁹ For not constituting formal territorial entities as cities or departments, the areas in mention cannot be delimited with definite political or geographical borders. Nevertheless, the last two (Magdalena Medio and Catatumbo) are frequently mentioned in the literature analyzing Colombian armed conflict. The former comprises 63 municipalities of six departments (Cundinamarca, Santander, Antioquia, Cesar, Bolívar and Magdalena) along the course of the Magdalena river (Vicepresidencia de la República de Colombia, n.d.). The latter comprises 11 municipalities of the upper half of Santander department (Verdad Abierta, 2018, apr 26).

landholders' abuses, right from their inception the institutions in charge of the agrarian reform were hamstrung by a multitude of legal obstacles to distribute the lands, ambiguous criteria to classify productive exploitation (in order to execute expropriations), the influence of powerful agrarian associations –such as the National Federation of Coffee Producers, the Society of Colombian Agriculturalists (SAC) and the Colombian Federation of Cattle Ranchers (FEDEGAN)⁵⁰– to bias the legislation in their favor, the establishment of burdensome legal and financial requirements difficult to be satisfied by the sharecroppers, tenants and small producers, black propaganda campaigns against ANUC⁵¹ and INCORA⁵² in the media, and with the increasing connivance between landowners and local authorities to suppress the peasant redistributive movement by legal and armed ways (Balcazar et al., 2001; Berry, 2002; Zamosc, 2006). In addition to that, structural agrarian change (from below) was unworkable –according to Zamosc (2006)– because of the deep-rooted division of the rural population along party lines, undermining peasant class solidarity; the rapid dissolution of the peasant associations that emerged in previous decades thanks to the relentless efforts of the National Front authorities to label communal associations as ‘antisocial banditry’ or ‘communist subversion’; and the massive migration from the conflictive areas, which served both to wither the popular claims and to develop new conflicts (or relocate old ones) in new colonization areas (pp. 36-38).

⁵⁰ According to Ocampo et al. (2007) the SAC was created at the end of the nineteenth century as a sectorial association dedicated to secure freight charges discounts, tariff advantages and diverse benefits for farmers. With the excisions that gave birth to separate associations such as the National Federation of Coffee Producers (FEDECAFE) and the Colombian Federation of Cattle Ranchers (FEDEGAN), it transformed in the main agency in the defense of the interests of large rural proprietors against reformist governments (p. 325).

⁵¹ National Association of Peasant Users, created under the auspices of president Carlos Lleras in order to unify and organize peasant mobilization, provide them with an official channel to formalize their claims, and increase their participation in policy formulation (Berry, 2002; Wills Obregón, 2016).

⁵² Colombian Institute for the Agrarian Reform, created by the law 135 of 1961 with three basic guidelines: endowments to landless peasants, adaptation of fallow lands for productive use, and basic social services in rural areas (Balcazar et al., 2001, pp. 10-11).

Ultimately, the (two) major attempts of agrarian reform were counterproductive because proprietors reacted by evicting sharecroppers and tenants from their premises to avoid them either requesting the adjudication of the lands they had been working or initiating claims for the payment of improvements (Balcazar et al., 2001; Berry, 2002). The radical sector of ANUC began to organize marches and land takeovers⁵³ against large haciendas, livestock latifundia, and fallow lands in dispute with entrepreneurs (Palacios, 2003, p. 255), but once again

The upsurge of peasant militancy caused an immediate reaction. Politicians, representatives of the landowners' federations, and even some government officials were indignant, demanding a heavy hand to control the peasant movement and accusing INCORA's personnel of instigating the land invasions. The government declared that [...] it would not permit illegal acts and the subversion of public order in the countryside. The security and intelligence services of the state leaked to the press some reports about presumed "communist conspiracies related to the rural invasions" (Zamosc, 2006, p. 70).

Faced with the limited success (failure for many authors) of the agrarian reform, the peasant movements decided to continue their 'land for the tiller and land without bosses' program (Molano, 2016, p. 601) and increased the colonization of new forest regions in which "there were no market nor state" (Gutiérrez, 2016, p. 533), but without proper state accompaniment those new colonization regions became new epicenters of conflict on account of the weak property rights and the emergence of illicit crops (Pizarro Leongómez, 2016), which combined gave insurgencies three crucial elements –described next– for their recovery and counteroffensive: recruits, a new source of income, and political control of isolated regions.

3.3.1. The narcotics industry

⁵³ The peasant movement often called them "repossessions" while the landowners and the state always called them "invasions" (GMH, 2013, p. 129).

López Restrepo (2006) stresses that the question is not why drug trafficking emerged in Colombia –given that it is a common nuisance to all the countries in the world– but why Colombia became a global center of production and distribution of narcotics. He argues that the initial expansion of the business in Colombia was facilitated, first by the geographical location of the country, that made it a forced passage point for the trade between the South and the North of the continent (also gifted with ports in both the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans); second by the existing grey economies fostered by the contraband of legal goods (such as household appliances, liquor and tobacco) that built contact networks and transportation routes; and third by its historical tendency and capacity to use indiscriminate violence, given that illegal markets tend to use it to settle conflicts due to the impossibility to appeal to the legal justice system.

The first Colombian drug boom occurred during the second half of the 1970s, in a period known as ‘Bonanza Marimbera’, in which Colombia became the main producer and exporter of marijuana between 1974 and 1982 (López Restrepo, 2006), after the plant was imported by Mexican technicians of the banana companies⁵⁴ and going from an initial phase of small-scale production destined to satisfy the local demand of ‘the underworld’ (sailor bars and brothels) to the large-scale production destined to satisfy the growing demand in the United States after the Vietnam War. For Wills Obregón (2016) and Fajardo (2016), a great deal of the peasants that were pushed away from the productive and political centers of the country either opted for joining the armed struggle or to migrate to the colonization areas to join the production of illicit crops given the high profitability of its cultivation (although neither author provides concrete figures on the matter)⁵⁵. For López Restrepo (2006) the main reason for the end of the boom was the combination of strong odor, large volume and low price

⁵⁴ Warf (2014) maintains that marijuana was introduced in America by Spanish and Portuguese conquistadores in the sixteenth century to compete with the Russian trade monopoly of hemp (the non-psychoactive variety used for industrial applications).

⁵⁵ Kalmanovitz –quoted in López Restrepo (2006)– estimated an income of 600 million dollars produced by marijuana only in 1978 (p. 415), while Puyana Ferreira (1990) estimates the total income generated between 1982 and 1988 in 680 million dollars (p. 39).

that discouraged its international trade and precipitated the substitution for local production (p. 414), to which Salgado Ruiz (2003) adds the consumers switch towards demand of cocaine after 1982.

On the other hand, for being a native plant, coca leaves have been used for religious rituals and medical purposes by the Andean civilizations for more than 4,000 years, and after the isolation of its main alkaloid (cocaine) in the nineteenth century, it was widely used in pharmaceutical and commercial applications in Europe and the United States until the early twentieth century, when its deadly side effects and its high addiction risk were discovered, and its production and commercialization gradually proscribed (Stolberg, 2011). At first –and well until the mid-1990s– the production of coca leaves and coca paste⁵⁶ was concentrated in Peru and Bolivia, and Colombian role was limited to being middlemen between the South American producers and the North American sellers, or to serve as “transit point” for the product (Gootenberg, 2008), but after the United States –as part of its ‘War on Drugs’– forced supply-side policies such as the militarization and criminalization of source countries and the crop eradication campaigns in Peru and Bolivia aimed to “disrupt the drug trade and curb production so that illicit drugs will be scarcer and costlier for U.S. users”, the resulting drop in the supply of coca leaves caused both a massive surge in coca cultivation and the relocation of the transformative processes into Colombia (Gray, 2008, pp. 69-70), while at the same time the Colombian participants in the industry –unsettled with their part in the business– used violence to eliminate Cuban wholesalers and gain direct access to the American market, achieving almost total control of a business that was reaching gigantic dimensions (López Restrepo, 2006, p. 415).

⁵⁶ The coca leaves require three major transformations to become cocaine powder: first, the transformation of coca leaves into an impure mix which contains 40 to 50% of the alkaloid, known as coca paste; second, the purification of the paste into cocaine base, which reaches up to 85 or 90% of alkaloid content and prices five times higher than those of the paste; and lastly, the transformation into cocaine hydrochloride, which is the purest version of the alkaloid (Léons & Sanabria, 1997, p. 15).

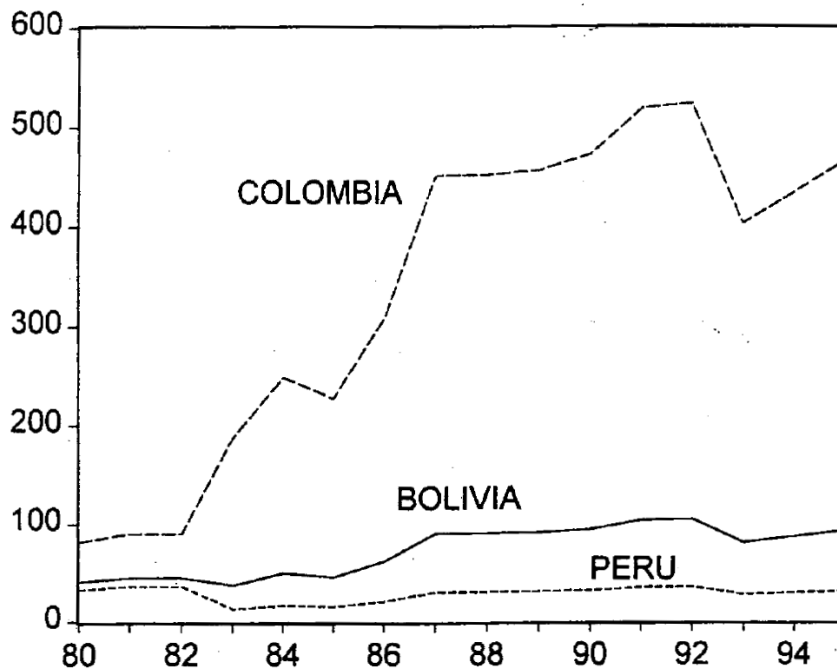
According to Puyana Ferreira (1990), between 1981 and 1988 the area cultivated with coca increased from 3,000 to 25,000 hectares, especially in rainforest regions such as Caquetá, Guaviare, Vaupés and Putumayo, for which the coca surge served as an exhaust valve for the marginalized peasantry, as summarized by Salgado Ruiz (2003)

The first regions in which coca began to grow significantly as a commercial crop linked to drug traffic were basically those departments [near the Amazon region] originated in colonization dynamics to where peasants arrived during the nineteen fifties, sixties, and seventies, expelled by the high pressure in the property of land, the constitution of large agribusiness units, the violent socio-political conflicts, and the failures of the estate-led colonization processes. [...] The lack of property titles, the absence of communication routes to connect them with the consumption centers in the hinterland, the tardiness, remoteness, and high price of transportation, the absence of facilities for the collection and storage of agricultural products, among many others, were the factors that [both] impeded municipal and regional development [and pushed peasants to commit] to the illicit use crops as their only hope [under the cry] “if not with coca, how are we going to make a living?” (pp. 256-257).

As a consequence of the above the exports of Colombian drug entrepreneurs quadrupled (see Graph 3-1, below) (Steiner, 1997), and “the price of cocaine to dealers in Florida dropped from around 60,000 to 15,000 dollars a kilo” (Gootenberg, 2008, p. 313), generating the opposite objective of the American authorities in terms of scarcity and price for the consumers.

The rapid success of the coca cultivation in colonization areas in the final years of the 1970s is explained by two primary factors, namely, a large amount of impoverished peasants in search of opportunities that thanks to coca production gained access to primitive trade, credit, transportation, health, education, and even leisure services (Molano, 2016), and the peripheral character of the territories, understood both as “geographically away from the political and economic centers of the country, with jungle and mountainous terrains” favorable to the development of illicit economies (Ríos Sierra, 2016, p. 88), and afflicted by what Wills Obregón (2016) calls ‘institutional deficiency’, this is, the

Graph 3-1: Exports of cocaine in metric tons, 1980-1995.

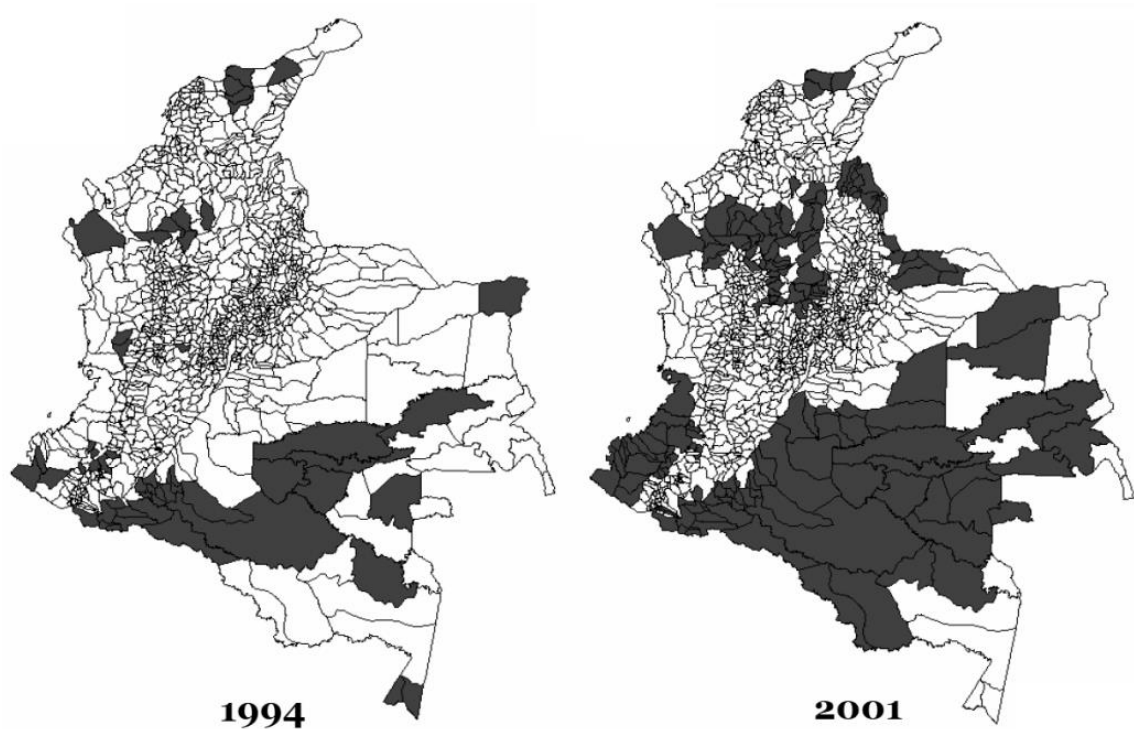


Source: Steiner (1997, pp. 22-23).

incapacity of the state to “permanently fulfill its primary obligations such as impart justice, provide security and guarantee the access and delivery of public services to all its citizens” (Trejos Rosero, 2013b, p. 108). Coca cultivation became the lifeline for those peasants that were unable to make a living differently, becoming in the eyes of the state in a ‘criminal’ or ‘illicit’ peasantry (Ramirez Tobón, 1996). The Map 3-1 (below) displays the growth of coca cultivation in Colombia between 1994 and 2001.

In the words of Angrist and Kugler (2008) “cocaine cannot be blamed for starting [armed] conflict, though it may play a role in perpetuating it” (p. 192), as well as in the increasing levels of violence experienced by Colombia after its establishment as an organized business, but according to Thomson (2011) that is precisely the reason by which academics and political analysts have tried to label Colombian one as the typical ‘resource curse’ armed conflict (p. 323), and by which “insurgencies origins and aims” have been largely misunderstood (Flores, 2014, p. 24).

Map 3-1: Coca cultivation in Colombia, 1994-2001.



Source: Diaz and Sanchez (2004, p. 12).

3.3.2. Insurgency expansion

Kalyvas (2006) suggests that there is a direct correlation between the levels of control exerted by an armed group on a determined territory and the levels of violence the group employs, which –with some exceptions– allows to infer one from the inspection of the other. The level of control exerted by an armed group (he calls sovereignty) can lead to either of the following situations: full control, shared control (with enemy group) and no control (full control by enemy group). The major implication is the level of collaboration and loyalty displayed by the local population toward such groups, ultimately determining if people provide resources to the group, sabotages its activities (e.g. providing information to the enemy group), or even switch sides.

On the other hand, on his study of the economies of Colombian insurgencies, Rangel Suárez (2000) –drawing from Naylor– classifies the resources they obtain (not including “international support from governments or sympathetic

organizations”) as initially predatory, inasmuch as the groups “are confined to a limited territory and have weak ties to the people [for which they tend to rely on theft], episodic extortion, bank robberies and random kidnappings”; on a second stage, with higher levels of involvement and influence in a determined area, the insurgencies can start to pressure for “embezzlement or extortion in exchange for protection”⁵⁷, which constitutes a parasitic form coexistence; and at the last stage, when the group “becomes an integral part of the regional economic dynamic” and reaches a stable supply of resources (often without recourse to force), as symbiotic (p. 582).

By merging both approaches we can presume that with no control or shared control, resource extraction by armed groups can tend to be predatory or parasitic –and besides, more violent–, while by contrast, in a situation of total control or greater acquiescence by local population, a group can obtain more resources with less violence, in a more symbiotic manner. This description resembles the colonization process of the southeast rainforest regions of Colombia –forced by the frustrated/biased agrarian reforms and assisted by the proliferation of narcotic crops–, which added new ‘islands of territory’ that, secluded from the traditional political and economic centers (Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Cartagena or Barranquilla), provided the geographical and political space for armed groups to grow financially, militarily and socially, through the adoption of some of the institutional obligations of the state (justice, security, taxation, etc.) in newly vacant territories, and sponsored by a relatively new – but largely profitable– business field.

While sometimes insurgencies (especially the FARC) were already present in new coca cultivation areas, occasionally they arrived after the growers (Gray, 2008), and according to Weinstein (2007)

The agricultural sector in Colombia was under tremendous stress, and illegal crops began to sprout in areas of FARC control. Economic liberalization was wreaking

⁵⁷ The term commonly used in Colombia is ‘vacuna’ (vaccine) in the sense that paying regularly an extortion ‘vaccinates’ people and their property against harm.

havoc on the peasant economy: foodstuffs faced competition from cheaper imports; cash crops, such as cotton, were being displaced by synthetic imports; and sugar exports were limited by quotas set by the United States (p. 290).

In that regard, Ferro and Uribe (2002) remark that the involvement of the FARC with cocaine production, after initial radical opposition, was piecemeal. According to interviews presented in Ferro (2004) when the FARC arrived to, for instance the Lower Caguan⁵⁸, coca cultivation was barely beginning and the region was markedly afflicted by poverty, and in addition, the IDEMA⁵⁹ used to buy the maize harvest with prices significantly below the expectations of the cultivators. To cope with the crisis many peasants switched to the cultivation of coca despite that the FARC prohibited it to prevent the ‘spread of addictions and prostitution’. In light of the situation, the peasants urged the insurgencies to authorize the production at least for two or three years in order to overcome the hardships created by the low prices of licit agricultural products and the lack of communication routes to commercialize their products. Ultimately, “coca became a new cash crop, supporting [the much less profitable] traditional crops of plantain, cassava, cacao, rice, and sugarcane” (Richani, 2005, p. 121).

Incidentally, “the FARC began to mediate relations between the narcotraffickers and the peasants/rural labourers who cultivated the coca” (Thomson, 2011, p. 340). The massification of coca production ignited diverse social conflicts, but specially controversies between those workers and the durg lords’ middlemen in charge of purchasing their production. As Norman (2017) explains

⁵⁸ Area located in the south of the department of Caquetá, which similarly to the Catatumbo or the Magdalena Medio has not definite political or geographical borders.

⁵⁹ Originally created in 1944 as the Instituto Nacional de Abastecimiento, INA (National Institute of Agricultural Supply), in the late 1960s it became the Institute of Agricultural Marketing (IDEMA), and served as the public institution in charge of the management of the purchase and distribution of agricultural inputs such as seeds or machinery as well as the coordination of international trade operations. During its last years it was dedicated to the regulation of the agricultural products market, through its purchase and sale, storage, import and export, especially with aims to guarantee minimum price levels for specific products (Fedesarrollo, 1976).

The chichipatos purchase either raw coca or coca paste from peasants and then sell [it] to traquetos, who belong to drug trafficking syndicates. The [latter seek] to obtain coca paste from peasant producers at the lowest price. Conversely, coca producers seek higher prices for coca and coca paste. Local state agents don't protect criminalized coca farmers, which leaves relatively powerless coca producers vulnerable to abuses from chichipatos and traquetos⁶⁰. During the last two decades of the twentieth century, state abandonment of communities that produce coca provided opportunity for the FARC to build political and economic power by offering the communities protection [and arbitration] in exchange for material and moral support (p. 646).

What many authors call 'the absence of the state' (called above 'institutional deficiency') facilitated the emergence of parallel powers in isolated regions (Trejos Rosero, 2013b, p. 109), and in this spirit the insurgencies became the government/co-government or a parallel/substitute power to the state in those regions. They began to perform many acts that can be called 'governance' such as economic policy, taxing, provision of infrastructure, administration of justice, and police functions (Estrada Alvarez, 2016, p. 348). Koc-Menard (2007) calls this process 'rebel consolidation'.

The FARC also increased its presence in other colonization areas –dedicated to the cultivation of licit crops or livestock– such as Urabá⁶¹ and the Magdalena Medio hand in hand with the political actions of the PCC, commonly as military backup for peasant organizations, protectors of union members, or avengers of abuses and atrocities (illegal detentions, tortures, killings and disappearances) committed by the official armed forces and paramilitary organizations against peasants and leftist political leaders (often pretending being members of the FARC to undermine the reputation of the insurgencies) (CNMH, 2014, pp. 91-94).

⁶⁰ The first term is registered by the Spanish Academy as a "person that makes small businesses" ("Chichipato," n.d.), although in Colombia it is used more frequently to denote a scrooge person. The second term is not registered in official dictionaries, but colloquially denotes a person involved in drug traffic.

⁶¹ Located in the northwest, in the vicinity of Antioquia, Córdoba and Chocó departments, and the border with Panama.

For its part, after the debacle of the 1970s the ELN underwent a reorganization process in which adopted a definitive ideology (Marxism-Leninism), adjusted its structure to adopt a more decentralized and democratic decision-making process, and made efforts to strengthen its links with the population based on the Christian and liberation theology inheritance of Camilo Torres (Gruber & Pospisil, 2015, p. 232). The discovery of oil deposits in Arauca presented as an opportunity to the ELN that promptly endorsed the resistance of indigenous communities that were being expelled or killed to advance its exploitation, echoed the pleas of the peasants and urban unemployed that arrived to the region looking for oil-related jobs, and started to exert pressure on the companies, first, to comply with legal social security obligations in their contracts, and second to pay extortions for the ELN permission to operate normally (Molano, 2016). In addition to its activities in the eastern oil territories, the ELN also targeted gold and emerald mining companies in the center of the country, while maintaining distance from drug-related businesses (McDougall, 2009).

Pizarro Leongómez (2006) explains that

Starting in the 1980s all [insurgencies], once their areas of influence were consolidated in the old colonization regions, conceived as strategic rearguards, make a leap towards regions with economic importance, with the object of either controlling the exploitation of natural resources or the extortion of their producers [which is evidenced empirically in the growing complaints about] insurgent pressure in banana, gold, oil, coal or coca producing regions (p. 184).

In the same vein that the ELN –although with fewer operational difficulties– the FARC reacted to the crisis of the previous decades with the definition of a clearer institutional structure, internal regulations, political goals and military strategy, all of which, benefited by the crescent financial sustainability and social support in areas outside state control, allowed the group to embark in the gradual occupation of regions surrounding capital cities, the penetration of urban organizations of workers, intellectuals and students, the consolidation of

their operational territories by harnessing natural geographic barriers between urban and rural zones, and even adopting a new name⁶² as a reflection of their nationwide expansionist project and political principles (Vélez, 2001).

Fast forwarding twenty years, Rangel Suárez (2000) discriminates the sources of income of the insurgencies as follows: for the FARC, 48% coming from its involvement in drug trafficking, 36% from extortions to cattle ranchers, landholders and industrialists, 8% from kidnapping ransoms, and “the remainder from robbery of financial institutions and other sources”; in the case of the ELN, 60% of its income has been generated by extortion, 28% from kidnapping ransoms, 6% from involvement in drug trafficking and 4% from cattle theft (p. 585), which allows to suggest that –historically speaking– a great deal of the FARC’s revenues matches Naylor’s notion of a symbiotic relation, while the majority of the ELN’s revenue matches predatory and parasitic forms of financing. However, while the colonizing peasants could see the intervention of the FARC as beneficial (or tolerable), the traditional landholders and the drug lords though otherwise. Additionally, the less voluntary (as in the symbiotic form) the resource contribution, the more likely violence is employed to secure it, for which the resources obtained through predatory or parasitic methods sooner or later will generate resistance from the exploited party. What is more, it should not be forgotten that –as remarked by Gray (2008)– legal economic ventures such as coffee, bananas, emeralds, gold, coal, and oil have also fueled violent conflicts in which the state or private agents predated on most vulnerable groups. More on this will be outlined in the following section.

Melo (2017) questions why if insurgencies disappeared quickly in other Latin American countries, in Colombia those groups reached so much military power with so little political power. His answer suggests the long experience of the rural armed struggle in the form of liberal and communist ‘guerrillas’ very much

⁶² The full name adopted by the group after its seventh conference, held in 1982, is Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP). We will keep using the short version ‘FARC’ for simplicity.

adapted to the rough geography of the country since the 1950s, the modest social support of the peasants rallied around land struggles, and of course, drug traffic as provider of financing. The vast majority of the literature analyzing Colombian conflict (and conflict in general) coincides, and emphasizes the last point, nevertheless, the cocaine industry gave insurgencies (especially the FARC) more resources –presumably saving them from extinction– rather than creating them. Any given Colombian armed insurgency of the time only started to perceive income from the drug industry twenty or thirty years after their emergence, which calls –again– into question the conclusions of economic-focused rebellion feasibility analyses that confound the motives to begin the struggle with the means to continue it, or the rationales to take up arms with the procedures to acquire them. Our contention is supported by Gray (2008) when she suggests that if drugs demand magically disappeared, so will drug traffickers (supply), but not the insurgencies. For us, the heart of the matter lies in specific characteristics of the cocaine business, inasmuch as they correlate the Colombian reality with one important theory of the political economy of armed conflict, namely, the lootability⁶³ of resources to finance armed groups.

According to Ross (2003) resources have different effects in armed conflicts depending on whether or not they are “lootable” (read, easily appropriated by individuals or small groups or unskilled workers), and as a corollary, conflicts in which easily lovable resources (such as diamonds or drugs) finance either of the contending parties are particularly harder to resolve (pp. 47-48). His argument is that if the resource in question (a) has a “high value-to-weight ratio, such as gemstones, coca, and opium” (p. 54), (b) it can be extracted by individuals or small groups of unskilled workers, and/or (c) it is difficult for a contending party (e.g. the state) to interrupt its trade because of its physical characteristics, any weaker party (e.g. an insurgency) can take advantage of it with relative ease, putting in trouble the stronger party (e.g. the state) when it

⁶³ The term is not registered by English language dictionaries but it stems from ‘Loot’, defined as “goods usually of considerable value seized in war” or “something appropriated illegally often by force or violence” (“Loot,” n.d.), for which here it is understood as the extent to which something is susceptible of being looted.

comes to extinguishing rebellious movements. On the other hand, “resources with lower value-to-weight ratio that must be transported [in larger vehicles or through long distances] are –in his words– moderately “obstructable” (p. 54). Examples of the latter are timber, copper, coal, or oil, as well as any landlocked products; in this case “its transportation can be easily blocked by a small number of individuals with few weapons” (p. 54), cutting the sources of funding of adversaries. Therefore as a general rule, the latter type of resources tend to be managed and exploited by large firms, high skilled workers and the government (directly or via taxation), while the former type tends to be exploited by small rebel or criminal groups. Additionally, in the case of lootable resources, all participants can benefit personally, which can create problems of discipline within the organizations and opening ways for dissident groups, multiplying the potential conflict fronts.

On the other hand, Le Billon (2005) classifies the resources used in armed conflicts according to, first, their level of concentration, as ‘diffuse’ (when they are “exploited over wide areas through a large number of small-scale operators”) (p. 32) or ‘point’ (read, clustered in small areas and/or requiring large-scale infrastructure and/or authorization for international trading), and second, depending on how easily governments exert effective control over resource revenues, as proximate (located in the vicinity of political centers) or distant (located in remote territories on areas controlled by rival groups) (p. 35).

By merging Ross’ and Le Billon’s tenets we can portray cocaine as a product with a high value-to-weight ratio, that can be produced by small groups of unskilled workers, in hardly accessible locations diffused across vast areas of jungle and mountains, distant to the political or military control radius of the state, making it –coincidentally or not– the ideal financing source for armed groups formed by peasants and unskilled workers interested in taking (or defending) ownership of scattered lands across the jungle and mountains.

Admitting that “the nascent bonanzas of coca, bananas and livestock, through kidnapping or extortion, gave rise to a solid war economy [that will feed the

insurgencies] for the next two decades” (Pizarro Leongómez, 2006, p. 184) the exploitation (forced or not) of such resources only added more elements of complexity to the profile and the dynamics of the conflict. As explained by Thomson (2011)

The emergence of the cocaine industry changed the dynamics of the conflict in a number of key ways. First, it gave birth to a new group of actors in the conflict: what Richani [...] calls the ‘narcobourgeoisie’⁶⁴ and Reyes Posada [...] refers to as Colombia’s ‘new elite’. Second, it provided a source of finance for the guerrillas, who also acquired a new role as regulators of the cultivation of illicit crops that had made the sustenance of the peasant economy more viable in the colonization zones. Third, it was part of the impetus for the growth of paramilitarism with close ties to the drug cartels. Fourth, it contributed to the explosion of violence in both rural and urban areas. Finally, it further complicated the legitimacy of an already shaky political establishment (p. 340).

In the following section we review the first, third, and fifth elements of Thomson’s outlook, with special attention to the ties between armed groups, the state, and producers and traders of both legal and illegal merchandise.

3.3.3. Counterinsurgency revival

Albeit beneficial for both the revolutionaries and the immigrant populations, the reciprocal growth of cocaine industry and insurgencies intensified the concern of American and local authorities (about drug consumption and communism at the same time); the apprehension of landholders, cattle ranchers, and companies producing or trading both legal and illegal products, that were being victims of extortion or afraid of being so in the future; the agitation of rival groups competing to control the same area or profit from same resources; and the distress of civilians that started to be forced to choose sides inasmuch as

⁶⁴ Defined as “the fraction of the bourgeoisie that occupies important economic positions in the narcotics industry [...] own its means of production and extract surplus from the [workers of their industry]” (Richani, 2003, pp. 72-73).

armed groups began considering not supporting them as opposing them. Just as insurgencies spread across the country, rejection sentiments emerged too.

We speak of a ‘revival’ because after their inception, paramilitary groups never ceased to exist in Colombia. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century landholders formed bands of vigilantes to intimidate colonists and peasant workers in order to smother their claims (as we pointed in Chapter 1); during ‘La Violencia’ of the 1940s and 1950s, groups like ‘the Chulavitas’ and ‘the Pájaros’ became the military arm of conservatives, landholders and local authorities to suppress the rising demands for fairer working conditions both in the countryside and in cities (as we pointed in Chapter 2); During the 1970s, bands called ‘Pájaros’ and ‘Campovolantes’ spread in many areas to halt the (lawful and not) attempts of redistribution of land property (as we pointed earlier in this chapter). For that reason McDougall (2009) argues that the Colombian “state has periodically declared itself incapable of protecting the people of Colombia [allowing the rise and consolidation of] strong counterinsurgency by providing legitimacy to paramilitary self-defense forces by way of both legal sanction and impunity” (p. 334).

According to Fernández Andrade (2002), already in the 1960s –upon request of the Society of Colombian Agriculturalists (SAC)– the Colombian government authorized the conformation of self-defense groups to defend landowners from increasing kidnappings through the presidential decree 3398 of 1965, and four years later through the law 48 of 1968, which regulated the formation of civilian armed groups under the control of the official armed forces (p.181). The CNMH (2019) observes that such groups –especially the first organizations, located in the Magdalena Medio– received weaponry, training and participation in official military operations. The former author remarks how while the self-defense groups organized by ‘the big capital’ were encouraged and regulated, the self-defense groups formed by peasants were persecuted since the 1950s.

Among the uncountable armed groups formed to counteract insurgent activity in Colombia, those linked to emerald producers and contrabandists in Boyacá stand out for becoming the archetype of paramilitary organization of the time. López Restrepo (2006) points out that

The core of emerald production is located in the center [of Colombia], and despite of being largely property of the state, it resigned to exercise control over its exploitation, leaving into the hands of private individuals [that control the region by sustaining] close ties with the church, regional political leaders and neighboring state security forces [...] The groups dedicated to the exploitation of emeralds [formed] particular armies with hitmen and bodyguards [many of which later] participated in drug trafficking (p. 410).

Rivas Nieto and Rey García (2008) remark that the model was replicated throughout the country because “wherever there was wealth it was necessary to arm violent groups to protect and increase one’s own resources” (p. 46), for which paramilitary forces began to proliferate.

However, López Restrepo (2006) highlights two key differences between drug traffic and other productive activities: a qualitative difference, given that emeralds and contraband are legal goods, while narcotics are illegal in all its productive stages; and a quantitative difference, given that the profits generated by drug traffic were gigantic and gave access to drug lords to economic, political and social spaces beyond the realm of their business (p. 411)⁶⁵. The first implication is that paramilitaries established to defend the production or trade of legal goods (emeralds, bananas, oil, etc.) were tolerated and even encouraged by the Colombian authorities; the second implication is that paramilitaries established to defend the cocaine business –as well as insurgencies extracting income from it– counted with amounts of financial resources that allowed them to challenge the state as equals. For Pécaut (1997) the drug economy provided

⁶⁵ In 1987 the Forbes magazine included Pablo Escobar in the top ten richest people on earth, and helped to spread the myth that he offered to pay the Colombian external debt in exchange for immunity (Henry, 1987, oct 5). Melo (2017, p. 256) also mentions the anecdote, but it has been amply disproved by other scholars and by Escobar’s own family.

all armed groups with previously unknown resources and disrupted the functioning of the whole society and institutions (p. 906).

Even if private armies were common for the defense of private property (as illustrated by the emerald mobs), according to the GMH (2013) the advent of drug traffic money generated an ‘epidemic of paramilitary groups’ because of

The confluence of the interests of three sectors: economic elites that sought to defend their assets [...], the drug lords themselves that wanted to expand their illegal businesses and to be protected from the extortionist pressures of the guerrillas to their labs and coca leaf purchases, and the military, that intended to attack the guerrillas and the ‘internal civilian enemy’ (p. 143).

The first group is exemplified by cattle ranchers of the Magdalena Medio region that formed ACDEGAM⁶⁶ to defend themselves from insurgent action. The organization established cooperatives, stores and health and educative projects to serve as a legal façade to cover paramilitary operations carried out with financial support of local drug lords and emerald producers (CNMH, 2019). The second group is exemplified by the MAS⁶⁷ group, created in 1981 by a collective of drug lords as retaliation to the kidnapping of the sister of members of the Medellin Cartel by the M-19 insurgency, while at the same time establishing a military unit dedicated to protect them against insurgent attempts to extort the noticeable growth of their wealth (LeGrand, 2003; Wills Obregón, 2016). The last group, the Colombian military, enters the equation as common denominator –as partner– in all the paramilitary groups of the time.

Starting with the primitive “civilian collaborator squads”, “self-defense juntas” and “civilian defenses”, all the paramilitary groups of the time –under the protection of national laws and decrees issued by the Colombian Ministry of Defense– were trained, indoctrinated (through counterinsurgency manuals

⁶⁶ Asociación Campesina de Ganaderos y Agricultores del Magdalena Medio (in Spanish) or Peasant Association of Stockbreeders and Agriculturalists of the Middle Magdalena.

⁶⁷ Muerte a Secuestradores, or Death to Kidnappers, in English.

replete of anticommunist proselytism), armed, and used by the Colombian army to support military operations against insurgencies or to watch territories in which they did not have operative capacity (CNMH, 2018a, 2019). The public security forces also began to openly criminalize left-wing political views and social mobilization (e.g. strikes) and to erase the boundaries between combatants and civilians and between social struggles and insurgent actions (GMH 2013, p. 140). On this regard Villamizar (2017) notes that in response to a presidential request on the matter, the Attorney General's Office presented a report in which 59 of the 163 individuals belonging to the MAS group were identified as active members of the official armed forces at the time. Quoting news articles, Romero (2006) notes that three years after the investigation none of the 24 members of the Colombian armed forces indicted for actively participating the MAS group had been convicted, and of the high-rank officers involved, two were promoted, and the remainder put in the army reserve or transferred (pp. 362-363).

The paramilitary groups also developed a close partnership with the emerging 'narcobourgeoisie' given that with the intention of cleaning their capitals, drug lords embarked in extensive operations of land and real state purchase (Wills Obregón, 2016) for which the private armies became useful for the protection of their new properties and the elimination of headstrong proprietors refusing to sell (Pécaut, 1997), the execution of "social cleansing" services (targeting petty thieves, sex workers or homosexuals), intimidation for expeditious collection of debts, and even the resolution of passionate troubles and all sorts of interpersonal conflicts (CEV, 1988). As a result, the 'narcobourgeoisie' gained considerable local and regional power (Wills Obregón, 2016), the property of the better lands of the country started (or continued) to concentrate (Pécaut, 1997; Richani, 2012) engendering an economic system based on accumulation and speculation that did not generate employment or development (Fajardo, 2016), and large-scale violence, that until then was concentrating in marginal colonization areas began to spread throughout the country, everyday closer to the urban centers (Sánchez, 1998).

Outside of the rural context of the colonization areas, counterinsurgency was manifested in radicalization of the political positions regarding social mobilization. For Pécaut (1997) social actors were forced to either forsake their claims or to subordinate them to armed actors (p. 912), because the National Security Statute enacted in 1978⁶⁸ –still effective at the moment– “granted extensive powers to the military to detain, investigate and judge civilians, generating systematic violations of human rights and fierce persecution not only to [insurgency] members, but also to social movements that struggled in legitimate ways for their claims” (GMH, 2013, p. 200). Aside from the ‘legal’ implementation of the ‘struggle against an internal enemy’ described in the previous lines, the CNMH (2019) recounts the assassination of left-wing militants, the constant accusations against social activists of belonging to insurgencies, and arbitrary detentions, threats, tortures and disappearances, as common elements of the repertoire of both known and unknown agents to exteriorize their sectarian, counterinsurgent, and anticommunist discourse. Human Rights organizations that denounced such crimes were accused by the Colombian government and army of discrediting them, of supporting insurgent projects, and of forming part of a global subversive strategy; the same happened to judges and officials of public institutions in charge of investigating and punishing such actions (Melo, 2017, p. 254).

Consequently, another vicious cycle emerged because leftist local political activists and figures (such as councilmen) and organizations (such as unions) started to receive –often without requesting it– armed support by the insurgencies, which simultaneously undermined their social prestige and attracted the military response of local elites and paramilitary groups (Melo, 2017). Social protest in its organized, pacific and/or legal form was condemned, quieted and/or prosecuted by the state, stigmatized beforehand by radical sectors of the society and/or ravished by paramilitary organizations; it goes

⁶⁸ Official response to the massive protest organized in 1977 by the four largest unions of Colombia (CTC, UTC, CSTC, CGT) against unemployment, inflation and other problems, in which the armed forces caused 25 dead and 5,000 people arrested, whereupon the government censored the radio and forbid public manifestations (Wills Obregón, 2016).

without saying the situation of the organized and armed form. Membership to either form was considered as equivalent, and any person or organization (even suspicious of being) associated to those became military target of official and unofficial armed groups, and subject to legal and illegal prosecution. The most representative case is the extermination of the UP political party.

The UP, Patriotic Union (Unión Patriótica, in Spanish), was a political movement that resulted from the peace negotiations between the government of Belisario Betancur and the FARC in 1985, as part of an agreement to increase the political participation of marginalized sectors and to serve as a transition mechanism –from arms to politics– for the FARC (CNMH, 2018b, p. 21).

After winning the presidency by pledging to address armed conflict above all, because a large proportion of the society began to feel jaded with the aggravation of violence⁶⁹, Belisario Betancur's cabinet held meetings with representatives of the FARC and the M-19 (Padilla Berrío, 2017). Agreements were reached with both insurgencies⁷⁰ and a ceasefire was agreed whilst the provisions to the surrendering of weapons and total peace were stipulated, but in the meantime the military truce was broken by all bands –given that no party had absolute control of all their subordinates– (Bushnell, 1996, p. 350). On the other hand, the peace process had manifold opponents: business associations concerned about potential expropriation of their assets, agrarian elites concerned about agrarian reform initiatives, representatives of traditional bipartisanship that felt marginalized from the negotiation process and torpedoed the political reforms required to legalize the peace, the Catholic Church for being a historical detractor of (the atheist character of) communism,

⁶⁹ Aside from violence caused by the confrontations between insurgencies, paramilitaries and the private armies of drug lords in rural areas, in the cities, clashes between bands attached to drug cartels became common (GMH, 2013), private justice (delivered by hitmen, or 'sicarios' in Spanish) rose to resolve personal conflicts, debts, or offenses (CEV, 1988), and dozens of judges and magistrates were being assassinated for handling cases against drug lords (Melo, 2017).

⁷⁰ According to Padilla Berrío (2017) the signature of the peace agreement by the M-19 in August 1984 persuaded smaller groups such as ADO, the EPL and the ELN to adhere to the same accord signed by the M-19, not without generating serious internal divisions within all groups (p. 92).

and specially the armed forces, that felt that the state was surrendering to the insurgency and granting excessive concessions (e.g. amnesty) to their eternal enemy instead of defeating it militarily; all sabotaged the process in their own way (CNMH, 2018b), with contradictory responses by the armed actors.

The M-19 quickly felt betrayed and resumed its hostilities, out of which the assault to the National Justice Court⁷¹ had the most significant repercussions in the Colombian armed conflict and history (Bushnell, 1996); the paramilitary groups, incited by local political and economic elites, escalated their attacks to civilian population with aims to extend their territorial control and break the support networks of the insurgencies (or any collective assumed to be related to them), using massacres as a prevalent instrument to instill terror (CNMH, 2019); the high command and ample sectors of the armed forces –arguing that the insurgencies did not have a ‘real will for peace’ and were using the truce to strengthen their military force, and that the negotiations represented a politico-military defeat for the state– heightened their open criticism to the top government policy and –omitting official directives– unilaterally redoubled their intelligence and combat operations against insurgencies, often hand in hand with paramilitary organizations (CNMH, 2018b; Chaparro Rodríguez, 2017); for its part, the FARC –after one year of preparations– launched the UP political party with the organizational support of the PCC, and in the elections of 1986 obtained nine seats in the Chamber of Representatives and other nine in

⁷¹ On November the 6th of 1985 a commando formed by 35 men of the M-19 assaulted the Palacio de Justicia (National Justice Court) in Bogotá to ‘put the president Betancur under trial for the non-compliance of the peace agreements signed in 1984’. Although there are conflicting versions about the ultimate goal of the insurgents and the chain of command of the military to handle the situation, ultimately the Colombian armed forces retook the building using heavy artillery (rockets and tanks shells), explosives and indiscriminate gunfire, killing all the insurgents and around a hundred civilian hostages and employees. After the operation the army tortured and disappeared dozens of official workers mistakenly assuming they were guerrillas in disguise. A detailed account of the situation is presented in Vega (2016) –the source of this note– and in Chapter VIII of Ugarriza and Pabón Ayala (2017).

the Senate, along with the election of 325 councilmen and 24 mayors⁷² in small municipalities across the country, which was an “unprecedented achievement” for the Colombian left (CNMH, 2018b, p. 74).

Many social sectors saw the movement with optimism for being a real possibility of insurgencies to reintegrate to civil life, giving it political momentum, but the (official and unofficial) radical sectors that considered it “a façade or an appendix of subversion” (CNMH, 2014, pp. 131-132) deployed all its political and military might to dismantle it. Between 1984 and 2002⁷³ more than 6,000 members or supporters of the UP were victims of violence. Around 3,100 were selectively assassinated, 540 forcibly disappeared, and more 470 killed in indiscriminate massacres; the remainder was victim of exile or forced displacement, death threats, attempted manslaughter, torture, arbitrary detention, unfounded indictment and/or sexual violence (CNMH, 2018b, p. 108). Those crimes were perpetrated by paramilitary groups and members of the armed forces (army, secret police, intelligence squads and police) –often in alliance with drug lords– in which is described by the related literature as a ‘political genocide’. The fatal victims include two presidential candidates (Jaime Pardo Leal and Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa), eight congressmen, thirteen deputies, 70 councilmen, and 70 mayors (GMH, 2013, p. 142).

As remarked by Dudley (2004), “following Bernardo Jaramillo’s assassination, there was a massive exodus from the UP” (p. 140) which led to the gradual disintegration of the political party and granted the extreme-right establishment a victory, inasmuch as “the end of the UP was really the end of center-left politics in Colombia [since] UP militants dispersed into other political organizations, the guerrillas, or disappeared altogether” (p. 141). However, from there on, “anytime anyone mentioned disarmament, the FARC said the words

⁷² In 1985, with a constitutional amendment, the popular election of mayors was instated, who until then were appointed by department governors, who in turn were appointed by the president (Bushnell, 1996).

⁷³ Year in which the National Elections Committee (CNE) suspended the legal identity of the party for “not having enough popular support to be considered a party” (CNMH, 2018b, p. 330).

Unión Patriótica [because] the massacre of its political party gave the FARC the perfect justification to fight forever” (p. 144). Blattman and Miguel (2010) observe that “the state has reason to wage bloody but short conflicts if peace deals are not credible” (p. 13), but the Colombian case shows that actions undertaken by the state (or its representatives, like the army) can undermine the credibility of the deal too, making the conflict both bloody and long.

Regardless of what group acted or what trend started first, the activity of the insurgencies, the paramilitaries, and the drug traffickers snowballed to a point in which instead of undermining they reinforced each other. Insurgencies gained financial continuity thanks to the taxation or extortion to (legal or illegal) businesses which, by growing, preserved or prolonged the wealth accumulation dynamics that instigated the emergence of insurgencies in the first place. The insurgent pressure on the (legal or illegal) capital of the elites revitalized the use of paramilitary organizations that –through their atrocities towards peasants, workers and activists– prompted the formation of insurgencies (initially as self-defense groups) in the first place. The expansion of the insurgency –and its tacit or explicit support to social movements of all kinds– was interpreted by some elites as a serious threat to the status quo that justified the connivance of state forces with paramilitary forces in order to be contained. The rapid accumulation of (legal and illegal) wealth by old and new elites, the renewed upsurge of paramilitary groups, and the unpunished collusion of members of the official armed forces with the latter to harass dissenting individuals and organizations was seen by insurgencies as an opportunity to obtain financing through taxation or extortion, and as a reason to continue and intensify their armed struggle, respectively. With the emergence of the two new actors in the landscape (drug lords and paramilitary organizations), violence propagated, aggravated and entrenched in Colombian society.

3.4. Full scale armed conflict

In the same way in which centralists and federalists (during the nineteenth century), and later liberals and conservatives (in the first half of the twentieth

century), in the course of the second half of the twentieth century, a myriad of interest groups harbored a meaningful and justifiable rationale for retaliatory, preemptive, or legitimate defense violence, and no group was willing to give ground on its claims, for which Colombia passed from a marginal war to a full-scale armed conflict.

3.4.1. One against all, all against one, and all against all

The failure of the orderly, institutionalized, and per chance democratic means to voice and address their requests compelled insurgencies to return or to prioritize again the armed struggle, which –according to Gray (2008)– coincided “with a period of increased resource exploitation [not only associated to illicit narcotics, but also to the] licit development in the oil, mining, and agribusiness sectors [that was] also accompanied by increases in local violence [as well as by] illegal operations in sectors such as logging and palm oil [...] also linked to conflict patterns” (pp. 78-79)⁷⁴. For Mantilla Valbuena (2012) “Colombia went from being an eminently coffee-producing country in the 1970s to become a producer of minerals and cocaine in the 1990s” (p. 38).

These patterns fit the perception of Le Billon (2005) when he observes that “as natural resources become more important to belligerents, so the focus of military activities becomes centered on areas of economic significance” (p. 44), but it is important to highlight that insurgencies were not the only armed group making use of (legal or illegal) natural resources to finance its military operations. Paramilitary organizations were sponsored by the narcotics industry and/or agribusiness elites related to cattle breeding, mining (e.g. emeralds) or commodity production, while the state (besides the taxation of all legal

⁷⁴ Detailed analyses of the connection between the expansion of mining and agricultural operations and the aggravation of armed conflict in some regions are presented by ABColombia (2015), Grisales González and Insuasty Rodríguez (2016), Ortiz-Riomalo and Rettberg (2018) and Betancur Betancur (2020) in the case of gold; and by Goebertus (2008), García Reyes (2014) and Pertuz Martínez and Santamaría Escobar (2014) in the case of African Palm, to name just a few.

economic activity) began to obtain revenue from what Clavijo, Vera, and Fandiño (2012) call ‘the mineral bonanzas’ of coal (in 1978), and oil (in 1983 and 1989), for which the control of resource-rich territories became an strategic prerogative to all belligerents given that access and control of more resources could allow armed groups (legal or not) to enlarge their troops and improve their prospects of military victory over their enemies. The repercussions of this struggle are diverse and incommensurable, for which in the following pages we describe those more closely connected to our argument.

In colonization regions, the FARC established a close relation with coca peasants and “ended up forming a more solid social base for the FARC than any insurgent group has had in Colombia since the times of the liberal guerrillas of the plains in 1950-1953” (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 357), even though their interests diverged greatly: the peasants wanted to be able to participate actively in markets and consumption while –at this point– the FARC wanted to replace the state (Zamosc, quoted in González González, 2016). Given that “the FARC provided security to local communities [and provided] the conditions that made a livelihood for local coca farmers possible, the FARC could legitimize itself in the eyes of the local population as a *de facto* state” (Wennmann, 2011, pp. 13-14) and consolidated “a geographical rearguard that simultaneously provided economic resources, military safeguard and political support” (Trejos Rosero, 2013b, p. 132). The cultivation of coca leaf destined to the cocaine industry “provided an alternative source of income [...] to poverty-stricken districts ignored by the government” but gradually “the laissez-faire approach of the [drug traffickers] clashed with the ideological goals of the guerrilleros” pitting insurgencies against drug cartels (Watson, 1992, p. 95).

As explained by Saab and Taylor (2009) “the majority of FARC’s drug-related income is raised through the ‘gramaje’, or a protection tax on drug trafficking and production” as well as the taxation of the establishment of new plantations, the purchase of chemical inputs, or the permission to use of vehicles (trucks or aircraft) or infrastructure (roads, airstrips) (pp. 464-465), and this so-called ‘narcotization’ of the insurgent groups (primarily the FARC), allowed them to

secure resources to expand, increase the number of fronts and combatants, modernize their weaponry and improve their logistic capacities, even to the point of tilting the military balance to their favor (Rojas, 2006, p. 42). For its part, Richani (2003) explains that

[Illicit crops] grew 400% between 1978 and 1998, reaching an estimated area of 100,000 hectares. The drastic increase coincided with the change in the military parity between the [insurgencies] and the state [...] and with the growing number of municipalities under insurgent control. In 1993 [insurgencies] controlled 173 municipalities which is equivalent to the 13% of the country. In 1998, [insurgencies] had extended their control to 622 municipalities, being a 61% of the total. In the vast majority of the municipalities with illicit crops, [insurgencies] have military presence or control (p. 157).

For its part, the ELN, now working as a ‘federation of guerrillas’, consolidated a critical position to the peace agreements for considering them a governmental subterfuge to dismantle ‘the left’ in order to facilitate the surrender of the national resources to the ‘imperialist rapacity’, for which focused its attacks on the energy sector (Aguilera Peña, 2006, pp. 218-222). In the same vein, the main source of income for the ELN were extortions paid by foreign companies established in the northwest to build the pipeline that transports the oil from Caño Limón well (Arauca) to the Coveñas port (in Sucre), and ransom money paid by foreign companies and governments for the liberation of workers (and their relatives) kidnapped by the group (Echandía, 2013). In spite of the growth, Aguilera Peña (2006) considers that the group stalled militarily because of the lower scale of financial revenue perceived, its decentralized internal organization, the little preparation and leadership of the cadres, the lack of a well-defined politico-military strategy, and its inability to absorb and use effectively the increase in the number of combatants, for which, the ELN devoted almost exclusively to economic sabotage (bombing oil pipes and electric towers, torching buses and blocking access roads to cities).

Due to the influence of the Christian ideology in the organization, well into the mid-2000s the ELN rejected any kind of involvement in drug production or traffic, and on the contrary declared war on the drug trafficking bourgeoisie and the small drug urban mafias that were attracting *milicianos*⁷⁵ to join their ranks by reason of the opportunities of individual gains and social ascent offered by narcotics (Bonilla, 2014, jul 7, para. 16). Eventually, the group got involved in narcotics when coca crops began to sprout in its historical rearguard areas (south Bolívar, the Catatumbo and Arauca), but especially when groups like the FARC or paramilitaries arrived to those same areas in an attempt to control the coca economies (Bonilla, 2014, jul 7, para. 26).

As described so far, the emergence and enlargement of the drug industry in Colombia –besides financially strengthening the insurgencies for their battle against the state– added a new scenario of confrontation by pitting insurgencies and drug lords, because the latter felt their trade monopoly threatened, resented the taxation schemes imposed by the former, and feared more extortive pressure on the capital they were accumulating in the form of lands (Richani, 2003, p. 179), but in parallel to the illegal, legal capital was also building up strong ties with paramilitary organizations, with a view to counteract insurgent extortive threats on their capital or operations (as described in the previous section), but also to use them as means to accumulate more and new capital. Using economic jargon, “paramilitaries became agents of many (hidden) principals” (Gutiérrez, 2016, p. 551).

⁷⁵ In Colombia, *milicianos* (militias) is the generic name given to collaborators of armed groups –commonly living in urban areas– that provide services such as intelligence, transportation, trading, political indoctrination, and the like, without directly participating in armed confrontations. According to Acero (1995, oct 15) the term was used originally by the EPL in 1980 to designate some of its urban military structures, and subsequently adopted by other organizations such as the M-19 and the FARC. The same author observes that insurgencies tend to organize (read, finance and/or arm) ‘*milicias*’ in poor neighborhoods and slum areas to alternate between vigilante functions (punishment to informants and traitors, thieves, drug dealers, etc.), regulatory functions (inter-personal problems, local prices), and organization of cultural and sport events, all intended to gain acceptance within the local communities, with a view to pave the way for ‘mass work’, that is to say, political indoctrination.

Along with the long-established confabulation between paramilitary groups and emerald industrialists, stockbreeders and landholders, during the late 1990s and well into the late 2000s national and multinational companies used the military services of illegal groups –commonly in joint operations with the Colombian Armed Forces– to advance their interests in diverse regions. Zelik (2015) documents numerous examples: threats and selective homicides of union leaders involved in media criticisms or demonstrations against extraction policies adopted by the Colombian state oil company (Ecopetrol). Pressure exerted by the Swiss multinational Nestlé to cattle breeders in Cesar (northwest) to use all means at their disposal to contain the local union interfering in the flexibilization of labor contracts, at the risk of leaving the region or reducing the purchase price of milk; under paramilitary threats, the union backed away and the company forced 178 workers to resign the collective agreement. In the coal mines of the north, Drummond managers provided shelter in their facilities, vehicles and cash contributions to paramilitary groups in order to ‘neutralize’ union members they considered ‘equal to ELN guerrillas’; the private security staff of the company was composed primarily by retired military personnel and worked closely with both the army and the paramilitaries. Chiquita Brands (formerly, the infamous United Fruit Company) dedicated to banana exports, was sentenced by American authorities to a fine of 25 million dollars for paying at least 1.7 million dollars to paramilitary groups in Colombia. The company argued that payments were made to all kinds of armed groups in order to protect employees, but later it was found that the company also knowingly helped in smuggling 3,000 AK-47 rifles destined to the paramilitaries through their facilities in the Turbo city port. Executives of Coca-Cola subsidiaries in Colombia were also linked to multiple threats and selective homicides of union leaders and the hiring of paramilitary members as salesmen and production operators for espionage; denunciations were never responded by the parent company in Colombia or the United States (pp. 228-241).

Koessler (2015) adds that Colombian companies such as Postobón (beverages) and Bavaria (beverages) also paid ‘vacunas’ to paramilitary organizations, and

that the president of the National Federation of Tradespeople (FENALCO) had multiple meetings with paramilitary leaders (p. 182).

The active participation of paramilitary groups was also documented in the displacement of (a) indigenous communities in Arauca with the intention of favoring oil projects by Occidental Oil and British Petroleum, in which the latter hired private defense corporations and established an agreement with the Colombian Ministry of Defense to provide war materiel and intelligence services to combat insurgencies in the region; (b) indigenous communities in Córdoba and Antioquia in order to complete the construction of two hydroelectric power stations; (c) artisanal miners in the south of Bolívar to turn the control of their mines to American investors; and (d) indigenous and black communities in Chocó to precipitate the cultivation of African palm, with the participation of companies that –quoting research of the journalist Ignacio Gómez– were sponsored by the Castaño Brothers⁷⁶, supported directly by USAID⁷⁷ and even financed with credits granted by the Colombian Agrarian Bank (Zelik, 2015, pp. 242-251).

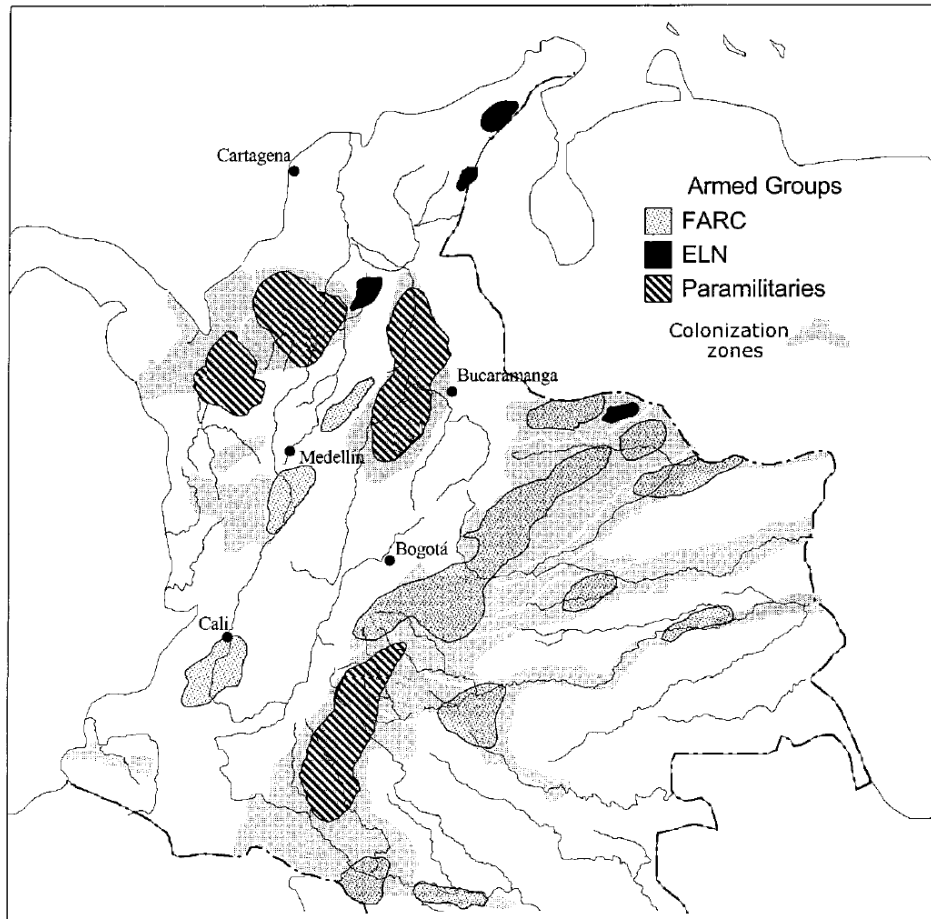
All in all, for Thomson (2011) “the use of violence to accumulate land and repress labour [...] proved particularly favorable to domestic and foreign agribusinesses” (p. 344). She quotes Richani to remark that “the ‘new elite’ is said to have acquired more land in just a few years –4.4 million hectares by the mid-1990s– than INCORA distributed in 30 years” (p. 341), and identifies the “the trinity of interests formed by certain sections of the state, the paramilitaries

⁷⁶ Regarded by the specialized literature as the leaders of the second generation of paramilitary groups in Colombia, for having formed the Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá (Self-Defenses of Córdoba and Urabá) in order to protect the production of bananas and cattle from the siege of insurgencies, and to provide a strategic corridor for the exportation of cocaine during the late 1980s. The Castaño Clan managed to integrate diverse paramilitary groups into a nationwide coalition called Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) by the late 1990s (CNMH, 2018a).

⁷⁷ United States Agency for International Development.

and an agribusiness elite (often the same person)” as the main beneficiaries of the plundering (p. 347).

Map 3-2: Regions of colonization after 1940 and regions with presence of insurgencies and paramilitaries 1990-2000.



Source: Adapted from Safford and Palacios (2002, p. 363).

By comparing Map 1-2 (Chapter 1) with the Map 3-2 (above) it is possible to see a continuous enlargement of the agrarian (and mineral) frontier, this time accompanied by the upsurge of armed groups to either hold back, protect, expel, or extort producers and traders, depending of the type of product, the type of armed group, and the type of relation established between one and the other, and while the war disseminated in the countryside, in the cities two more wars were waged: the war between drug cartels competing for “control zones, routes, weapons, customers, political relations, and strategic rearguards” (Niño, 2016, p. 117), and the war between Pablo Escobar and the state.

According to Duncan (2013), the unlimited source of capital provided by drug trafficking opened new opportunities of power to drug lords and their associated clientelist groups (bribed authorities, entrepreneurs in charge of asset laundering, contrabandists, etc.) as well as to the marginalized population that benefited with direct or indirect jobs and benefits created by the drug business, for which Pablo Escobar quickly became a powerful figure beyond its financial capabilities. The best example is how with his fortune Escobar organized a political movement called 'Civismo en Marcha' (Civility on the March) and distributed food and cash money, built football fields in poor neighborhoods, and houses for poor people living in dumpsites, which shortly garnered him enough votes to win a seat in the Senate in 1982 (El Tiempo, 1993, feb 28).

In the face of the rejection of some sectors of the political and economic elites, the numerous press reports condemning his illegal activities, the refusal of the leadership of traditional parties to accept him in its ranks, the increasing governmental offensive against drug traffic, the imminent approval of the extradition project, and as a retaliation for expelling him from the Senate (under drug trafficking allegations), Escobar

Ordered a long series of major crimes, including the assassination of various presidential candidates, a minister of justice, and the nation's attorney general; the kidnapping of journalists and the relatives of people high in government; and the dynamiting of two major liberal newspapers, the administrative center of the nation's criminal investigative agency [DAS], and an airplane full of passengers while in flight (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 368).

With an estimated army of 2,000 men (Medina Gallego, 2012), the Medellín Cartel (led by Escobar) displayed economic and military power "beyond the bribe and the threat" (p. 252), and concentrated in Escobar the interests of a number of organizations that over and above trafficking drugs started to permeate more and more social sectors: resources from the narcotics fueled political campaigns, a handful of economic sectors depended on the currencies and capital flows provided by narcotics, and many communities found in drug traffic livelihood opportunities inaccessible through lawful occupations

(Duncan, 2013), for which the Colombian elites realized that “the strengthening of the criminal elite (personified by Escobar) was [larger] and more dangerous than previously thought” (López Restrepo, 2006, p. 421).

The magnitude of the war with Escobar led the Colombian government to –at the same time– initiate peace talks with him and other drug lords who escaped to Panama (under paid protection to the Noriega dictatorship) (López Restrepo, 2006), and to establish an unholy alliance with ‘Los Pepes’⁷⁸ (rivals and enemies of Escobar among which the Cali Cartel and the Castaño Brothers were the most notable) in order to increase the effectiveness of the police operations aimed to capture or kill members of the Medellín Cartel (Medina Gallego, 2012). The logic of ‘the enemies of my enemies are my friends’ prevailed.

According to Caballero (2016a), the 10-year-long war “between the Colombian state and a particular citizen” was lost by the former considering: the thousands of citizens, police officers⁷⁹, judges, ministers, politicians, and journalists that died because of the confrontation; the concessions made by the state in the form of amendments to the justice system (e.g. the derogation of the extradition agreement); the collusion between (technically) legitimate institutions such as the army, the police, and the DEA⁸⁰ with paramilitaries and rival criminals; and the fact that after Escobar’s death the narcotics business maintained buoyant by just changing managers (pp. 17-18).

Lastly, the increasing intermeddling of the United States added one more element of antagonism to the deepening of the armed conflict, by switching, first from the view of the Colombian conflict as a local problem motivated by local agendas and interests to a conflict inscribed in the international fight against

⁷⁸ In Spanish, the acronym for ‘Persecuted by Pablo Escobar’.

⁷⁹ Pablo Escobar conceived a practice called ‘Plan Pistola’ (Pistol Plan) in which rewards were paid for killing police officers. The bounties ranged from one million Colombian Pesos for killing a police officer, to five million for killing members of the special forces group dedicated exclusively to his search and arrest (Tamayo Ortiz, 2018, dec 3).

⁸⁰ Drug Enforcement Administration agency of the United States.

communism, and later, to a national security problem derived from the narcotics industry (Rojas, 2006). Starting in the 1980s with Ronald Reagan's 'War on Drugs' and reinforced in the early 1990s during the Bush and Clinton's administrations, the government of the United States increased its pressure on Latin American governments to militarize the war against drugs (Medina Gallego, 2012, p. 165), based on two major assumptions: first, that obstructing the production and shipment in its origin points would make illicit drugs scarcer and costlier for consumers, gradually forcing them to abandon its consumption (Gray, 2008); second –and specifically for in Colombia– that the elimination of the main source of income of insurgencies will make them more vulnerable to a military defeat and/or force them to negotiate with the Colombian state (Rojas, 2006, p. 42). Neither of these happened to be the case.

With diagnostics that included terms such as 'narco-guerrilla' and 'narco-terrorism', the American authorities rearranged their intervention protocols in ways in which the boundaries between the political and the drug war became highly diffuse (Villamizar, 2017, p. 679), facilitating diverse types of intervention in social, political and economic areas. For Rojas (2006) this rearrangement was conducted in three phases. First, avoiding Colombia to become a 'narco-democracy' in the sense that the state had proven unable to contain the growth of insurgent and drug trafficking activity due to military incompetence and unrestrained corruption, with the aggravating circumstance that the president Ernesto Samper himself was accused of receiving funding from drug cartels for his presidential campaign. Second, negotiated peace or open war, in the sense that the provision of military equipment, training and intelligence technology could weaken insurgencies and lead them to a negotiated solution, with the aggravating circumstances of the FARC killing three American citizens kidnapped in 1999 and the frustrated peace talks with president Andrés Pastrana; during this phase the implementation of the 'Plan Colombia' began with the creation and training of rapid deployment anti-narcotic battalions and the aerial fumigation of illicit crops. Third, open fight against narco-terrorism, under the global anti-terrorism framework that resulted from the attacks of September 11 in American soil, and by which the FARC, the ELN and the AUC

were promptly included in the list of terrorist organizations of the American Department of State to officially become targets of the global 'War on Terror'. Rojas closes her analysis by remarking that the 'Plan Colombia' was conceived as an anti-narcotics plan, put into practice as a counterinsurgency plan, but publicized as an anti-terrorist plan, dissolving lock, stock and barrel into an ambiguous socio-politico-economic-military agenda (p. 54).

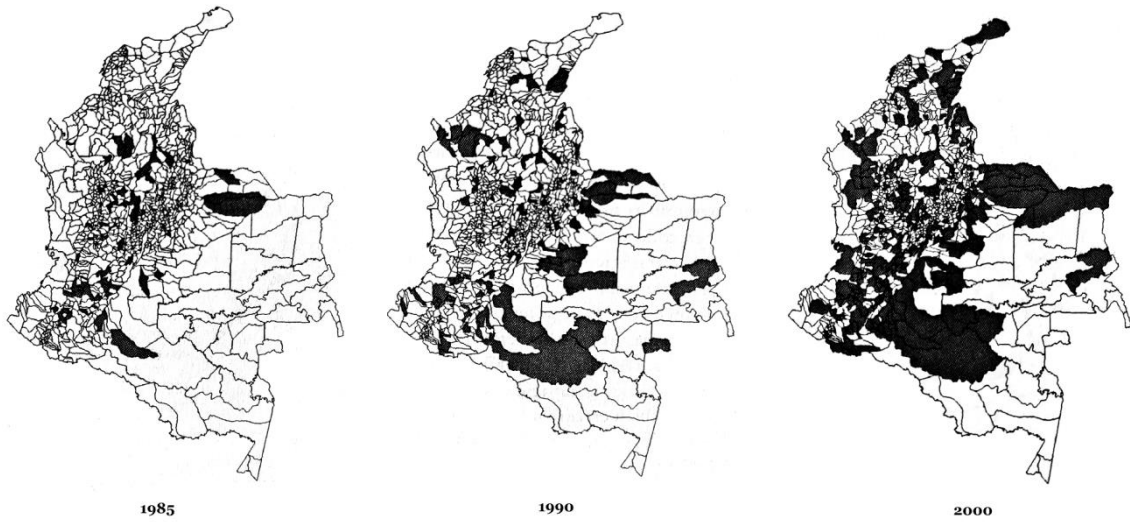
Ultimately, the 'Plan Colombia' consisted of a two trillion⁸¹ dollar assistance package aimed to "regain state control of the country, while at the same time creating a safe territory for investors", for which the priorities of the program were to (a) establish military control of the south of the country to eradicate coca crops, destroy processing plants and intercept narcotics transportation; (b) strengthen judiciary, investigative, and anti-corruption corps, improve the penitentiary system and rekindle extradition laws; (c) neutralize the drug lord finances and contraband frameworks internationally; (d) combat drug lords allies, especially the sourcing of weapons and their extortive and kidnapping capabilities; (e) share intelligence information with international agencies, and (f) strengthen development plans to take social services and better job opportunities to illicit-crop-ridden regions (Medina Gallego, 2012, pp. 167-168), in that specific order⁸².

As could be expected, the interplay between more armed actors, better equipped, with more stable financing, and often competing for the same resources, resulted in aggravation of violence instead of its containment or termination. The following maps show the territorial expansion of the insurgent groups analyzed on this study, after the leap from the marginal to the intensification era.

⁸¹ Original quote (in Spanish) talks about billions; Beittel (2019) registers ten billion (in English) for Plan Colombia and its follow-on programs between 2000 and 2016.

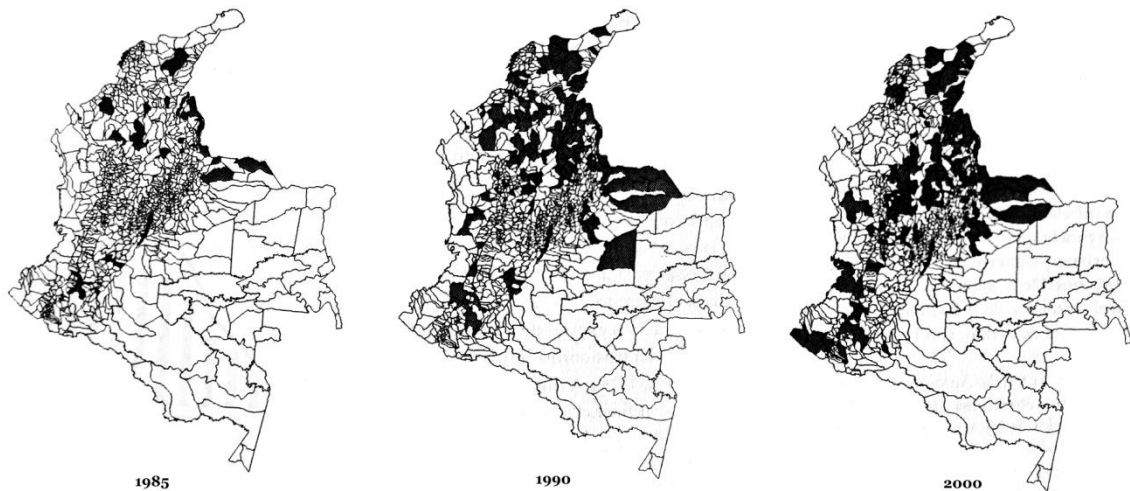
⁸² According to Rojas and Atehortúa Cruz (2001), the first package of aid, approved in 2000 by president Bill Clinton, was to be destined 75% to the Colombian armed forces and the police, 13% to reform the judiciary and human rights system, and 9% to alternative development programs intended to replace illicit crops cultivation.

Map 3-3: Presence and activity of the FARC between 1985 and 2000.



Source: Adapted from Sánchez and Chacón (2006, pp. 357-358).

Map 3-4: Presence and activity of the ELN between 1985 and 2000.

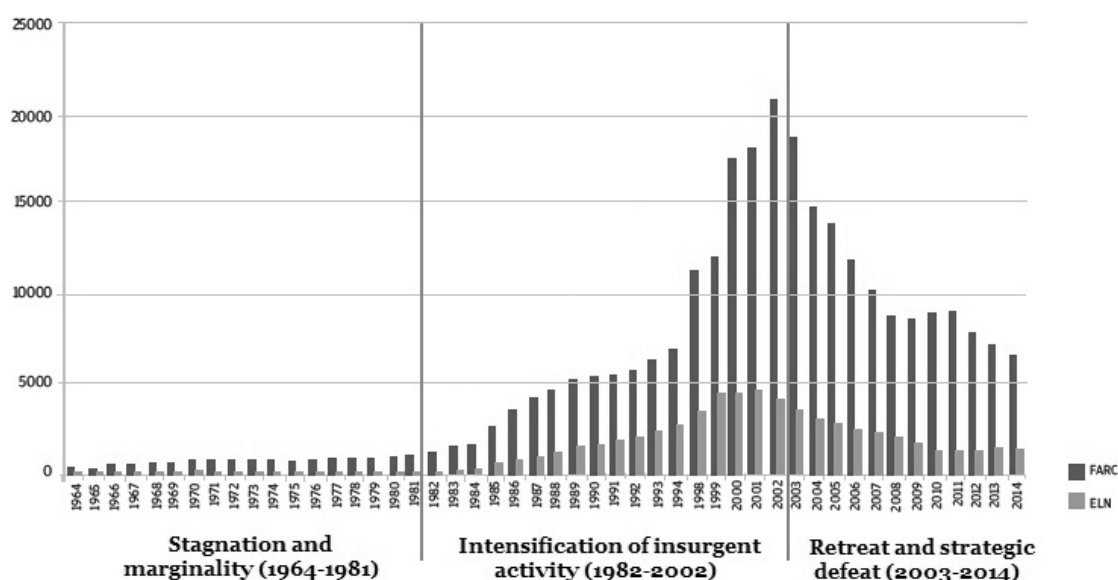


Source: Adapted from Sánchez and Chacón (2006, pp. 362-363).

Safford and Palacios (2002) observe that between 1986 and 1996 insurgencies increased their size “more than in the previous thirty-two years. The FARC went from 3,600 insurgents in thirty-two fronts in 1986 to about 7,000 in sixty fronts in 1995. In 2000 its numbers were estimated at about 15,000 [while on the other hand] the ELN went from 800 insurgents in eleven fronts to 3,000 in

thirty-two fronts [and] in 2000 it was thought to have about 5,000 combatants” (p. 362)⁸³. See Graph 3-2 (below).

Graph 3-2: Evolution of FARC and ELN number of members, 1964-2014.



Source: Echandía (2015)⁸⁴.

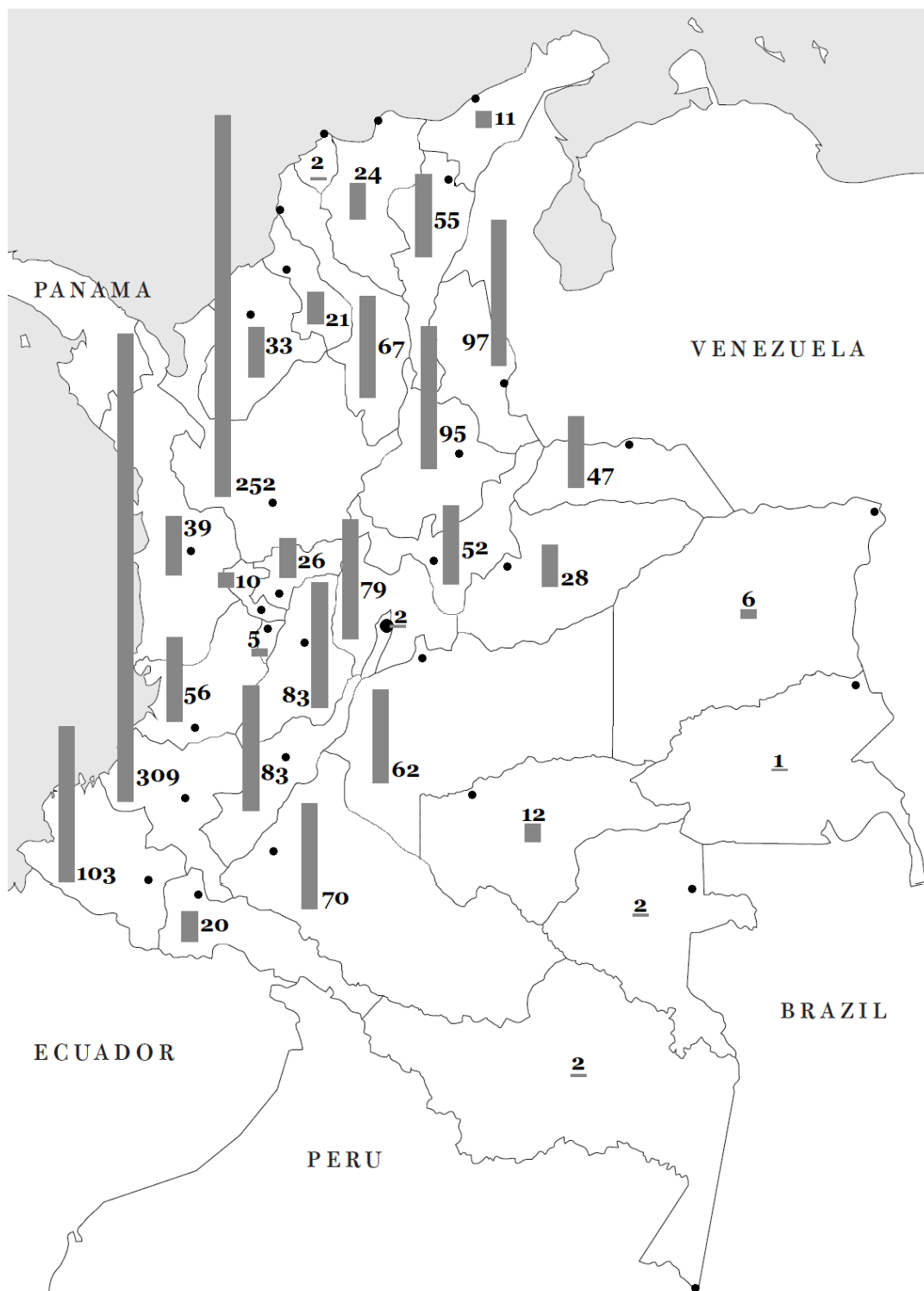
In turn, the territorial expansion of the groups and the collision of their interests resulted in increases in armed clashes, although the confrontations concentrated (just like the historical trend of political and economic activity since colonial times) in the west of the country, affecting some departments and municipalities much more than others, as can be seen in the maps 3-5 and 3-6 (below), that show insurgent (read, left-wing) and paramilitary activity.

The related literature reports an aggravation of violence all across Colombia (albeit concentrated in the west of the East Mountain Range): an increase in the intensity, especially from the groups defending privileged positions or the status quo; an increase in its amplitude, in terms of the type of goals pursued; and an increase in its scope as evidenced in participation of more actors.

⁸³ Even if the figures relating to the size of irregular armies tend to be rough estimations, the majority of the literature on the matter agrees on similar quantities.

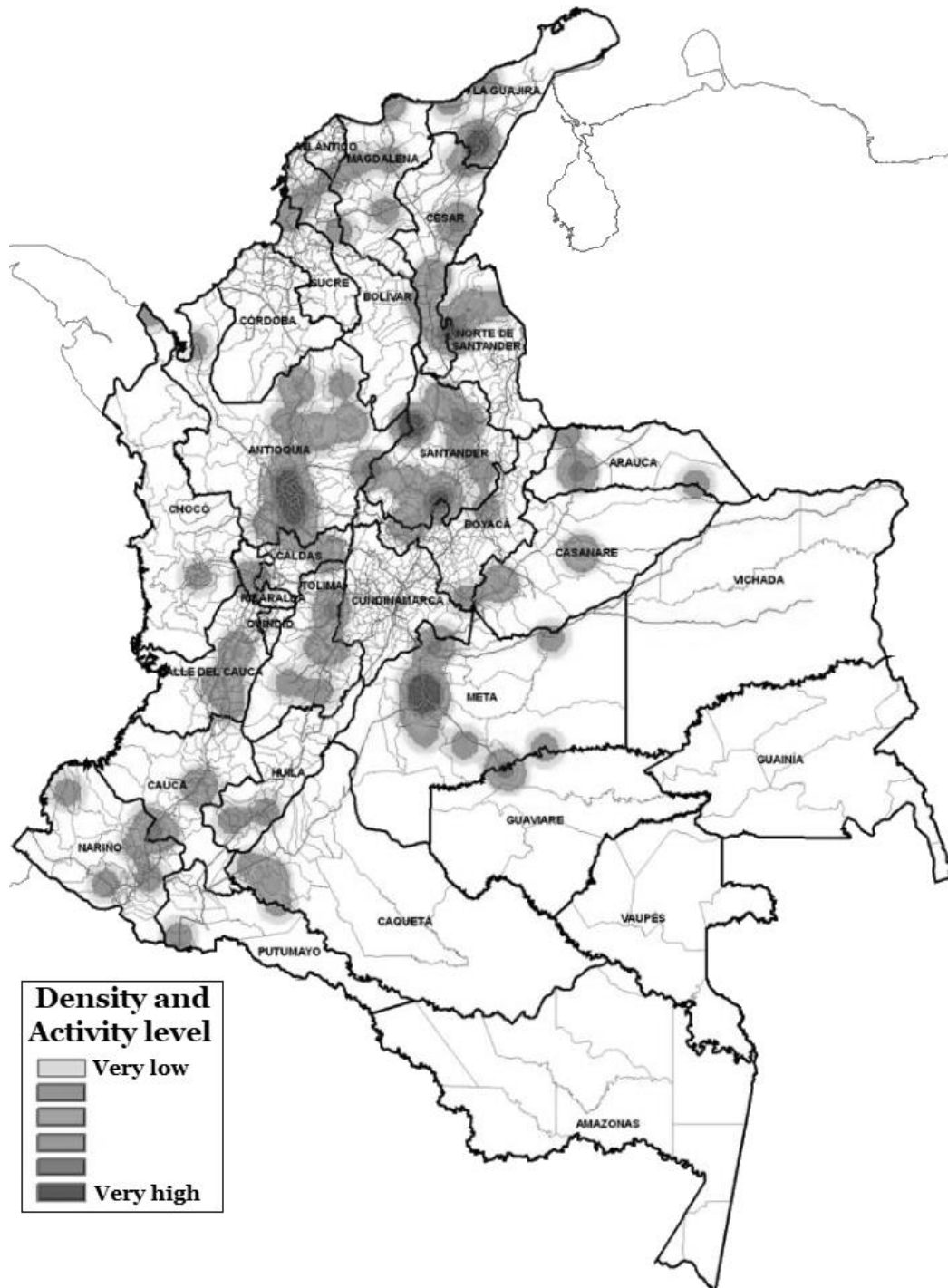
⁸⁴ The names of the historical periods are presented as in the original source of the graph.

Map 3-5: Distribution of insurgent raids by department, 1965-2013.



Source: Own construction with data from CNMH (2016b).

Map 3-6: Presence and activity of the AUC paramilitaries in 2002.

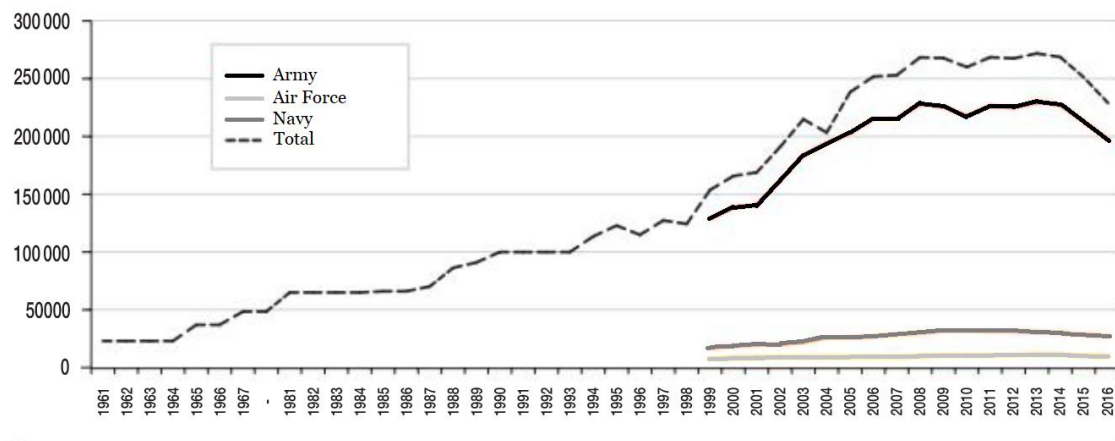


Source: Adapted from ODH⁸⁵, as presented in Ríos Sierra (2015).

⁸⁵ Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario, or Colombian Observatory of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, in English.

In the official side, in spite of being sharply limited by budgetary and technological difficulties, lack of knowledge about the local geography and regional idiosyncrasies, poor recruiting filters that exposed them to repeated infiltration, and the incapacity to cover one region without opening a vulnerable spot in another⁸⁶, the official armed forces also responded to the increase of insurgent forces with a major quantitative and qualitative leap in the first half of the 1980s, firstly by opening of more than 240 new battalions and military schools aimed to improve intelligence services and psychological and tactical training of soldiers, and secondly by launching ever more large-scale operations against insurgent ‘critical centers’ (Ugarriza & Pabón Ayala, 2017).

Graph 3-3: Size and composition of Colombian armed forces, 1961-2016.



Source: Ugarriza and Pabón Ayala (2017).

All armed groups decided to go on the offensive. The army thinking that the FARC was stagnating in outermost regions; the FARC overestimating its military blows on the official armed forces (supported by public analysts stressing the multiple weaknesses of the latter); the paramilitaries, sheltered in

⁸⁶ Army intelligence reports of the early 1980s considered that “the social problems afflicting Colombian society work both to enhance subversive proselytism in students and workers, and to facilitate enemy actions inasmuch as the use of troops to contain social manifestations (such as civic strikes) distracts up to 70% of the available men, in detriment of the protection of the territory and the internal defense against subversive armed organizations” (Colombian Army Command, quoted in Ugarriza & Pabón Ayala, 2017, p. 167).

governmental decrees authorizing special services of private and communal vigilance and security; drug traffickers using private armies for profit and for the resolution of social and political disputes (Ugarriza & Pabón Ayala, 2017). In other words, an all-out war.

As remarked by Shaw (2009), “whereas politics in general is concerned with renegotiating power between actors, the violence of war leads actors to seek to destroy the other’s power” (p. 101), but in Colombia, all the armed actors have tried –unsuccessfully– to destroy each other’s power during, four decades (taking the mid-1980s intensification as a starting point); five decades (taking the inception of the FARC and the ELN as a starting point); eight decades (taking ‘La Violencia’ between liberals and conservatives as a starting point); or two centuries (taking the wars between federalists and centralists of the nineteenth century as a starting point). Analyzing the latter, Hincapié de Uribe (2001) asserts that “even though the rhetoric and political languages of the disputes changed [...] the grievances language endured [...] maintaining both the idea of a ‘just war’ and the right of the victims to insurrection and violence” (p.18). Two hundred years after, her assertion appears to be equally valid.

3.4.2. A new country for an old war

“The increase of the violence found the [Colombian] state unarmed, not only because of the lack of military power, but because of its institutional fragility” (Lemaitre Ripoll, 2016, p. 5). The institutional fragility was better described by Bejarano and Pizarro Leongómez (2005) when they observed that

Elections are held on a regular basis, but candidates and elected politicians are also regularly assassinated. The press is free from state censorship, but journalists and academics are systematically murdered. Electoral authorities recognize a growing number of political parties and minorities have increasing participation in representative bodies [given that] the constitution and the law explicitly address the opposition’s rights and responsibilities. At the same time, the killings of opposition leaders multiply. For a century and a half, control of the state has been in civilian hands except for a few short and exceptional periods. Nevertheless, the

military has retained a high degree of autonomy in matters of internal public order, as well as a series of prerogatives that place it above civilian control. The state claims that it alone can exercise legitimate use of force, while at the same time admitting its inability to contain [violence, and even establishing alliances with outlawed violent actors] (p. 236).

For which the authors find difficult to classify the Colombian political system “because it is neither a full democracy nor an authoritarian regime”, finally opting for “semi-democracy” or “besieged democracy” (p. 258).

A deep –yet characterized as incomplete by the author– analysis of some of the institutional settings that uphold the prevalence of violence in Colombia was made by Umaña Luna (2005) in what he calls ‘the failure in controlling criminality’, and that is composed by (a) a juridical utopia with a legal system based on foreign patterns and “ideal hypotheses” yet distant from the Colombian social realities, dominated by “legalism” (read, draconian formalities that, instead of streamlining, clog the system) and favoritism (read, groups trying to keep the old institutions for convenience with their interests); (b) new types of crimes, often covered with a mantle of ‘political motivations’ to dissimulate real ends, and in which individual criminal actions became collective, making it more difficult to establish responsibility; (c) a justice apparatus that neither enforces the law nor oversights the conduct of public officers in spite of the increasing numbers of people and resources employed, with forensic evidence commonly being gathered or analyzed by incompetents, with extreme concentration of law professionals in cities, and aggravated by the intellectual and financial incapacity of the ordinary citizens to access law; (d) bureaucratic conformism, defined as the displacement of the legislative and judiciary branches by the executive branch of power due to a constant state of “legislation for emergency” which gradually undermined the body and power of the judicial authorities; (e) a clientelist chain of judicial intermediaries going from the jail guard to the judge that have found in violence and crime the best source for their income, aside from the judicial officers that dedicate at least two or three months of their yearly work to support election campaigns in order to increase their salary or guarantee their job stability; (f) juridical centralization

that generates complications and delays that create opportunities for the evidence to disappear or the investigation to prescribe; and (g) benefits and reduced penalties that do not become instruments of social and political peace but mere advantages to criminals.

The analysis above was made for the context of ‘La Violencia’ –before the official emergence of insurgencies– but the diagnostic is broadly coincident with the findings presented by Nemoga Soto (1995) –who adds the backwardness of the legal system with respect to the transformations required by the new international political and economic order– for the 1990s, and even for the modern institutional structure of Colombia in the twenty-first century, which allows us to suggest a high degree of historical continuity.

During the 1990s the epidemic of violence mobilized a large segment of the population –especially students– who claimed for major institutional transformations to bring back political actions over military actions as means of conflict resolution (GMH, 2013), but the proposed solutions differed: for conservative sectors the solution lied in the construction of a “strong state” with bigger investments in the public forces and the judiciary system; for liberal sectors the main problems were authoritarianism, corruption and poverty, for which human rights and economic progress were the key to obtain the legitimacy and governability required to return the control of the territory to the state; and for leftist sectors, besides widespread poverty and inequality, the closed nature of the political system dragged alternative forces to engage in political participation through arms, for which opening the political system to direct popular election of public officers and to the participation of collectives different from the traditional parties was indispensable to legitimize and modernize the state and cease violence (Lemaitre Ripoll, 2016).

As a response to the generalized claim to eradicate violence, the Colombian state embarked in the design of a new constitution with a view to strengthen the reach of the state, and to increase its legitimacy and openness.

The FARC did not participate in the assembly convoked to design the new constitution and organize the associated voting process, given that for not accepting to participate under the conditions established by the government (read, full demobilization of troops and concentration in agreed sites) following presidential instruction the armed forces bombed ‘Casa Verde’ (the former headquarters of FARC command) –which the insurgency interpreted as a ‘second Marquetalia’ and a new declaration of total war (Villamizar, 2017, p. 584)– and started an extensive offensive against strategic positions of the FARC (Restrepo, Spagat, & Vargas, 2006, p. 520). The GMH (2013) considers those state military actions as the reflection of the belief that the ongoing democratic opening must coexist with the war (p. 218); we interpret them as necessary gestures to satisfy the conservative sectors asking for a “strong state” that does not capitulate. Gutiérrez and Sánchez (2006) argue that the FARC stayed out of the process to a great extent because of the traumatic experience of the UP party (p. 12), while the ELN limited its participation to “issuing a series of press releases supporting the [peace] process” (Rampf & Chavarro, 2014, p. 8).

According to Hernández (2013) the three macro-objectives of the political constitution of 1991 in Colombia were peace, for being a partial result of the negotiations with insurgent groups and a potential scenario to negotiate with drug lords; democratization, to overcome the restrictive inheritance of the National Front and –at the moment– the ongoing contradictions regarding political openness in the light of the extermination of the UP party; and just order, understood as the general respect for human rights. Following Alviar García (2016) the last point can be expanded to include “economic, social, and cultural rights [...] that guarantee a minimum living standard [and] access to goods such as health, education, occupation and housing” (p. 318).

As part of the second objective, but aiming at the attainment of the first and the creation of the conditions for the third, one of the major transformations carried out by the new Colombian constitution was the politico-administrative decentralization of the state. Valencia-Tello and Karam de Chueiri (2014) clarify that the process began already since the early 1980s, in the wake of the global

broadening of neoliberal ideologies: back in 1983 with laws granting local autonomy in the collection of diverse taxes, in 1986 with the popular election of mayors and the creation of communal participation spaces to control local budgets according to local priorities, and in 1987 with the transfer of the responsibility for the delivery of public services (water, sanitation, education, urban development and public infrastructure) to local entities. These authors remark that there was no “differentiation of the municipalities according to their size, inhabitants, resources, geographical location or any other factor”, and that local administrations were unable to implement all the assigned duties with so short notice (p. 187), for which the global result was an aggravation of the non-compliance of the state functions in the vast majority of municipalities with poor financial and administrative capabilities. Ávila (2019) adds that administrative decentralization did not manage to help in the consolidation of strong or stable local administrations because a great deal of local leadership had been jeopardized by armed groups in the previous two decades.

Drawing from previous studies, Sánchez and Chacón (2006) summarize the major repercussions of the 1991 constitution with regard to state decentralization in that the central government was then obliged to transfer half of its revenue to the local governments to be managed by local governments (governors and mayors, now elected instead of appointed), in conjunction with own fiscal efforts and with the active participation of local communities, which resulted in a frantic parallel increase of the assigned responsibilities and the funds transfers, that went from 1.9% of the GDP in 1982 to almost 6% of the GDP in 2002. By virtue of this, “local governments began to administer substantial resources that made them tremendously attractive to irregular [armed] groups” (pp. 371-372). In addition to that, the income generated by oil and mining royalties (also administered locally) increased exponentially after 1991, generating at the same time financial inequality between the producing regions and the rest of the country and elevated levels of spoilage and

corruption (Perry, 2011)⁸⁷. The most significant consequence of this process was the transformation (or relocation, in their words) of the ongoing armed conflict in a dispute for local power, in which henceforth violence is used to appropriate public funds and resources, armed groups influence political and electoral processes and results (protecting or eliminating candidates, or pressuring voters), and directed to consolidate territorial domination from a local perspective, given that local power is more vulnerable and susceptible to influence than central power (Sánchez & Chacón, 2006). Eaton (2006) calls this trend ‘armed clientelism’, and points out that in spite of being considerably lower than those generated by the drug industry (and more difficult to obtain with proper administrative controls, we would add), the control of public revenues provided armed groups –either insurgencies or paramilitaries– “the ability to claim credit” for providing goods and services to communities in need (p. 561).

In parallel to the shift of the political framework and the economic relation of the state with the regions, a major revolution –that was underway since the late 1970s– found its final brushstrokes with the new constitution: economic liberalization, or ‘Apertura’ in Spanish. According to Ocampo, Romero, and Parra (2007) the timid economic liberalization of the 1970s was reversed by diverse recessions and by the infamous ‘Latin American debt crisis’ of the 1980s, but regained importance with the reforms promoted by the ‘Washington Consensus’ to “harness the opportunities of economic growth offered by the insertion into the world economy” during the 1990s (p. 342). In addition to that,

⁸⁷ Safford and Palacios (2002) explain that “under the precepts of fiscal decentralization, it was decided that 49% of the oil royalties would go to the departments and municipalities where the oil was extracted and through which oil pipelines passed, [and] the remainder [to] the nation. As oil exploitation occurs in regions with scanty populations, the result is a grotesque maldistribution of revenues. On a per capita basis the royalties going to Arauca are 362 times those received by Antioquia, 1,300 times those going to Cundinamarca [excluding Bogotá], and 8,900 times those destined for Risaralda” (p. 340). Nevertheless, in 2018 Arauca was reported to have 31.8% of multi-dimensional poverty and 91.3% of the population depending of informal jobs (DANE, 2019).

the reforms were presented as the key for overcoming the (exhausted and unsuccessful) import substitution model that for academics and policy-makers failed because –among other reasons– internal demand was not able to support internal manufactures, the production of commodities (coffee, oil, bananas, minerals, etc.) guaranteed the economic solvency of the country, the alliance between the coffee sector and industrialists (for being the main suppliers and the main users of currencies, respectively) to control macroeconomic and trade policy, and the premature formation of government-protected oligopolies that abused consumers and did not achieve large technological and productivity improvements (Misas, 2001); for González (2001) the first point was explained also by poor internal infrastructure to interconnect markets and the widespread income inequality of the population, both recurrent problems –as mentioned in Chapter 1– dating from Spanish colonial era.

With the intention of internationalizing the Colombian economy

[Diverse mechanisms] of internal market protection were eliminated, free importation of 90% of the goods and services traded in the country was implemented, tariff structure was simplified and tariffs were reduced. Simultaneously, the monopoly in currency trade was withdrawn from the Banco de la República (Colombian Central Bank), the capital market was open, and the spheres of action for foreign investment and banking were expanded. Exchange policy was left to the free flow of currencies and the free movement of long-term and speculative capital (Bonilla, 2011, p. 47).

The economic changeover of the country quickly brought to the surface serious contradictions that worsened the profile and dynamics of the armed conflict.

First, between 1994 and 2009 foreign direct investment concentrated in hydrocarbons and minerals (with 40.5% of the investment) rather than in incentivizing industry (only 22% of the investment), while at the same time employing only 1.5% of the available workforce, in a “re-primarization of the economy” (Bonilla, 2011, p. 61). What is more, agricultural production began to be rapidly displaced by food imports while agribusinesses focused in the

production of bio-fuels (e.g. palm oil) and in the expansion of unproductive cattle latifundia, turning the historical conflict over property of land into a conflict about its use (Estrada Alvarez, 2016), a trend that was reinforced by the increasing concentration of land in the hands of drug lords and their legal representatives (testaferros⁸⁸), that created an speculative bubble that made it “impossible for small-scale farmers to acquire land for subsistence farming” (Gaviria, 2011, p. 124). Higginbottom (2005) points out that “in 1984 the top 3% property owners held 60% of registered land, in 1996 they owned over 65% [and] by 2001 [they] owned nearly 76% of the land”, a trend –for him– closely correlated with the dramatic increase in forced displacement of peasant farmers (p. 122). In addition to that, the lands began to serve to the proprietors as shelter from income taxation (given the poor tax and cadastral structure), as criterion for receiving government subsidies, and as tool for exercising political power (Richani, 2012), while rural labor was commoditized and “peasants and small-scale farmers were forced to compete not only with import crops, but also among themselves to get resources to grow crops under the new [international food regime] standards” (Gaviria, 2011, p. 133).

Secondly, drug cartels introduced their capital successfully to the national economy in conventional activities such as real state, livestock, trade, tourism, transportation, health, education and housing, gradually compromising the local and regional political class through bribes, corruption and clientelism (Medina Gallego, 2012, p. 153). For Thoumi (2002) this process was facilitated by increasingly sophisticated money-laundering systems that evolved from the liaison between Colombian contrabandists and international criminal networks, and Pécaut (1997) adds that even “the government helped in the laundering process [when in the late 1970s] opened an special account in the Central Bank [and] later declared numerous “fiscal amnesties” (p. 908), in a practice the media called ‘the sinister counter’⁸⁹. On the legitimate side of the economy, the

⁸⁸ See note 9 in Chapter 1.

⁸⁹ In Spanish ‘ventanilla siniestra’. The mechanism allowed Colombian banks to purchase dollars at a discounted rate without requiring the identification of the seller or the source of the funds (Marcy, 2011). The same author observes that it was operational until 1995. For Medina

excessive influx of dollars led to an appreciation of the Peso and strong increases in imports of consumption goods (primarily textiles and footwear, via contraband), affecting negatively local industry (Kalmanovitz, 2010; Safford & Palacios, 2002).

Thirdly, thanks to the priorities of international markets and the conditionality established by international economic institutions to grant aid and credit, the Colombian state was driven to implement fiscal austerity and efficiency policies, as well as to privatize assets and public services (Mantilla Valbuena, 2012). In their balance of the Gaviria administration (1990-1994) –the first and most decisive in the Colombian liberalizing process– Aguilar Zambrano, Leal Buitrago, and Zuluaga Nieto (1994) conclude that: many industrial sectors were almost destroyed because of policy design mistakes; the poor infrastructure of the country limited the circulation of goods within the country and internationally; the pronounced focus in the control of inflation left the authorities with a narrow room of maneuver, especially if attempting simultaneously to reduce fiscal deficit, increase transfers to the regions, and improve infrastructure while perceiving less customs and tax income; long-term product growth and social coverage were sacrificed in the name immediate goals of inflation control; the change in the development model implicated heavy costs for the least favored social sectors, who were already experiencing high levels of deprivation and inequality, and would likely result in social tensions and/or escalating violence.

In addition to that, Higginbottom (2005) explains that

Multinationals [took] advantage of [the] ‘flexibilization’ laws to adopt aggressive anti-union policies; unions and communities mobilizing against state expenditure cuts and privatizations are [we would say, continued to be] fiercely repressed; the major mining and oil investments, as well as water dams, are notoriously

Gallego (2012) and for Higginbottom (2005) it was the main reason for Colombia to cope with the 1980’s debt crisis much better than its Latin American counterparts, and for Pécaut (1997) the instrument also stimulated the growth of the financial and construction sectors.

characterized by the heavy presence of the military and paramilitaries to [protect] their infrastructure. The social impacts of these investments can be summarized in one word: dispossession (p. 122).

Fourthly, Varela (2008) highlights that massive privatizations did have a positive effect in some cities and with the provision of some services –especially regarding coverage– but that in all cases the more immediate negative effect was the increase of monopolization and consequently in prices, for which he concludes that privatization of domiciliary public utilities in Colombia had a negative impact on equality and social inclusion by conditioning access to payment. Muñoz Conde (1994) adds that privatization is not an automatic synonym of ‘modernization’ and Cuervo (1994) –quoting Maldonado– provides a representative example: in small and mid-size cities, it was determined that the pitiable administrative and operative condition of the public water companies rendered them unable to provide the service efficiently and/or profitably for which a new company with mixed capital should be created; however, local governments were forced to inject financial resources (given the increasing demands of the population to access the service) while privates limited to provide ‘managerial capacities’ or minority capital participation (given the unprofitable character of the enterprise)⁹⁰.

Lastly, for González (2001) there were three major contradictions regarding the postulates of the new constitution and its application. First, the establishment of a state governed by the ‘social rule of law’ –in which the protection and participation of the citizen is at the center– is incompatible with economic policies that transfer all decision and power to the market, in the sense that

⁹⁰ The mass transport system of Bogotá (subsequently copied in all major Colombian cities) is a modern example. City administration must provide the infrastructure for the system (roads, stations, etc.) while the private (operator of the service) provides the buses and parking spaces. Income is distributed 4% for the city administration, 7% for the companies in charge of ticket collection, and 89% for private operators; but in addition, the city administration must pay to the private operators the difference between the technical fee (real cost of transportation) and the price paid by the user. Only in 2016 the deficit covered by the city administration was 661 billion Pesos, or approximately 220 million Dollars (Romero & Marín, 2017, apr 2).

citizens' voice is displaced by the market decisions (unless they have paying capacity, we would add). Second, the discourse of income distribution improvement, contradicted by regressive taxes and by the increasing share of the national income being captured by capitalists and less by workers. And third, the discourse of state size reduction when public expenditure was higher than in the 1980s. All worsened by the irruption of financial globalization as a medium to reduce fiscal discretion and autonomy in economic policy.

Regarding the last contradiction, Partow (2002) illustrate the “public sector’s unprecedented expansion” by reporting that the central government deficit went from 0.4% of the GDP in 1991 to a deficit of 7.1% in 1999 (p. 148), with territorial transfers, debt service, and social security systems and salaries being the largest expenditure categories, in most cases leveraged by the expectations of future oil and mining revenues that led local governments to incur in debts (both in local and international markets), but that ultimately became unsustainable: “growing deficits and declining growth culminated, in 1998-1999, in a recession of a magnitude unprecedented in the country’s history” (p. 148). Oddly enough, in the first decade of the ‘Apertura’, with increasing deficit and indebtedness, output and taxes showed conflicting behavior: GDP growing with declining tax revenue, and vice versa (Partow, 2002).

All in all, while the state renounced more and more assets and responsibilities its expenditure grew and its income decreased; the so-called ‘modernization’ increased the price of basic services and reduced the access to them to an everyday more impoverished population by reason of a combination of the destruction of the local industry and agriculture –replaced by imports– and the increased precariousness of labor; political decentralization did not translate into the replacement of clientelism with local self-governance but into armed clientelism, in the sense that the additional faculties and resources transferred by the state to remote regions ended up under control of NSAGs that strengthened their political and military power; the black and grey economies gained importance compared to the legal one and –while opening opportunities to some groups– exacerbated socio-economic issues such as accumulation and

inequality, being the most tangible example the access to land; and finally, the pledge of participation, pluralism and social justice that were opened by the political transformations embodied in the new constitution were quite often closed by violence or by the prevalence of the (allegedly unbiased) market logic.

3.4.3. War rearrangement and exhaustion

All the belligerents in the Colombian conflict escalated their actions in the 1980s, and for forty years, in great part thanks to the enhanced financial capabilities provided by new sources of income (such as drug traffic, extortion to multinational companies, and –in the case of the state– support from foreign states), increasing also their recruitment capabilities and their influence in diverse social, political and economic spheres.

Garrison (2008) suggests that armed conflicts can be divided into at least two separate periods, onset and termination, between which a series of interactions between the participants produce either “a regime victory, a challenger victory [or] a negotiated settlement” (p. 145). He –as well as many other conflict analysts– concludes that when neither side can defeat the other, the result is a ‘military stalemate’ (See also Collins, 2009a; Fearon, 2004). At this point, a common assumption of the conflict analysis literature is that “mutually hurting stalemates create an environment conducive to negotiated settlements” (Garrison, 2008, p. 148) because “there is a common acknowledgement between all the contestant parties of the impossibility of obtaining a military victory, ultimately generating substantial costs and sacrifices for one and all” (Pizarro Leongómez, 2006), which eventually compels warring parties to negotiate a way out of the conflict.

However alternative developments to the stalemate situation –that seem to fit more adequately the Colombian case– are presented by Jeong (2008) when he theorizes the perpetuation of escalation or stalemate situations for as long “as each party retains any little glimpse or hope of victory” (p. 98); by Collins (2009a) when he pinpoints the potential transformation of a conflict in a “war

of attrition” based on the argument that the actor with greater economic resources would eventually win, for which besides attaining the maximum amount of resources possible, attacking enemy’s economic base is a key to achieve victory; by Wennmann (2009) when he introduces the notion of “mutually profitable stalemate in which neither party’s objective is to win [but rather to] look for opportunities to cut losses through alternative ways of accommodation” (p. 1128); and by Keen (1998, 2000), when he analyzes the possibility of interests groups taking advantage of the ‘apparent chaos’ generated by the continuation of the armed conflict.

The armed actors in the Colombian conflict, namely, the state and the insurgencies in a first moment, and the paramilitary groups and the drug lords afterwards, at some point have, first, refused or delayed negotiated solutions under either the expectation of an upcoming military victory or the possibility of improving their negotiating position through the achievement of military dominance (Restrepo, 2006); second, distrusted their counterpart peace intentions under the argument that in order to reach a settlement “each side must voluntarily de-escalate violence levels” (Garrison, 2008, p. 148), but is better if the other side does it first as an act of goodwill; third, downplayed the substantial costs and sacrifices of the war and, on the contrary, escalated the hostilities in search of potential benefits, as exemplified by the association between paramilitary groups and rural elites to accumulate lands. Furthermore, because of the internal divisions and/or the atomized character of the struggle in terms of group organization and local specificities, it is common that “while negotiations are being carried out [by or] with some groups [or factions], the war continues to be waged by others” (Bejarano, 2003, p. 239), as the case of the peace efforts made during Betancur administration, sabotaged by regional elites and the armed forces command (Gray, 2008, p. 75), or as evidenced in the rearming of splinter factions⁹¹ after successful peace negotiations with any given NSAG.

⁹¹ See Burch and Ochreiter (2019) for definition and detailed analysis.

For us there is one important implication of the reality of the Colombian case at theoretical level, elicited from the idea that

If the conflict becomes stuck in its confrontation stage, other directions open up. The more prolonged the struggle, the more the resources become strained and the more the search for resources becomes important, even dominant, [for which] the conflict leadership is drawn into an ever-intensifying search for the means to keep the conflict going, to the neglect of the ends themselves [and to steering the situation towards a] soft, self-serving, stable stalemate [that might represent] a comfortable resting place for the rebellion and an acceptable division of territories for the government (Zartman, 2005, pp. 268-269).

As a result, when the conflict gets “frozen following exhaustive fights without the obtainment of original objectives” (Jeong, 2008, p. 37), commentators, scholars, policymakers, and the civil society alike begin to characterize it as a ‘greedy war’, this is, an armed conflict intended to capture rents or to personally enrich the members of each contending party, as well as to stress the negative effects it has on the economic performance of the country. Our contention is better summarized by Zartman (2005) when he argues that “greed is a mark of the evolution of a conflict that has left its “normal” course toward either victory or stalemate and settlement” (p. 275).

The moment drug money gave to all belligerents the capacity or the justifications to finance their military operations, the conflict entered in a never-ending phase of (mutually hurting or benefiting, depending on the point of view of the observer) stalemate –that we describe at the end of section 3.3.3 and in the conclusions of this chapter– and which Richani (2003) –quoted in the opening of this chapter– summarizes as a self-perpetuating ‘system of war’, in which a group of units (what we call actors) that interact and establish a structure of power relations based on the resources (political and economic) that they manage to obtain through war, and that would not be able to attain in peace.

As noted by Paterson (2013) “every Colombian president since 1982 tried to pursue parallel paths of confrontation and negotiation with the insurgents” (p. 8), being –in the twentieth century– the most successful in the negotiation approach César Gaviria, who managed to demobilize three minor insurgencies (the EPL, the Quintín Lame, and the PRT) as part of the 1991 constitutional assembly, and to restart peace negotiations with the FARC, the ELN, and the remnants of the EPL (by the time grouped as the CGSB⁹²) after the failure of the Betancur process (and the extermination of the UP). On the other hand, during the Pastrana administration (1998-2002), the Colombian state “made an enormous military effort and increased its forces from 215,000 men in 1998 to 445,000 in 2010” (GMH, 2013, p. 179) and in parallel underwent a broad reorganization (especially thanks to the auspices of the United States) with aims to retake military offensive and tilt the balance in his favor (Aguilera Peña, 2013b), for which since the early 2000s the conflict reached new highs in its apparent low intensity and sameness. However, at the same time, president Pastrana authorized the creation of a demilitarized zone of approximately 42,000 square kilometers to host new peace negotiations with the FARC (CIDH, 2007, pp. 29-30); the Caguán demilitarized zone⁹³ was established in October 1998 and extended repeatedly until 2002, when the increasing evidence of indiscriminate attacks, kidnappings and military strengthening of the FARC –as opposed to the agreed ceasefire– forced the president to end the zone and cease the negotiations (CIDH, 2007).

The failed negotiations of Caguán left the public opinion an image that the FARC real interest was the eternal continuation of war, and increased the voices condemning their military actions (Pécaut, 2016), especially the growing perception that the protraction and geographical expansion of the conflict could

⁹² Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar, or Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Coordination, in English. Created in 1987 by the FARC, the M-19, the ELN, the EPL, the PRT, and the Quintín Lame Armed Movement, with aims to unify insurgent actions in the country (Radio Nacional de Colombia, 2016, nov 28).

⁹³ Known in Colombia as the ‘Zona de Distensión’ (distension zone, in English).

reach everyday more city dwellers (via kidnapping⁹⁴, extortion, bombings, attacks, etc.), and that insurgent barbaric methods did not differ from those of paramilitary organizations (Echandía, 2008), for which the military approach gained anew monumental support ultimately leading to the election of Álvaro Uribe, who launched a strong military offensive that generated a re-escalation of conflict (González González, 2016). Under the consideration of insurgencies as plain delinquents, drug traffickers and terrorists without any political character (Pécaut, 2016), and under the umbrella of a renewed “warmongering policy and the post-September-eleven frontal war against global terrorism”, the Uribe administrations (2002-2010) closed all avenues to negotiation and to humanitarian agreements (i.e. exchange of kidnapped people and captured military for guerrillas) (Villamizar, 2017, p. 698).

During Uribe’s administrations the balance of power became largely favorable to the Colombian state, as evidenced in important operations such as the liberation of Ingrid Betancourt⁹⁵, three American citizens, and 11 members of the armed forces held as prisoners by the FARC (Echandía, 2008), as well as the deaths of several members of the high command, the loss of strategic territories, and the increasing desertions (Aguilera Peña, 2013b). For the latter author the model of war (or strategic plan) of the FARC has failed, while for the former, the loss of (at least) the 50% of its members in such a short time undermined its room to maneuver. An alternative opinion is presented by Ávila (2019), who argues that

For many years it was believed that during the Uribe administrations [2002-2010] the FARC were about to be defeated [but] the data shows that the ‘Democratic Security Policy’ only managed to get control of the major centers of production and trade of the country, as well as the main communication routes [forcing] insurgencies to retreat, but never to be militarily defeated (p. 39).

⁹⁴ In the late 1990s the FARC implemented a practice called ‘pesca milagrosa’ (miraculous fishing) in which they randomly kidnapped civilians in improvised highway checkpoints to later verify if the victims were wealthy or prominent (e.g. politicians, foreigners) in order to demand a hefty ransom (El Tiempo, 1998, dec 26).

⁹⁵ Presidential candidate kidnapped by the FARC in 2002 and rescued in 2008.

In the case of the ELN, since the late 1990s the steady onslaught of paramilitary groups in its areas of influence, along with the increasing effectiveness of the official armed forces, generated considerable weakening of its military structures and loss of strategic zones, often forcing it to establish alliances with FARC fronts or private criminal organizations in order to survive. The increasing lack of internal cohesion led to strategic mistakes such as bombings of oil pipes that resulted in oil spillages in nearby rivers or civilian deaths –that promptly escalated complains about the victimization of civilian population– and in massive desertions, such as one in which a second tier commander surrendered himself with other 30 combatants (Echandía, 2013).

Even if the goals, the actors, and the repertoires have been malleable, violence has been a constant in Colombian history, and contrary to the assumption that when unable to win and burdened by the costs and sacrifices of war, antagonists would acquiesce to negotiated solutions, Colombian armed groups seem to be determined to keep what Hincapié de Uribe (2001) called a ‘constant state of war’, guided by “the explicit and unwavering will of not submitting to any authority, or to accept any power, different to one's own” (p. 11).

Before closing this chapter, Table 3-1 (below) complements the Table 2-3 by presenting a brief characterization of the Colombian armed conflict in more recent times, while at the same time introducing four (comprised as three) distinctive phases for our later analysis. A first period since the emergence of insurgencies in the mid-1960s until 1980, or what was identified above as a ‘marginal war’; a second period commencing with the development and involvement of drug traffic as financing source of armed groups in the 1980s and ending before the full implementation of the ‘Plan Colombia’ in the early 2000s, and that we will identify as ‘escalation’; a period inaugurated by the failure of the Caguán negotiations with the FARC in the early 2000s (and which we will call ‘re-escalation’) which also comprises the beginning of the third major –and definitive– peace negotiation process with the FARC in 2012 (a fourth distinctive period for our analysis).

Table 3-1: General outline of the Colombian armed conflict 1965-2015.

Aspect / Period	1965 - 1980	1980 - 2000	2000 - 2015
Profile Political and economic environment	Structural transformation of the productive system evidenced in the increasing participation of industry and services, and the reduced participation of agriculture in national GDP, all accompanied by rapid urbanization, increasing land concentration and major failure of agrarian reform attempts. End of the (bipartisan) National Front as agreement for political control of the state, with no substantial opening of the political system to alternative parties and continuation of state repression to peasant, workers, and student movements under insinuations of subversion.	Radical economic transformations resulting from rapid and broad liberalization of financial, labor and trade markets, with renewed importance of commodity exports, especially in the mining and hydrocarbons industry. End of the international coffee (cartel) agreement ending its hegemony in the local economy. Administrative and fiscal decentralization that shifted a large proportion of financial and political public resources to regions. Increasing penetration of drug business in political and economic aspects of the society.	Rise in the establishment of Free Trade Agreements, especially focused in the export of agricultural commodities (produced in large-scale agro-industrial projects) and in the import of capital goods, textiles, and agricultural products subsidized by industrialized economies. Relative political stability, political plurality and democratic governance, accompanied by consolidated influence of armed groups in peripheral regions (resulted from the preceding decentralization process) and of drug entrepreneurs in political matters.
Actors, objectives and strategies	Simultaneous emergence of multiple revolutionary and insurgent groups. Only a handful remains –with difficulties– during a phase of low scale confrontation with the state marked by scarce political and military power.	Major insurgencies (FARC, ELN) radicalized and escalated armed confrontation in light of the failure of diverse peace negotiation processes, caused by sabotage and opposition exerted by political and economic elites connected to the official armed forces and	Insurgencies, the Colombian state (with the military and economic support of the United States), paramilitary organizations, and drug cartels entangled in a ‘mutually hurting’ (and often mutually benefiting) stalemate’ protracting the conflict for five decades.

	Increasing cooperation between the Colombian state and United States authorities in order to, first, unite efforts against the spread of communism in the continent, and later, in the war against drug production and traffic. Revival of paramilitary groups organized and financed by rural elites and drug lords as means to protect themselves and their assets from the threat of insurgencies. ‘Marginal war’	paramilitary organizations, and by the decimation of the alternative political parties formed by former insurgent combatants. Highest point in the cooperation between Colombia and the United States authorities; materialized in the implementation of ‘Plan Colombia’ as means to end armed conflict and eradicate drug production, both militarily, under rhetorical umbrellas such as a ‘war on subversion’, ‘war on terrorism’, or ‘war on narco-terrorism’. ‘Escalation’	Failure in the second major peace negotiation process with the FARC (Caguán, 1998-2002) reinforced the public opinion of the military option as a definitive solution to the armed confrontation. Combination of full scale military attacks with policies to stimulate individual desertion (economic incentives, pardon legislation, etc.), and characterization of armed groups as terrorist organizations. ‘Re-escalation’
Dynamics Aspects that make the situation transform into new scenarios	The combined effect of land concentration, widespread poverty and economic transformation pushed marginalized population to newer colonization areas, helping in the development of drug production and traffic as a profitable and stable business. Increased economic power of drug production serving the increase of the military power of armed groups.	Territorial consolidation of paramilitary groups and increasing liaison with official armed forces. Increasing victimization of (non-combatant and neutral) civilians, noticeable in the exponential increase of homicides, forced displacement, and extra-judicial executions (among many other forms).	Massive demobilization of paramilitary armed organizations. Extensive loss of social support to any form of armed activism, accompanied by massive and frequent protests against violence. Beginning of the third major (and definitive) peace negotiation process with the FARC (Habana, 2012-2016).

Source: Own construction based on Herbert (2017).

3.5. Conclusion

The PNUD (2003) considers that “Colombian conflict is many conflicts” (p. 16), which somehow resembles what we called ‘full scale armed conflict’ in the sense of capturing the multiplicity of actors, interests, strategies, and affectations generated to the society on account of the failure of institutional and/or peaceful approaches to channel and settle differences. While each interest group has managed to control a certain territory and certain resources that grant them certain powers (military, economic, political, media attention), the society has gradually become accustomed to violence in its different modalities and often has forgotten that the confrontation is very much alive and constantly mutating. The degree and concomitance to which economic, political and social factors keep fueling violent conflict in Colombia is complex enough to feed lengthy debates, for which we limit here to highlight the interpretations that serve better our argument and research intention.

First, drawing from Cramer (2006), Thomson (2011) and Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas (2015), violence has served to continue a long-process of primitive accumulation in Colombia in the sense of –fortuitously or deliberately– helping land accumulation, the defense of extractive projects, and the promotion of the interests of private entrepreneurs (all often legalized with help of corrupt officials and enforced by armed groups), a trend that aggravated the precarious condition of a large proportion of the population. A great deal of the violence in Colombia has been part of a process of political and economic rearrangement that serves in the transition of the country to capitalism, especially in the form of ‘forced asset transfer’ or ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (Cramer, 2009). On the other hand, both the rural and the urban general population were stricken by the abrupt liberalization of economic activity that besides damaging local production conditioned their access to basic services to payment. The involvement in narcotics production or traffic emerged as a lifeline for many of those dispossessed population –especially in rural areas– only to become another element contributing to national decay.

Secondly, drug traffic nourished the growth –or emergence– of armed actors that eventually became predators or burdens for the population. Insurgencies, paramilitaries and trafficker’s private armies reached extraordinary proportions and competed –violently– to exert control in more and more aspects of society, ravaging everything in their path and reaching what we called before a mutually hurting and benefiting stalemate: the FARC gained military strength and political validation in coca-producing and colonization areas for their support to the peasant struggle for livelihoods, but its growing involvement in drug production and its violent repertoires delegitimized its political struggle and attracted more military contenders to its game. The ELN capitalized on the exploitation of natural resources to develop militarily, and labor protest to develop politically, but its ‘senseless’ attacks to public and private infrastructure delegitimized its political struggle and also attracted more military contenders. Thanks to the insurmountable condition of violence, the Colombian state gained popular support to advance any kind of reform conducive to peace, to the point of completely reshaping the constitution, and –after a couple of ruinous decades, and mostly because of the intervention of the United States– the military transformations necessary to pass from containing to hurting insurgencies; nevertheless it was unable to contain the infiltration of drug money in all spheres of society and institutions, and in its pursuit for decisive victories established alliances with shady actors with whom ended up committing atrocities equal or worse than those committed by its enemies.

In addition to that, the osmosis of the drug traffic and the Colombian social, economic and political structure diverted the attention from other serious and unabated problems previous to its emergence, either assuming that they were all directly connected with it or that by ending drug traffic all the remaining problems would be solved. As observed by Rojas (2006), the United States and Colombia fell in a dual trap: repeating a circular diagnosis (ending drugs means ending war, which means ending drugs), and distorting (or minimizing) the complex reality of the armed conflict (p. 35). Interestingly enough, drug money did not avail insurgencies only; paramilitaries, politicians, real estate brokers,

tradespeople, and even the state (with the uncomplicated system of legalization of currencies known as the ‘sinister counter’) also benefited from it.

For Giraldo Moreno (2016) drug traffic does have a fundamental responsibility in the strengthening of all protagonists of armed conflict, but –as stated earlier– not as its only cause or final solution. Idler and Forest (2015) remark that admitting its potential as sponsor of non-state actors, “a shadow economy can address the fundamental need among a local population to make a living [especially if] illicit economic opportunities are more widely available than opportunities in the legal economy” (pp. 4-5), and according to Valencia (2006) “social inequality is a factor that causes and deepen armed conflict; not in the sense of directly causing fights, but by fostering black market economies in which exchange is often regulated by violence [for entailing] high and quick returns” (p. 166). Besides, “it is not only drug cultivation that fuels violence in rural Colombia: licit development in the oil, mining, and agribusiness sectors has also been accompanied by increases in local violence” (Gray, 2008, pp. 78-79). In our view, as preponderant as it might be, drugs production and traffic is just another dimension of a multidimensional problem.

Lastly, as observed by De Zubiría Samper (2016), the Colombian modernization project has been precarious and confuse, especially in terms of its political system. Decentralization of fiscal, administrative and political authority, instead of promoting autonomy and legitimization, facilitated the capture of the state (authority, resources, policy) by armed actors, affected electoral participation negatively (abstention or coercion), and reinforced local clientelism, from then on mutated to an armed form (Moreno, 2017). The latter author quotes García et al. to stress that

A large part of the Colombian territory simply lacks the factual conditions (social peace, infrastructure, citizen culture, bureaucratic capacity, etc.) to allow the entrenchment and proper working of institutions. In many places there are mayors but no ‘mayorship’, judges but not justice, police but no security (p. 43).

To which Gray (2008) adds that “the implicit assumption is that insurgencies are challenging a central state that once had control [while] in parts of Colombia, such control has never existed” (p. 77). Regarding armed confrontation, the situation is no better: one faction of the state is responsible for massacres, forced displacement and human rights violations, while the other condemns and investigate them (Giraldo Moreno, 2016); while the local governments establish communication channels with armed groups to achieve peace, the central government overrules such initiatives pressured for immediate results and following the idea that peace is equal to weapon surrendering (Restrepo, 2006); the visible sector of the state opens political participation to alternative ideologies, while the invisible sector uses paramilitary groups to silence those alternatives.

The ‘characterization of conflict’ presented in this chapter allows us to conclude that the complexity of Colombian armed conflict renders vain any attempt of comprehensive synopsis, inasmuch as the boundaries in terms of the initial date of aggression, the private or governmental character of the actors, the conflicting or overlapping nature of interests (that often has driven contestants to cooperate or compete on as seasonal basis), the power relations between the actors and the ways to establish them, the distinction of the genuine motivations of interest groups, and ultimately the precise interrelation between social, political and economic aspects, have all been always blurred.

However, this undetailed characterization –along with the historical antecedents presented in previous chapters– should suffice to exhibit the convoluted and ever-changing context in which people have decided to (and presumably still do) join insurgencies (and armed groups in general) in Colombia, which we analyze in deep in the next chapters. In other words, in order to inspect the motivations of people to join insurgencies we deemed necessary to clarify why those groups emerged in the first place, how those groups evolved after their inception, and the interactions between one group and another, that ultimately put individuals in the great dilemma of getting involved (or not) with one armed group or the other.

4. GENERALITIES OF MOTIVATION

“Human action is purposeful behavior”
–Ludwing Von Mises (1996 [1949])

4.1. Introduction

In Chapter 2 we showed that in situations in which individuals or groups have incompatible goals (read, conflicts) violence can emerge –in spite of not being a natural human ability nor an optimal mechanism to address it– either to establish dominance, to intimidate the opponent to retreat in their pretensions, to seek revenge for previous wrongdoings, to achieve particular gains, or to force one’s interests in the settlement of the dispute. The related literature considers violence, in general, a result of the incapacity to pursue goals or to solve conflicts through legitimate and peaceful means.

We also presented the transition from individual to collective conflicts as result of –among other factors– the formation of a communal identity, the development of solidarity regarding others’ troubles, and the framing of social situations with specific meanings, all of which can mobilize individuals on grounds of (real or imagined) grievances in an attempt to “change their circumstances, [...] act in concert with the group they identify with, or [...] express their views” (Klandermans, 2015, p. 223), none of which –in our view– is inherently violent or requires violence to be exercised.

At this point, it is important to grasp how two people sharing the same grievance, preoccupation, or perception of injustice –assuming they do share them– become an army of thousands. In other words, the process by which a private conflict that became collective manages to mobilize new militants, especially if the latter do not share the original grievance, preoccupation, or perception of injustice that motivated the ‘first movers’.

In the following pages we present a few essential theoretical elements that substantiate our analysis of the personal process of enrollment into armed groups, to finally inspect the case of Colombian insurgencies; bearing in mind that most often the decision does not reflect solely to the internal ruminations of the individual, and that the process is not carried out under the freedom levels is often assumed.

4.2. The study of motivation

People make a multitude of choices every day [and] in much theory and research, choice [...] is the end result of a decision-making process in which an individual has some freedom regarding whether to engage in one behavior or not, or one behavior over another (Patall, 2012, p. 249).

One of the key components –often regarded as the most important component– of that decision-making process is motivation, commonly understood as the reason(s) for which people behave in the ways they do, or in other words, the justification for choosing one particular course of action instead of another. Harmon-Jones, Price, and Harmon-Jones (2018) define it “simply as the urge or impulse to move or act” but clarify that it can be directed towards approaching or achieving something as well as to avoiding or going away from it (p. 559). Another dimension is added by Kanfer, Chen, and Pritchard (2008) when they remark that motivation –understood as drive– can possess intensity levels, this is, the amount of personal effort devoted to the attainment of a determined goal.

Franzese (2013) underlines the problematic regarding the confusion between the words ‘motivation’ and ‘motive’ as means to assess and analyze individual agency for being often used as synonyms in spite of having different meanings across scientific disciplines. Without bringing closure to the discussion, she observes that “motivation is generally understood as the underlying reason for action and motive as the specific reason for action” (p. 281), and gives the following example in an attempt of clarification: drinking something in order to quench thirst responds to the specific and momentary *motive* of thirst, but also to the underlying –and more general– *motivation* of essential physiological needs satisfaction. She adds that “there may be (and often typically are) multiple motives for any given behavior” (p. 299).

All in all, motivation is understood separately or simultaneously as the raw impulse to do something, the justification to do it, or the intensity of the effort to do it, making the term itself as complex as the things it tries to explain.

A thorough analysis of the evolution of the concept is presented by Burns (2003) in its passage from religious, behavioral, biological, and psychological approaches, ultimately arriving to the conclusion that, in general, theories of motivation “have proven wholly inadequate to explain more than a small subsection of behavior”, and that since human behavior is the result of numerous factors, explanations based in a “single mechanism” are unproductive (pp. 403-409). However, she also observes that

Early philosophers and researchers were successful in identifying some of the individual threads of motivation: hedonism, physiological needs of the body, experiences with the consequences of behavior, anticipation of future events, goals, reflexes and instincts, psychological needs, social influences, and many more [but] only recently are we beginning to recognize [that] the ways in which these threads are woven together [are unbelievably] intricate (p. 409).

Motivation concept is specially put into use in disciplines such as psychology and neuroscience, with applications centered in education, human resources management and sports, from which one strand of the literature stands out: Self-Determination Theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic motivations (when something is done for being inherently enjoyable) and extrinsic motivation (when something is done because it is instrumental to something else) (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b). This notion is important for our analysis because it also allows establishing a separation between tangible and intangible rewards. A common example is that of students or workers that perform well by virtue of the pleasure they experience with their activities versus the ones that do it in pursuit of rewards like money, external recognition or the avoidance of punishment. The former illustrate intrinsic motivation and the latter extrinsic motivation. We will relate these notions to the enrolment into armed groups further ahead.

While the literature is wide and the debate remains open, diverse approaches on the subject have emerged in function of the type of need that is attempted to be satisfied, thus, physiological approaches emphasize on the satisfaction of vital needs such as food, sleep, safety, or sex; psychological approaches focus their

attention on issues such as hedonism (enjoyment of pleasant experiences), relatedness (feeling significant to others), self-esteem, autonomy, mastery (competent use of own skills and expertise), etc. (Vansteenkiste, Ryan, & Soenens, 2020); and sociological approaches emphasize on the analysis of needs such as social acceptance, recognition, status, power, etc. (Lieberman, 2006). The implication is that the motivation to act stems from the type of need that is being satisfied and its relative importance for the individual.

For Graham and Weiner (1996) over three decades the study of motivation gradually passed from the assumption of human behavior as the result of automatic and mechanical-like responses to impulses towards a gradual recognition of the cognitive, analytic and decision power of humans, the inclusion of affective aspects in the process, the recognition of individual differences, and the influence of environmental factors in the decision process. Kanfer, Chen, and Pritchard (2008) summarize some of the findings as follows

- Motivation varies within and across individuals, and across situations for the same individual.
- Motivation is not directly observable and must be inferred from personal and situational antecedents and consequences.
- Motivation is determined by the combination of individual and environmental characteristics, and represents a set of psychological processes that connect and integrate these forces.
- Motivation is subject to change as a function of forces internal to the individual as well as external to the individual.
- The primary feature of the motivational process is the coupling between intentions and allocation of resources toward specific actions [making the latter] the primary means of personal control over behavior. Therefore, to change behavior, one must change motivation (p. 6).

Nevertheless, while the analysis of human motivation and its explicative power in terms of behavior seems to be limited by the multiplicity of factors entangled, its diverse dimensions of significance, its differing scope, or its intricate active

mechanisms, the mainstream approach to it seems to return to the automatic and mechanical responses to given impulses, this time in the form of ‘rationality’.

Despite of being originally conceived “not as an accurate description of human nature but as a model of economic behavior” (p. 9) the so-called homo-economicus –read, an individual with well-defined preferences, endowed with rational capacity to evaluate means to his/her ends, and determined to maximize the satisfaction obtained by consuming goods and services (called utility)– emerged as the central figure of the ‘Rational Choice Theory’ in economics, to gradually influence a great deal of the analysis of human behavior (Melé & González, 2014). The homo-economicus became an analytical paradigm for human behavior, to the point that

Sociologists and political scientists have tried to build theories around the idea that all [human] action is fundamentally ‘rational’ in character and that people calculate the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do (Scott, 2000, p. 126).

Apart from (or as the essential part of) his/her rationality, the homo-economicus has been characterized as

Amoral and entirely self-regarding, devoid of any intrinsic morality, or any desire to behave in an ethical manner. [Homo-economicus] do not exhibit an intrinsic preference for honesty; truth-telling; keeping promises; trusting others and being trustworthy; reciprocating kind and unkind behavior of others; and caring about the fairness of procedures. [Homo-economicus] also have no feelings of remorse or guilt from letting down the expectations of others. [Homo-economicus] strive solely to maximize their own material well-being (self-regarding preferences) without regard to the well-being of others (Dhami & Al-Nowaihi, 2019, p. 181)

The image provided can be encapsulated as a ‘decision machine’ whose only motivation is utility (read, satisfaction) maximization.

Scott (2000) adds that the consideration of humans as ‘rational-choice-making individuals’ propagated the belief that the entirety of social phenomena is “reducible to [...] individual actions” (p. 128) and explainable “in terms of the rational calculations made by self-interested individuals” (p. 136), and that ultimately, all forms of social exchange are the result of the calculated interactions of individuals, understood in terms of rewards and punishments, costs and benefits, or wins and losses. Among those social interactions encased within the cost-benefit logic he includes collective action (briefly alluded in Chapter 2), and remarks how, following the tenets of the ‘Rational Choice Theory’, workers unions, political parties and similar organizations would not exist if all members made such calculations in order to decide their participation. In his view, attitudes such as altruism, reciprocity and trust represent crucial paradoxes to the homo-economicus concept.

An increasing academic literature criticizes the homo-economicus inadequacy as explicative of human behavior, not only regarding economic choices, but also in its application as behavioral archetype in non-economic situations, both from a theoretical perspective and on the basis of empirical evidence.

For Kahneman (1994) the notion of utility is outdated in the sense that subjective human experience relativizes the definition and degree of pleasure, pain, comfort or discomfort, and that in reality choices are made in on the basis of an ‘anticipated utility’ relying on “memories of past episodes” (p. 28), because people know little about their future tastes and preferences. Urbina and Ruiz-Villaverde (2019) remark that in real life (a) humans are not endowed with ‘perfect rationality’ in the sense that “perceptions and decisions are systematically affected by biases and cognitive limitations”; (b) the so-called ‘individuality’ is substantially influenced by diverse social factors given that all human existence takes place within social spaces and is mediated by social power relationships; and (c) cooperation and solidarity schemes (predominant in pre-capitalist economies) certify the existence of motivations beyond self-interest (p. 85).

On the other hand, Simon (2000) observes that analyzing all the potential alternatives when facing a choice is a “lengthy and costly process” (p. 16), hindered by cognitive, computational, and time availability constraints, and often exacerbated by inconsistent choice criteria, for which people regularly relies on ‘heuristics’⁹⁶ to make decisions. He calls ‘bounded rationality’ the process of rational choice which takes into account those limitations of the decision-maker (p. 15) and which results in the selection of choices that are only ‘good enough’. Following that logic, MacMullen (2014) ponders if the terms ‘rational’ or ‘irrational’ do not correspond to a technical connotation –in the sense of obeying a strict set of formal rules, or understood as “flawless intelligence” (Kahneman, 1994)– but rather reflect “whether decisions serve or damage the agent’s interests” (p. 18), or what are the implications if a choice is ‘rational’ –in the sense of being consistent with some logical reasoning behind it– but the reasoning is misinformed (p. 65), therefore, he prefers to consider a ‘reasonable’ choice one that is consistent with people’s general beliefs and limitations, and that probably goes beyond material rewards.

In addition to that, Sent (2018) presents a compelling argument when she observes that

It could be argued that the focus on rationality on the part of economists is an illustration of their own bounded rationality. For rational agents are easier to study for boundedly rational economists [...] It could be due to their own bounded rationality that economists typically modelled agents as being rational (pp. 10-13).

Lastly, “human rationality cannot be understood merely by considering the mental mechanisms that underlie human behavior. Instead, we should elucidate the relationship between the mental mechanisms and the environments in which they work” (Teraji, 2018, p. 150).

⁹⁶ Defined as “cognitive shortcuts or rules of thumb that simplify decisions, especially under conditions of uncertainty” (“Heuristic,” n.d.). “Heuristics are used to simplify complex tasks [as well as to] solve specific tasks in specific environments” (Teraji, 2018, p. 151).

All these contentions will be recalled at a later stage in our analysis of the motivations (or motives) to join insurgencies in Colombia, while for now they serve to provide a glimpse of the orientation taken by the research on the matter, to limit our working definition of ‘motivation’, and to underline some of the inherent limitations of motivational approaches to analyze human behavior, and specially some of the limitations of the mainstream analytical notions used to inspect and (attempt to) predict human decision. We now outline a few theoretical approximations to the motivations to join armed groups.

4.3. The study of motivation to join armed groups

In 1994 Mark Lichbach published an article entitled ‘What makes rational peasants revolutionaries?’ in which he presents the commoditization of agricultural products, the increasing self-interest of market actors –especially landlords trying to extract more surplus from their workers– and the resulting threats to their economic security as major generators of peasant upheaval. He concludes that mainstream models of collective action, that repeatedly stress personal benefits –called ‘selective incentives’– as the key input for revolutionary movements, lack explicative power for peasant rebellious mobilization inasmuch as “almost anything that motivates people (for example, prestige, altruism) can be labeled a selective incentive” (p. 417), and even if reduced to material rewards (such as a bridge or a school), peasant motives for struggle are not ‘apolitical’ or solely economic, although self-interested in appearance. While the article is limited to criticize the monotonous application of the concept of ‘selective incentives’ to insurrectionary peasant movements and does not talk about social groups different from peasants nor about ‘irrational’ people, it serves us to illustrate the dominance exerted by the homo-economicus concept in the analysis of human action.

In the same vein in which diverse social phenomena are considered as the aggregated outcome of the calculated and self-interested behavior of individuals, armed conflict has been regarded as a façade for personal profit, and people involved –in our case, combatants– as personal profit seekers.

Similar examples are to be found in ‘Revolution, repression, and the rational peasant’ (Heath et al., 2000), where the authors use “consumer choice theory [to] model the rational peasant's behavior” (p. 622) when deciding between supporting government (complying with laws and paying taxes, voting in elections, providing intelligence against rebels, etc.) or supporting rebel groups (contributing money, food, sanctuary or recruits, mislead the state forces, etc.) during internal armed conflict situations; the conclusion is that support to either group goes to the ‘highest bidder’ in function of the “goods and services received from each faction” (p. 625). In ‘Resources and the information problem in rebel recruitment’ (Weinstein, 2005) it is argued that rebel groups can recruit depending on their resource endowments, that potential recruits commitment level depends on the time frame of their motivations (the discount rate of present versus future consumption), and that both respond to the compliance/commitment signals of their counterpart. Basically

Resource-rich rebel groups offer short-term rewards, or payoffs, to motivate participants. Resource-constrained rebel groups rely on promises about the selective benefits that individuals will receive in the future. Material motivations remain important considerations for potential rebels in both circumstances [...] High-commitment individuals are investors, dedicated to the cause of the organization and willing to make costly investments today with the promise of receiving rewards in the future. Low-commitment individuals are consumers, seeking short-term gains from participation (p. 603).

All in all, the economics-influenced literature considers that armed groups face three general mobilization problems: recruit and retain soldiers, acquire weapons and equipment, and exercise effective direction upon those soldiers (Vinci, 2006b), and under the assumption that the potential recruits are all ‘rational’ and utility-maximizing individuals, the solution to the first and third components of the mobilization problem calls for an equilibrium between the supply (armed group) and demand (potential recruits) of ‘selective incentives’ (both material and immaterial); the opposite situation –when the armed group demands and the potential recruits supply– is modelled and analyzed as a labor force market in which combatants offer their ‘war skills’ in the market; the latter

idea is exemplified in Levy's (2007) 'Soldiers as laborers' article. Nevertheless, just as with other goods and services markets, economic theories find it difficult to properly model the situation, to find the circumstances that allow reaching the equilibrium, or to match theory with reality.

Moving away from the homo-economicus approach, Henriksen and Vinci (2007) criticize what they call the 'essentialization' of the armed conflict, this is, its reduction to singular causes, the consideration of armed conflict and armed groups as static entities, and the unification of the motivations and goals of groups and participants into a single body. They include an additional dimension to the analysis of motivation –called 'context'– that encapsulates "the nature of the organization, its goals, and means", and which assumes three standard typologies of armed groups: insurgencies, terrorist groups and warlordism, which in conjunction with the "basic drivers of the individual fighter" (p. 92) –that can be either communitarian, economic, or existential– result in five typologies of combatants: 'mercenaries', loyal to a contract and to a paycheck; 'soldiers', loyal to a nation or a future idea of it; 'warriors' motivated by personal enthusiasm to experience or master war; 'slaves' who were forced to join under threat or psychological abuse; and 'barbarians', who are driven by the urge to inflict pain to others for fun or excitement (pp. 94-96). Their analysis also falls into what they called 'essentialization' inasmuch as it also reduces the complex nature, goals and means of armed groups into three typologies, and those of combatants into five typologies, but it serves to introduce a common tendency of the motivation analysis, the classification of both motivations and individuals in accordance to standard taxonomical systems.

Regarding motivations, Ugarriza and Nussio (2015) identify five groups of justifications to join armed groups: grievances (associated to relative socio-economic position); economic incentives (wages or opportunities to capture war booties); communal links and peer pressure; allure for adventure, social status or revenge; and forced recruitment. Regarding combatants, Barrett (2011) considers that recruits of armed groups generally belong to six categories in terms of their justification to join and stay in such organizations:

- Ideologue combatants, following a conviction –often Manichean– that impels them to put the group’s ideals and goals above his/her own personal safety and security.
- Basic needs combatants, who are motivated because of considering the membership to the group as beneficial for their survival; often because of the provision of food, shelter, or protection.
- Criminal combatants, who exploit the chaos and lawlessness created by war to obtain instant gratification through violence (e.g. theft, rape, vandalism).
- Pragmatist combatants that see the armed conflict as an opportunity to achieve long-term political or economic benefits such as important positions or wealth.
- Soldier combatants, who strive for communal security or act in retaliation for what they perceived as wrongful or unjust acts, most often with the clear intention of ending the hostilities after justice is delivered.
- Follower combatants, motivated by status and social perception that could grant them a sense of belonging, often even pushing them to switch sides according to the course of events (pp. 755-759).

This is not to say that those classifications are conclusive or indispensable, but to highlight the way in which the debate on motivations to participate in armed conflict has grown both in terms of width as in depth, especially by going beyond the rigid assumptions of the homo-economicus.

The first case (regarding motivations) was extracted from an analysis of the Colombian case; the second (regarding combatants) from an analysis of armed groups in Nigeria. Interestingly enough, there are elements of each theory that can serve to cross-study particular situations of each country, as well as domains away from Colombia or Nigeria, but that underscore the importance of, first, taking the analysis of motivations to join armed groups away from the mechanical narrative of economics, and second, extracting premises from the evidence present in the reality rather than envisaging an ideal model of behavior and struggling to accommodate it to real situations.

Another interesting analysis of the motivations to join armed groups –that encompasses the aforementioned inductive reasoning– is presented by Viterna (2006), who analyzes the mobilization paths of women that joined the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador during the 1980s. While she also establishes what we call ‘taxonomical typologies’, she shows that the intersection of individual biographies, local social networks and situational contexts drove heterogeneous people through multiple paths to the same outcome (participation in the insurgencies), contrary to the popular academic belief that “a largely homogenous group [...] generally follow[s] one path to participation” (p. 2). For Viterna, despite of all being Salvadorian, middle-class women, and clustered in rural areas, many became guerrilleras for being already embedded in organizational and familial networks of activism (the politicized), while others were pushed into the insurgencies because the conflict-generated crisis left them with no other options (the reluctant), and many more were targeted by the armed groups and gradually persuaded to join under adventurous or retribution appeals (the recruited) (p. 24). The author also lays emphasis on the fact that “the pervasiveness of state-sponsored violence varied greatly during the civil war” (p. 17) for which participation also was susceptible to war dynamics.

In this vein, Eck (2014) analyzes the levels of coercion used by armed groups to recruit by suggesting that “recruitment is a dynamic process [in which armed] groups are likely to shift recruitment strategies depending on the exigencies of the conflict]” (p. 364). She presents economic and military shocks –often mutually reinforced– as the two main situations in which armed groups can modify their approach to recruitment in the following manner: for instance, decreasing access to financial resources or increasing defeats by military counterparties can push armed groups to rely of forced recruitment to deal with difficult situations within the context of confrontation, in spite of voluntariness being the optimal policy in terms of fighter commitment with armed organizations.

Viterna's study on Salvadorian female insurgents and –more recently– works analyzing the recruitment of minors introduce an important notion, namely, the differentiation between pull and push factors, which Vergani et al. (2018) characterize as follows⁹⁷:

“Push factors” overlap with the structural root causes of [involvement] that drive people toward resorting to violence, and include, for example, state repression, relative deprivation, poverty, and injustice. “Pull factors” capture the aspects that make [armed] groups and lifestyles appealing to some people, and include, for example, ideology, group belonging, group mechanisms, and other incentives. “Personal factors” include related but more specifically individual characteristics that make certain individuals more vulnerable than their circumstantially comparable peers to [involvement]. This includes for example psychological disorders, personality traits, and traumatic life experiences (p. 3).

The same authors add that

In reality, push, pull, and personal factors are all closely interrelated. Push factors, which identify contextual and structural conditions, often can be the root cause of both pull and personal factors. For example, structural conditions (such as poverty) could contribute substantially to personal conditions (such as depression and low self-esteem) while simultaneously boosting the appeal of pull factors (like material incentives or the need to belong to a group) (p. 3).

An alternative version of the push-pull factors notion is presented by Humphreys and Weinstein (2008), who condense pull factors as “the positive incentives that can be given to individuals who participate” (p. 441) (i.e. selective incentives), and push factors as the search of protection from negative repercussions of war such as violence or threats. As stated by Kalyvas & Kocher (quoted in Justino, 2009) “individuals may participate in rebellion not in spite

⁹⁷ We replaced the words ‘terrorism’ and ‘radicalization’ considering that the definition presented fits better our research interest, however the notion of ‘push and pull factors’ is used in the analysis of topics ranging from international migration to the learning of new languages, for which this is the most appropriate definition we found in connection with personal motivations to participate in armed conflict.

of risk but in order to better manage it” (p. 183) because civil wars have tended to affect negatively mostly civilians and destroy their working tools and assets, for which a symbiosis could emerge between civilians using armed groups looking for protection, and armed groups using civilians to achieve their goals (Justino, 2009).

With this in mind, it is possible to assume that any analysis of the motivations to join armed groups must take into account, on one hand, the levels of violence derived from the armed confrontation, and on the other, the resulting recruitment strategies used by armed groups, which in conjunction, precipitate diverse push and pull factors that induce individuals to join armed groups, all in order to construe a better image of the phenomenon.

This analytical stand is described by the related literature as a bridge between structural factors (macro) and personal motives or motivations (micro), by including the behavior of armed groups (meso) as a key element in the transition from ‘civilian’ or ‘noncombatant’ to ‘collaborator’ or ‘combatant’, but this idea will be elaborated in the next chapter, which constitutes the core of our research. Bosi and Della Porta (2012) summarize some of the interactions between the three levels as follows:

- The socio-political [and economic] context has a bearing on the decision to participate through the perceptions that individuals hold (macro-micro).
- The [armed group] organizational level affects the choices made by individuals (meso-micro), as the organizational recruitment strategy targets specific groups.
- At the same time, armed groups and contexts change over time as they constantly influence each other (macro-meso and meso-macro).
- Due to changes in the sociopolitical [and economic] environment, expectations spread within the armed group constituencies, and organizational strategies may need to be adapted in order to attract new recruits (macro-meso).

- Armed groups are not only influenced by their environment, but are themselves agents of change that can alter the socio-political [and economic] context, manufacturing [or hindering] opportunities (meso-macro).
- Finally, new flows of armed activists may alter the composition of an armed group and its trajectory from within [depending on the real motivations they have to join] (micro-meso) (p. 4).

One of the most prominent strands of research regarding motivations to join armed groups is dedicated to the enrolment of minors. On the basis of their physical and psychological vulnerability, the recruitment of children is generally considered as one of the most serious violations of international humanitarian law on the context of armed conflict, being the remaining, killing or maiming, sexual violence, attacks against schools or hospitals, abduction of children and denial of humanitarian access (United Nations, 2013). The recruitment of people under 18 years of age is not a new phenomenon, and although the most “frequent roles include cooks, porters, spies, informants [and] bodyguards [...] the widespread availability and low cost of lightweight, automatic weapons [have rendered children] useful fighting forces” (Wessells, 2015, pp. 237-238). The same author remarks circumstances such as living in areas affected by armed conflict, poverty, job insecurity (for both parents and children), inadequate access to education, familiar and peer involvement in (armed) conflict, and domestic violence or abuse, as risk factors that promote the participation of minors in warfare. The analysis of the motivations of children to join armed groups encompasses many of the ideas presented above, although commonly focuses in the structural push and pull factors for assuming that they are invariably victims, as remarked in the first lines of this paragraph.

The logic behind the utilization of children in warfare –assuming that they are equally capable of fighting than adults– is that “children are easier to mislead and indoctrinate, cheaper to retain, and more responsive to coercive methods” (Beber & Blattman, 2013, p. 68). In Colombia, for instance, children under the age of 14 are bound to a special legal regime and not subjects to criminal

liability, which diverse commentators consider an additional ‘advantage’ for armed groups in the sense that the crimes committed by minors are not subject to regular conviction, and the processes of ‘truth, justice and reparation’ associated to the prosecution of armed conflict activities become truncated by the same principle (Rincón Angarita, 2015).

The analysis of the recruitment of children is also important because some of its results can be extrapolated to the case of adults, for instance, the real level of voluntariness of the decision. Brett and Specht (2004) present the example of a child in Sierra Leone that “identified himself as having volunteered, but he had also witnessed the murder of his friend who refused to join [which does not resemble] the idea of voluntary recruitment” (p. 109). Such examples led the same authors to conclude that

War creates the environment for child soldiering in different ways. First, for young people war rapidly becomes the normal everyday background to their lives. Second, the war comes to them, rather than them going to look for a war to fight. Third, living in a violent situation creates the need for self-protection and to use violence to do so. Fourth, war is the cause of many of the other conditions, such as the closing of schools, exacerbated social tensions, family breakup, and increased poverty, which can also contribute to their involvement. Finally, although many children play at war games, watch war movies, and dream of the adventure and heroism of war, only some are in a position to actually try it out. Thus war is not only an environmental factor in its own right, and a root of many of the other causes that push or pull young people into participation, but also provides the opportunity (p. 10).

If one replaces the words ‘children’ or ‘young people’ in Brett and Specht’s analysis with the words ‘people’ or ‘adults’, the contentions hold, vindicating their assertion that “claims of voluntary recruitment should be treated with critical skepticism” (p. 129), especially since the widespread assumption of freedom has consistently failed to address situations in which individuals participate in armed confrontations against their will (Eck, 2014).

On the opposite shore, Maclure and Denov (2006) argue that children's role in armed conflict is not exclusively that of victims, for they "are possessed with agency and frequently act with deliberation and awareness of the meaning and consequences of their actions" (p. 121). Wessells (2015) adds that taking into account is negative connotation

It would be simplistic to assume that [child] soldiering is entirely negative [given that often times their participation in a] military group may have positive effects [in their lives] such as meeting basic needs for food, security, and health care. Moreover, soldiering may be attractive to some children because it helps to meet social needs for power, belonging, respect, and identity (p. 248).

Other studies on the motivation to join armed groups have proliferated and have established that (a) economic factors are neither the main nor the only source of it (Vinci, 2006a); (b) motivations are varied and very often not completely coherent (Gutiérrez, 2008; Ribetti, 2007), and never mutually exclusive (Ocampo, 2014); (c) war is polymorphous and motivations constantly change (Henriksen & Vinci, 2007); (d) the motives of selected individuals do not necessarily reflect the broad motivations of the group as a whole, nor the opposite (Vinci, 2006a); and (e) contrary to the recurrent assumption, joining an armed group is not always a carefully pondered decision (Ribetti, 2007).

While we could continue recapping approaches to research motivation to join armed groups, the literature is remarkably vast, for which we limit our presentation and close this section by remarking Viterna's (2006) assertion that the "search for the "typical" path to activism erroneously imposes uniform explanations on what is in reality an integrative, conjunctural, and varied mobilization process" (p. 10).

4.4. Previous studies of motivations to join armed groups in Colombia

Academic analysis of the Colombian armed conflict began in the 1980s with an emphasis on the dynamic of the peasant and workers movements that were ‘pushed to arms’ due to the elite and governmental refusal to redress land property and labor controversies. During the 1990s the literature shifted towards the analysis of the emergence of new actors (read, drug cartels and paramilitary armies) and their interrelations. In the 2000s the focus was on the (negative) effects of the war on economic performance, the plunder of natural resources by armed groups, and the strengthened links between drug traffic, and armed conflict. Recently, transversal and interdisciplinary analyses have detailed the reasons for its protraction, and broadened the spectrum of subjects and the depth of the analyses, and as part of this new exploration avenues, a modest academic agenda has emerged, steering away from the internationally dominant microeconomic assumptions of rational theory and utilitarianism to analyze the motivations of Colombian people to join NSAGs, especially insurgencies and paramilitaries for being the largest and most influential in Colombian society. In the following pages we summarize the findings of what in the literature is generally known as the ‘micro-foundations of rebellion’ (Gates, 2002) for the Colombian case, and we do so in chronological order with the intention of gauging the progression of the arguments and conclusions.

Back in the 1970s, Enrique Valencia portrayed insurgencies in Latin America as the only alternative to overcome backwardness and predominant injustice, for they represented the answer to the problems of the social structure that were not being correctly addressed by regular politics (1970, p. 337), to which Galjart (1972) added that low salaries, long working hours, unfair trade practices, and concentration of the property of land were common problems in the agrarian economy of the whole region, and explicit justifications for armed rebellions. Nevertheless, the formal study of the transformation of social mobilization into armed rebellion and the channels of individual participation were largely ignored by the academic community —not only in Colombia— for considering

that participation –irrespective of the country or the local or personal context– had one explicit and unambiguous explanation: communism and subversion⁹⁸. With the exception of Castro's (1998) short comment on insurgencies interpersonal bonding processes, no significant works surveyed the specific motivations of civilians to become rebel combatants in Colombia during the first four decades of armed struggle.

According to Florez-Morris (2007) the works made in the 1990s to analyze the process of defection from insurgencies were pioneers in the analysis of the personal motivations to the involvement in armed conflict. Those studies were made from psychoanalytical and anthropological perspectives using mainly biographies or interviews with former combatants, but –in his opinion– lacked macro-level comparative analyses.

In the early 2000s a major contribution to the subject was made by the PNUD (2003), by abridging those that could be considered as the basic range of specific motivations (excluding forced recruitment) of individuals to join NSAGs in Colombia: personal history of victimization (be it exerted by family members or by armed groups), fear and need of protection from threats, revenge, zest for status, perception of lack of alternatives, romantic relationships with members, coincidental location in historical areas of influence, familiar links, allure for weaponry and military operations, frustration from rejected applications to enroll in the state armed forces, and expected personal excitement from travel and adventure, all commonly embedded within precarious surrounding socioeconomic conditions (e.g. unsatisfied basic needs, poverty, unemployment, or restricted access to the educational system) (pp. 263-264). It should be noted that each one of those items could constitute a sizable area of research by itself.

The next major contribution to the subject was published by Human Rights Watch in the report entitled 'You'll learn not to cry', which based on 112

⁹⁸ "The act of trying to destroy or damage an established system or government" ("Subversion," n.d.).

interviews made to former combatants (79 from the FARC, 20 from the ELN, and 13 from the AUC) produced “the first comprehensive account of child combatants in Colombia, [covering] their recruitment, training, life in the ranks, role in combat, and treatment after desertion, capture, or rescue” (HRW, 2003, p. 5). The report concludes that even if

Every child has a somewhat different story for why he/she left home and joined the guerrillas or paramilitaries. There are, however, common denominators. In nearly all of the children’s accounts, poverty, deprivation, underemployment, truncated schooling, lack of affection and family support, parental ill-treatment, and insecurity intermingle as “push” factors. “Pull factors” include promises of money (usually broken in the case of the guerrillas), thoughts of an easier life, thirst for adventure, the desire for a gun and a uniform, and simple curiosity (p. 36).

In both cases, the analyzed population is children, which is presumably explained by two facts: the consideration of children as special victims of the armed confrontation because of their physical and psychological vulnerability, and more importantly, because a relatively high percentage of the people that joined armed groups did it when they were still underage. According to Springer (2012), of their adult combatants, approximately 52% of the ELN, 50% of the FARC, and 38% of the AUC, joined when they were still underage (p. 27). Of the total children recruited between 1960 and 2016 (approximately 17,000 individuals), 54% were recruited by the FARC, 26% by paramilitaries, 10% by the ELN, and the remainder by other groups (CNMH, 2017). Having in mind that it is estimated that at the heyday of the confrontation the FARC comprised nearly 22,000 combatants, the ELN nearly 5,000, and paramilitary groups at least 15,000 (Gutiérrez, 2008), 17,000 minors is not a negligible figure. The emphasis in children recruitment seems like a forced step in the analysis of motivations to join armed groups given its commonness.

Florez-Morris (2007) used 42 in-depth interviews with former members of extinct insurgencies (M-19, EPL, and CRS) to explore their decisions to join such organizations. The study notes that the majority of the subjects came from the lower (14, or the 33%) and middle (26, or the 62%) classes, while a small

minority came from the upper class (2, or the 5%), and adds that sixteen (38% of the) interviewees “stated that their economic situation was good or very good [before enrolment], eighteen [43%] said it was tolerable, and eight [19%] said it was bad or very bad”, for which he concludes –following Gurr’s relative deprivation theory– that rebels were not necessarily those “at the bottom of society but [rather people with] expectations that [could not] be achieved” (p. 619). Only a minor fraction [four subjects] mentioned to be “attracted to the guerrilla group in part because it offered “job opportunities” [including] job security, leadership training, and other job-related benefits” (p. 631).

In Florez-Morris’ subjects

The most popular motivation for joining a guerrilla movement [...] was their concern regarding socioeconomic injustice and inequality, and the desire to improve these situations [...] The second reason [was] being inspired by Communist, Theology of Liberation, and nationalist ideals as reasons to join [...] The third most common reason for joining a guerrilla movement was the individual’s previous experiences in grass-roots organizations [and] the fourth most important motivation for joining these organizations [...] was the revolutionary climate of the era (p. 620).

The author draws from Matza’s three-stage process to explain the process experienced by the recruits when resolving to enlist or not: interest in the activities and goals of the organization (affinity), contact with the organization (affiliation), and awareness with respect to his/her own activity in the organization and its probable consequences (signification), and based in the stories of the interviewees finds that in all cases –with particularities– the subjects analyzed followed a pattern resembling that model, this is, interest, contact, and active participation. It is worth observing that the armed groups in question were those small insurgencies that –as explained in Chapter 3– resulted from the splits and internal differences of groups like the FARC and the ELN (see Figure 3-1) and that for diverse reasons lived short lives, for which it is possible to consider these interviews as one approximation (if not the best known) to the study of the individual motivations to participate in the

insurgencies that emerged after the so-called ‘first generation’ (read, FARC, ELN, and EPL) and during the last years of what we called ‘a marginal war’, until the mid-1980s. Additionally, the author notes that in spite of the “strong prior interest, most interviewees took, on average, between two and a half and four years before making the decision to join a guerrilla movement” (p. 633), for which we dare to present the following contentions:

First, those were recruits before the 1980s violence upsurge, which probably signified much less pressure and/or a higher level of freedom to choose to that experienced by the inhabitants in rural areas that –as we will describe in the ‘victimization of civilians’ section– cannot remain neutral and are constantly forced to comply with whatever demands from armed groups to avoid becoming suspicious of being biased towards one side or another. The energetic official repression and the unruliness of paramilitary organizations might have served as a strong disincentive for involvement, which according to the interviews took no less than two years of careful reflection. The relative lack of economic hardship of the sample also supports this.

Second, by rearranging the four top reasons cited by Florez-Morris’ subjects in reverse order it is possible to see a mobilization pattern not mentioned in his article: in the midst of the revolutionary climate of the era individuals began to join grass-roots organizations in which they were exposed to diverse revolutionary theories which stressed matters such as socioeconomic injustice and inequality, building up their desire to improve these situations –which added to the repressive attitude of the government– resulted in participation in rebellious organizations as combatants. In other words, their declared motivation to join insurgencies proceeds from their experience in the grass-roots organizations, something that according to Florez-Morris study is a common trait to all subjects, but that he does not arrange sequentially.

On another study, Ribetti (2007) interviewed fifteen former members of insurgencies during their process of reinsertion to civilian life, half of which were in jail at the moment of the study. She observes that “most join and

continue to participate in insurgent groups for a variety of reasons that are not always clear-cut or well-articulated in their minds” but that she considers in general “selfish” for not being articulated in any form with the objectives of the armed group. She remarks that the individuals she examined were “generally too young to have great financial burdens and too uneducated to ‘know about ideology’” (p. 699) and concludes that enrolment was not a well-thought decision, “but rather a choice lightly made and based on short-lived emotions and uncertain promises” (p. 709).

Later, with the combined information extracted from 418 judiciary processes, 2,000 entries of the Colombian Institute for Childhood and Family (ICBF) database of demobilized children, official documents, and computers seized to insurgent and paramilitary commanders, Gutiérrez (2008) differentiates the incentive systems and recruitment practices of the FARC and paramilitary organizations. He remarks that the FARC is a vertical organization with severe punishments for infringement of internal rules that does not pay salaries to their members and that –with few exceptions– does not permit personal enrichment. On the other hand, describes paramilitary groups as usually composed by confederations of local armed groups defending territorial elites, often commanded by former members of the Colombian armed forces, and in which combatants receive monetary monthly salaries. For him the differences in the organizational structure of insurgencies and paramilitaries determine a great deal of the mechanisms of mobilization, and have profound consequences in terms of the permanence of the fighters in their ranks.

Minor differences surface in regard to the demographic characteristics of the groups. The FARC consist primarily of peasants with lower levels of education, and enrolls more women and younger people, while the paramilitary groups are formed by a majority of urban dwellers and former gang members. Among the commonalities, both groups prefer voluntary enrollment to avoid military risks, despite that forced recruitment is a common practice, and a great proportion of minors join due to ‘small annoyances’ or ‘fits of fury’, probably responding to extremely short time horizons and high discount rates –in the words of

Gutiérrez. This author also highlights a recruitment practice that is mentioned frequently by former FARC combatants: the offering of salaries to potential recruits despite that the group does not honor them, but that represents an important linkage between economic hardship (as a push factor) and the strategies used by armed groups (pull factors) in the enrollment process. All these issues will be analyzed in more detail later, based on our database.

Later on, Villegas de Posada (2009) used a sample of 682 demobilized (out of 5,000) that during their demobilization process were interviewed by psychologists from the Ministry of Defense in topics covering “four general areas: demographic, psycho-affective, reasons for enlistment in the group, and reasons for retirement” (p. 270), and in which twelve reasons⁹⁹ for enlisting were presented in a yes-no format. The author notes –quoting Rangel– that in insurgencies

Initially [...] idealistic peasants and students enlisted. Now enlistees are poor peasants and small-scale landowners looking for a wage and for better life conditions. In other words, in the past, people joined the guerrillas for ideological or political reasons but, today, they do so for pragmatic reasons (p. 267).

While she also remarks the importance of studying

(a) the gap between the interests of individuals and armed organizations; (b) the nature of the decision, which has emotional components; (c) the uncertainty linked to life in the illegal groups; and (d) the differences in life as civilians or as members of the guerrillas (p. 267).

⁹⁹ Lack of economic opportunities; Forced recruitment; Agreement with the ideology and [armed] group policies; Resentment against the [official] armed forces; Conflictive family situation; Attraction to the arms and camouflaged uniform; To live an adventure; Security of basic needs (work, food, and clothes); Enlistment by deceit; [Influence of] friends or relatives; Tradition or regional culture; Revenge against other illegal armed group (Villegas de Posada, 2009, p. 272).

Her analysis is reduced to the use of econometric techniques to correlate the responses given by the sampled interviewees with four underlying factors for joining (fun and adventure, economic safety, promises, and retaliation), then to correlate four underlying factors for deserting (survival, physical-psychological safety, civilian safety, justice, and self-determination) with the reasons given to do so, and ultimately to correlate motives for enrollment with motives for desertion. She finds that ‘economic safety’ and ‘promises’ were the most significant predictors of enrollment –being the former stronger in the case of paramilitaries and the latter in the case of insurgencies– and that “motives for enlistment did not correlate with motives for retirement” (p. 274). For her, “individuals are motivated to enlist in the guerrillas or in the paramilitaries because these groups offer conditions that are seen as opportunities to satisfy important motives (goals)” (p. 266) –an important point in our argument– but recommends “to expand research on guerrilla enlistment and demobilization to additional political and cultural settings to assess the generalizability of motives [...] in Colombia” (p. 278).

In a different approach, a compelling argument is presented by Valencia and Daza (2010) when they compare the motivations to join NSAGs –which coincide almost entirely with those presented by the PNUD (2003) and other authors– and motivations to join official armed forces. They quote Pardo to remark that very often the enrolment into the official armed forces is seen as “a career or profession with a high component of vocation and commitment to the nation” (p. 435), but that, first, the forced military service by which all males older than eighteen years old are obliged to join for at least one year in Colombia contradicts the idea of voluntariness, and second, the official armed forces are often seen as an attractive employment option –with high salaries and relative stability– when the labor market is experiencing downturns, making it –without neglecting completely vocation or patriotism– a valid line of work for many Colombians¹⁰⁰. In addition to that, the author contends that motivation and

¹⁰⁰ It is possible to add the special pension regime of the Colombian armed forces, in which retirement is reached after 15 or 20 years of service regardless of the age, while the rest of the

dedication of career soldiers is higher than those of conscripts, given that the former join voluntarily and get a salary for their job, while the latter are forcibly recruited and obtain only food and accommodation (p. 436).

Table 4-1: Percentage of soldiers recruited according to socioeconomic stratum¹⁰¹ and type of enrolment, 2012.

	Bachelor Soldier	Regular Soldier	Peasant Soldier
Stratum 0	10,28%	1.80%	16.42%
Stratum 1	16.82%	21.22%	14.70%
Stratum 2	55.03%	60.44%	50.48%
Stratum 3	17.11%	15.32%	18.10%
Stratum 4	0.70%	1.15%	0.30%
Stratum 5	0.04%	0.01%	n.d.
Stratum 6	0.02%	0.06%	n.d.

Source: Adapted from data in CPDH (2016, p. 25).

On a related note, the CPDH (2016) presents an analysis of forced conscription and shows how the Colombian army concentrates both their legal and illegal¹⁰² recruitment efforts in impoverished neighborhoods, as shown in Table 4-1 (above), which displays the proportion of rank and file soldiers of the

population is required to work (and declare formally) at least 1,300 weeks and reach 57 (in the case of women) or 62 years of age (in the case of men) to be legally suitable for retirement (La Opinión, 2019, dec 16).

¹⁰¹ In Colombia socioeconomic stratification is a tool for the determination of the pricing of public utilities (water, electricity, gas, communications, etc.) according to the location of the place of residence. Subsidies are granted to lower strata (poorest neighborhoods) and larger contributions are extracted from higher strata (richest neighborhoods). The lowest is 1 and the highest is 6 (SDP, 2014). The CPDH registers as the lowest stratum number zero (0) and there is no technical note in the document about this, for which we reproduce the data as in the source to maintain data fidelity.

¹⁰² In 2011 the Colombian Supreme Court declared illegal the arbitrary detentions with the aim of recruitment for military service, commonly known as ‘Batidas’ (raids, in English). A common practice –only registered and denounced after 2006– in which the Colombian army detained young people in the streets, put them into trucks and took them directly to a military base if they had not served and verified their military obligation at the moment of detention (CPDH, 2016).

Colombian army according to the type of enrollment¹⁰³ and a dummy variable for socio-economic situation. In general it is possible to see that the Colombian wealthy youth does not go to war for the official side.

Later on, Arjona and Kalyvas (2012) conducted a survey with 821 former combatants of the FARC, the ELN, and paramilitary groups (both group and individually demobilized for the latter case) to “gather evidence on three main areas: joining, group organization and practices, and demobilization” (p. 147), out of a total universe of approximately 7,100 individually demobilized and 4,400 collectively demobilized combatants at the time of the survey. The authors clarify that the sample is “not representative of the universe of irregular combatants in Colombia” (p. 149) given that all interviewees were demobilized (neglecting the opinion of non-deserters) and probably focused on the least committed or satisfied members of insurgencies (given that all of them are deserters), which they qualify as ‘selection bias’.

Among their main findings it is possible to mention that ideology (read, affinity with the political views or convictions of the group) is a less strong reason to join insurgencies than paramilitary groups, although in both cases its weight is low (14% and 16% respectively). While material benefits are cited as an important motivation to join (especially in the case of paramilitaries), “only a few respondents report having being unemployed and looking for a job at the time of enlistment (less than 3% in all groups)” (p. 157), which rests relevance to the opportunity cost premise that states that people join armed groups if the income lost by leaving a job is lower than the income to be perceived in the armed group; this applies especially for workers or the coca industry –with salaries above average– who joined insurgencies that do not pay any salary.

¹⁰³ Non-professional (read, non-voluntary and unpaid) soldiers in Colombia serve their obligatory military service in three forms: ‘Bachelor soldiers’ (who have completed high-school) must serve 12 months and ‘Peasant soldiers’ serve between 12 and 18 months, neither of which – in theory– should be sent to areas with intense combats with NSAGs; ‘Regular soldiers’ (who have not completed high-school) and/or were taken in ‘batidas’ serve between 18 and 24 months.

Nonetheless the authors also note that the majority of those recruits left temporary, precarious and/or underpaid jobs. They also observe that

Respondents in all groups report that they thought that joining was a small commitment and that they would be going home soon. This result is remarkable as it suggests that individuals often decide to join armed groups on the basis of poor information and that choices tend to be highly contingent (p. 157).

For Arjona and Kalyvas (2012) the inadequate state presence –and the resulting territorial control exerted by armed groups– have more to do with the decision of joining NSAGs than economic reasons. The high levels of threat and vulnerability along with familiar and social networks connected with the armed groups provide strong motives to enlist, for which they conclude that “recruitment is a highly localized end-product of the conflict itself” (p. 168), and that with “considerable heterogeneity both across and within individuals, [speaking about one] single, overarching, ‘master motivation’ (e.g. ‘greed’ or ‘grievance’)” makes no sense (p. 167).

Ocampo (2014) makes a detailed analysis of enrolment into armed groups for the department of Antioquia, and confirms the findings of previous studies: while the possibility of earning money to satisfy personal desires motivates recruits of paramilitary groups to a larger extent, those motivations are also present in insurgency recruits, although in the latter case the strong territorial presence of the insurgent group is more relevant. Recruits of both types of groups are characterized as young and uneducated, and to share a strong allure for military lifestyle (guns, clothing, money, power, access to women), however, to the list of motivations to join armed groups the author adds one specific motivation that was not mentioned before in the literature: incrimination, described as luring potential recruits into the commission a crime (robbery, murder) in exchange for payment or as an admission test, in order to guarantee their permanence, inasmuch as after that it is unlikely that newcomers report to the authorities or defect given their involvement or co-responsibility (p. 32).

Ugarriza and Nussio (2015) performed a meta-analysis¹⁰⁴ of all previous studies on motivation to join armed groups in Colombia (ranging from 2002 and 2015) and besides reiterating the major categories of motivations as determinants for the participation in rebel groups (grievance, selective incentives, networks, personal wishes, and coercion), they conclude that only a small minority (2% for ex-paramilitaries and 7% for ex-guerrillas) claimed to be forcibly recruited, which for them responds to the level of insertion of the armed group into the community, as that might entail different recruitment strategies and the assembly of strong networks of collaboration in which relatives and neighbors join because of communal links. The authors also remark that if two armed groups are present in the same area, individuals might tend to join the one that allows them to redress grievances committed by the other (i.e. revenge).

In parallel to the growth in the specialized literature analyzing the recruitment of children, a strand of research has focused in the process of recruitment and role of women in armed groups, and aside from the aforementioned motivations to enroll, Gutiérrez and Carranza Franco (2017) mention the possibility of women to reach “a certain degree of autonomy and personal development” otherwise unavailable in a strongly patriarchal rural society as a motivation for their enrolment in insurgencies (p. 772). Other works add the desire to escape from domestic sexual abuse or unwanted marriages as a common denominator in the case of female enrolment (Denov & Ricard-Guay, 2013; Hernández & Romero, 2003; Moreno Martín, Carmona Parra, & Tobón Hoyos, 2010). Aside from these two factors, women’s engagement in armed groups in Colombia share all the relevant components observed in the case of men or children (Herrera & Porch, 2008).

One interesting overview of recruitment dynamics is found in Gutiérrez (2010). Even though the chapter is also focused in the recruitment of minors, the author presents a comparison of the general recruitment determinants of the largest

¹⁰⁴ Defined as an “statistical analysis of a large collection of analysis results from individual studies for the purpose of integrating the findings” (Glass, 1976, p. 3).

armed groups, related to diverse aspects of its internal structure. Table 4-2 (below) is the summary presented by the author.

Table 4-2: Comparison of recruitment incentives.

Criterion	FARC	ELN	Paramilitaries
Structure	Centralized	Federalized	Localistic
Incentives			
Pay	Very seldom	Very seldom	Yes
Access to individual benefits	No	No	Yes
Relation with civil society	Low	Medium	Strongly integrated
External risk	High	High	Low to medium
Recruitment	Mainly but not only voluntary, provision of both genuine and false information	Mostly voluntary	Voluntary and forced, depending on region
Exit	Death or desertion	Death, desertion, negotiation	Death, desertion, negotiation
Discipline	Very severe	Medium-low	Medium-low, but with high internal risk
Ideology	Organizational culture	Christian militancy	Self-defense

Source: Gutiérrez (2010, p. 132).

While the table is valuable in the analysis of enrolment into armed groups in Colombia, it contains two problematic contentions. First, contrary to opposite assertions in which the same author remarks that the FARC does not pay salaries or monetary rewards (See, Gutiérrez, 2004; Gutiérrez, 2008, 2012, 2016), in this work he affirms that the FARC do pay their combatants ‘very seldom’. The difference is important inasmuch as if the group did pay salaries or bonuses –even if rarely or to individuals in commanding positions– a major inconsistency emerges between the FARC’s publicized ‘payroll’ policy, the academic standpoint on the matter, and the testimonies of potential recruits and former combatants. Secondly, the author characterizes the relationship of the FARC with civil society as ‘low’ for being “almost completely mediated by coercive-regulatory practices (weapons, policing, and market regulations)” (p.

133), which could indicate a deterioration of the relations with communities in which the FARC established politico-economic symbioses in previous stages of the conflict (e.g. coca producing regions), which in turn tends to coincide with increased levels of violence (converting enrolment into a safety opportunity) and forced recruitment.

In this work Gutiérrez presents an important criticism to Collier's 'greed' presumption of enrolment into armed groups (read, as derivative of scarce labor opportunities in the legal sector) by remarking that

Someone who has not found employment in the legal market has many options. A non-normative Colombian has many choices if he decides to work illegally. He can engage in [drug traffic], which is both more profitable and less risky than being a guerrilla. Or he can become a paramilitary, which offers pay above the Colombian minimum salary. Because there is no ethnic or religious segmentation in the country, not even a sharp territorial one, any rational expected value calculation should imply avoiding the FARC and choosing any other alternative (p. 135).

For which –for him– the many motivations of potential soldiers of NSAGs (proximity, vengeance, fear, family conflicts, coveting local power, and visibility) might as well just “constitute the intersection between story and history, between personal trajectories and big processes”, inasmuch as the discourse provided by the armed group “allows individuals to spell out their individual concerns in a universalistic idiom” (p. 140). The transformation of recruits into good soldiers happens –in his view– thanks to processes of socialization and ideological training that increase loyalty to the group and fortify the “political valence” of their participation, aided by the fact that “membership in an armed organization offers status and the possibility of upward social mobility [as well as –in the case of children–] an explicit recognition of their status as adults” (p. 140).

Villacampa and Flórez (2017) challenge the consideration of enrolment to armed groups in Colombia as a voluntary decision, given that in the majority of cases it responds to “a combination of factors, such as extreme poverty, lack of

education, lack of opportunities for income generation, family abuse or the threat of another armed group or of insecurity in the area of residence” (p. 9), which together constitute limitations to free choice, and which added to the recruitment and retention practices of the armed groups, for them qualify as human trafficking.

Alternative positions have suggested that before joining, combatants tended to have ‘normal’ lives (Florez-Morris, 2007); the risks of joining armed groups might not be as serious as anticipated given the low scale of the conflict (Ribetti, 2007), and that –occasionally– joining an armed group provides more protection than hazards (GMH, 2013; Ocampo, 2014); the fulfilment of personal ambitions within an armed groups will largely depend on the role and/or rank of the individual in the organization (Ribetti, 2007); and that NSAGs do have barriers to entry, which challenges the assumption that ‘anyone’ interested in joining such a group is automatically accepted (Gutiérrez, 2012). These propositions will be addressed further ahead.

In general, the scarce exhaustive works on the motivations to join armed groups in Colombia conclude that motivations are quite diverse, interwoven and ever-changing, but that there are common factors such as dysfunctional familiar contexts, socioeconomic marginality, and violent surrounding environments that exert influence to join; that political ideology has lost importance as a motive to join –at least after the formation of the first generation insurgencies– and got replaced by ‘more practical’ and material-oriented goals; that material benefits are cited as an important motivation to join armed groups –more frequently in paramilitary groups, but less frequently than predicted by the ‘greed theory’– even though in many cases recruits were employed; and that a high proportion of the recruits were still underage at the moment of enrolment, for which their decision conveys the impression of being impulsive, not well-informed, or forced.

The specialized literature regarding motivations of people in Colombian to join armed groups have opened multiple research trajectories and played a part in

the surmounting of the (neo)classical description of enrollment into armed groups as the dichotomy between ‘ideologists’ and ‘opportunists’ that has dominated the literature thanks to the aforementioned works of Paul Collier; however, it is possible to present the following objections:

First, comprehensive studies not focused in children are quite scarce, which might seem surprising given the penetration rate of the armed conflict in the Colombian society and the number of citizens involved, but that presumably responds to the frequency with which minors are recruited.

Second, the analyses commonly consider recruits in binary states (civilian or combatant), disregarding the progression of the relation between the individuals and the armed groups (e.g. affinity, contact and full involvement, following Matza) which in turn result from conflict dynamics (escalation or stagnation) manifested in the macro-meso-micro interactions.

Third, under the assumption that armed groups are homogenous organizations, recruitment practices (pull factors) are also considered homogeneous, and no intergroup, intertemporal or interregional comparisons are made in terms of (offered) incentives or motives.

Lastly, the literature does not go beyond the description (or enumeration) of the diverse types of motivations to study them or their synergy in detail; this is, any listed macro factor (e.g. poverty or unemployment) is automatically connected with any listed meso strategy (e.g. promises or forced recruitment) and with any listed micro rationale (e.g. domestic abuse or appetite for adventure, social status or revenge), for which all possible combinations have the same result. Put in another way, if two individuals –one enticed by the promise of money, and the other seeking social status– join an armed group in a region stricken by poverty, the logical connection is poverty-enrollment given that the result (enrolment) and the context (poverty) are the same, yet, in our view, the trajectories and motivating mechanisms are different.

While the temporal and geographical span of the Colombian armed conflict is wide enough to feed a myriad of intellectual inquiries and there are still grey areas on several issues, the theoretical and empirical approximations to the study of combatants' motivations in Colombia have contributed to reveal a broad range of factors and a multiplicity of conditions, interactions and situations that compel individuals to join armed groups, that above all, corroborate that either the homo-economicus does not apply to the Colombian case or that Colombians (and a few foreigners¹⁰⁵) are not rational utility-maximizing individuals, at least regarding participation into armed groups.

Before moving into our core study, we will introduce a key aspect for our analysis, namely, the victimization of civilians. Its importance lies in the fact that, first, the studies of motivations to join armed groups often mention victimization (in any of its diverse expressions) as the cause for enrolling, for being a mechanism of protection, revenge, or compensation from previous wrong-doings; second, the conflict that emerges when the idea of joining an armed group is contrasted with the evidence regarding the damages they (the armed groups) cause to the communities surrounding potential recruits, this is, the passing from being a victim (or not being one yet) to become a victimizer; and third, it showcases the level of affectation of the armed conflict in people's lives, validating the assertions regarding how 'the war comes to people instead of them going out to look for it' (Brett & Specht, 2004).

4.5. Victimization of the community

¹⁰⁵ The census made to 10,015 members of the FARC after the signature of the peace agreement with the Colombian government in 2016 reports 84 foreign members in the insurgency, being Venezuelans (54), Ecuadorians (16) and Brazilians (8) the majority of them (AFP, 2017, jul 6). Notable examples include Tanja Nijmeijer (Dutch) who joined the FARC in the early 2000s after teaching English in the city of Pereira –arguing to fight against socioeconomic inequality– (Escobar Moreno, 2016, jul 13), and Manuel Pérez –an Spanish priest– that joined the ELN in the late 1960s after being expelled from Dominican Republic and Colombia due to subversive activities, to later become its commander until his death in 1993 (El Heraldó, 2017, jul 6).

By request of the government in place, in 1987 the Commission of Studies about Violence (CEV) established a general diagnosis of the situation of violence in Colombia, with aims to “recommend measures to stop its unsettling advancement” (CEV, 1988, p. 10). The report begins with a noteworthy assertion:

Violence has its roots in the unique features of the Colombian society, and it is not exerted exclusively by the poor –many times as an understandable expression, when not legitimate, of rebellion– but also it is employed against them systematically (p. 17).

The Commission reported that the vast majority of the violence afflicting Colombia at the time lied in private relations (read, citizen-citizen) and not in the relation between citizens and the state (like insurgent groups), for which they concluded that “more than 90% of the victims cannot be considered as of political nature, since they do not result from the confrontation between the state and individuals that try to substitute it; they are essentially victims of violence generated by social inequality” (p. 18). In other words, they considered insurgency as the only form of organized violence (present in Colombia at the moment) with a true or evident political content, but not the main cause of victimization. While their analysis is Clausewitzian in the sense of considering that “war is merely the continuation of politics by other means” (as quoted in Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013, p. 180), they arguably failed to recognize the political aims of other groups they considered as ‘civilians’, bypassed the deaths of noncombatants caused by groups with unspoken political aims, or omitted forms of violence or victimization that perhaps at the time were not as visible as now.

In order to provide one last element for the contextualization of the conflict as determinant for the enrollment in insurgencies –namely, degradation– we expand the analysis with the inclusion of additional forms of violence to those reported by the Commission, and that we think were omitted or misjudged as not political; we exemplify such forms of violence in terms of more recent expressions; and we present a brief summary of the victimization reports made

by the most recent and complete studies on the matter in order to gauge the destructive power of the armed conflict in the social fabric.

First and foremost, we will clarify three key concepts we adopt to substantiate our analysis. Drawing from Peters (2004) and from Nicholson (2004) we understand politics as the relations of power established between social groups to steer the society towards the achievement of a determined array of goals, and in which violence (or force) is one way of enforcing obedience. This definition is important inasmuch as all the interest groups involved in the Colombian armed conflict have tried –personally or by proxy– to lead society in a determined direction, to obtain certain material gains, or to improve their position in the power relations scheme to do either. For that reason Uribe López (2011) remarks that “wars have never ever been disinterested” (p. 30). For the CEV, the killing or displacement of one family by paramilitary groups might not be as ‘political’ as stealing Simon Bolívar’s sword, but the act might be as well part of a macro-process of –say– land accumulation deeply articulated with some determined economic model of production, hence, political in the sense of being related to the management and direction of society.

Secondly, ‘victims’ will be understood as “members of the civilian population that suffer damages in their lives, or a serious deterioration of their personal integrity or possessions, caused by [attacks, combats, and any other kind of actions] within the context of the armed conflict” (Montoya Ruiz, 2008, p. 45). Here the literature draws a clear boundary between combatants and noncombatants, by remarking that the former do not constitute victims, but war casualties.

Thirdly, the levels of individual participation in the conflict will be based on the definitions presented by Downes (2008) when he discriminates ‘combatants’ as “all organized armed forces, groups and units which are under a command responsible to that party for the conduct of its subordinates, as well as individuals involved in the construction of weapons” from ‘noncombatants’, or the individuals that “do not participate in armed conflict by fighting, carrying

weapons, serving in the uniformed military or security services, or building weapons” (p. 14). He adds that civilian victimization can result from (a) “a government-sanctioned policy or strategy, as opposed to random or uncoordinated attacks” (p. 15) such as the starvation blockades of World War I or the bombings of World War II –both attempted to ‘reduce the morale’ of the enemy and force it to surrender–, counterinsurgency attacks on noncombatants intended to deter the population from providing support to rebel forces, and territorial annexation; or (b) when combatants “employ force so indiscriminately that it inflict large amounts of damage and death on noncombatants” (p. 15), and often called ‘collateral damage’.

In this regard the Colombian case presents a singular peculiarity, well described by Fichtl (2004) and that we reproduce *in extenso* in order to portray situation in the best possible way:

Some civilians —albeit a tiny minority— do actively collaborate as committed informers or partisans for the armed groups, while not going as far as bearing arms for the militants and thus not forfeiting their noncombatant status [...]

[However] the majority of Colombia’s civilians are caught in a situation where they must be cautious at all turns not to display allegiance or aversion to [any] armed group(s) that hold(s) sway in the region where they live and work [...]

[The situation is further complicated] in some towns [in which armed actors share or constantly swap territorial control, which] creates ambiguities as to who is in authority, generating additional opportunities for civilians to fall prey to accusations of collaboration with one side or another. For the bulk of the civilian population, who seek to remain neutral in the conflict, daily life presents ample opportunities to be accused by the ever-observant armed groups of having collaborated with their opposition [...]

[One example is peasants that] must harvest their crops and collect their livestock, then transport their goods from the countryside toward the market towns, and possibly onward to the larger cities. In so doing, the [peasant] may cross multiple “fronts” of the conflict, and pass through checkpoints of various armed groups just to bring part of his or her harvest to sell at market. The [sole] movement of goods across enemy lines presents openings for accusations of collaboration with multiple

sides: What did you do in town? Who did you talk to? Were [enemy] checkpoints on the road? Did you tell the army we had a checkpoint on the road? Do you sell produce to the paramilitaries? Do you sell produce to the guerrillas? Of course, the real question is, does the [peasant] have a choice? [...]

Colombian civilians face an almost impossible task if they are to avoid the perception that they are collaborators or sympathizers with the armed groups that happen to control the neighborhood or village where they live, work, shop, study and/or worship. One misstep or unguarded statement can lead a civilian to be accused of collaboration with an armed group [which leads immediately and inescapably to] summary executions, [preferred by armed groups] over the convoluted machinations of trials or the awkwardness of taking accused collaborators captive. [The execution] ends any potential for collaboration and closes the case irrevocably, while also sending a crystal-clear message to the local population that the armed group will not tolerate such activities [...]

One recurrent theme in accusations of collaboration is “guilt by association” [and in which] most victims are never afforded a chance to prove their guilt or innocence. In this climate, if one person is accused of collaboration with an armed faction, his or her entire family is often considered suspect. This principle has frequently been applied to the entire populations of towns, especially by the state security forces in reference to towns and villages in guerrilla-dominated areas [...]

[For those reasons] civilians are caught between two or more armed groups and forced to make “choices” that will invariably aggravate one of the armed actors. There are countless incidents of shopkeepers in rural small towns who [often forcedly] have sold produce or supplies to one armed group, only to be accused of collaboration with that group when a rival armed faction comes to town [...]

The same principle is readily applied to other forms of succor, such as providing shelter or assistance [or allowing the use of one’s property as warehouse] to persons alleged to be members or partisans of an armed group; [in all cases] this “collaboration” is punishable by death [...]

Civilians have to parse their words carefully whenever in contact with any of the armed groups so as to avoid a potential verbal slip-up that might make them appear prejudiced toward one side or another.

In light of the above, the boundaries between combatant, member, collaborator and sympathizer become awfully cloudy, making the determination of the political, economic, collective or private nature of any form of victimization problematic, to say the least. Based on this, for us ‘combatant’ will be understood as an armed individual supporting the military or strategic activities of an armed group, willingly or not; this classification excludes ‘milicianos’, or active collaborators of armed groups that provide services such as intelligence, transportation, trading, and the like, without formally or explicitly enrolling on the armed group nor participating in armed confrontations. By contrast, ‘noncombatant’ or ‘civilian’ is an individual that do not participate in the military or strategic activities of the armed group, or does it under threat or fearing retaliation. For us the key in the characterization is willingness. In the following table we summarize our characterization.

Table 4-3: Characterization of individual participation in armed conflict.

	Willingly	Unwillingly
Armed confrontation (yes)	-Combatants	-Combatants (forcedly recruited)
Armed confrontation (no)	-Milicianos -Suppliers	-Civilians -Noncombatants

Source: Own construction.

Hence, if an individual is coerced by an armed group to provide shelter, victuals (with payment or not), storage or information, or to withhold it from the enemy (e.g. deny the presence of an armed group or mislead a group regarding the activities of other), while he/she is helping the strategic and military goals of the armed group, remains a civilian in our view. Cases in which an individual declared to the armed group that he/she preferred to remain neutral and not support any group have been amply documented, but the result was either death or forced collaboration. Trejos Rosero (2013b) quotes Schelenker et al. to provide a powerful note in this regard:

The commander of the First Division of the army in 1998, General Víctor Julio Álvarez, regarding the peace communities of San José de Apartadó¹⁰⁶, declared publicly that: Neutrality is just an instrument of army detractors to isolate the population [...] The so-called neutrality is a made-up-story of our enemies [...] intended to separate us and isolate us from the population [...] I think that those who act in that way are useful idiots or willing sympathizers of the interests of subversive groups in Colombia, or conceivably foreigners (p. 123).

The author (Trejos Rosero) concludes that “pressure against civil society is not exerted only by illegal armed groups; the state through its armed forces also coerces and instrumentalizes noncombatant population (p. 123). For instance, the Colombian armed forces have used civilian children as paid informants, messengers, and infiltrators of insurgencies (CNMH, 2017; HRW, 2003).

In line with Collins (2009), who remarks that when two armies fall in a military stalemate and lock in war of attrition it is common for the war to expand “beyond the battlefield to become a war on the entire society, including civilians” (p. 19), the expansion of the confrontation between insurgencies, the state, paramilitary groups and drug cartels produced every day more noncombatant victims, making Colombian armed conflict a typical case of a Kaldorian ‘new war’ in the sense that, on one hand “battles are becoming rare and most violence is directed against civilians [...] the ratio of civilian to military casualties has increased dramatically and [...] the scale of forced population displacement per conflict is increasing” (Kaldor, 2012, p. 208); on the other, “it is very difficult to distinguish whether civilians were killed as a side effect of

¹⁰⁶ In 1996 the communities of several municipalities in Chocó –for years victims of murder, torture, sexual violence, threats and forced displacement from members of the FARC, the EPL, paramilitary groups and the Colombian army– decided to become a neutral community. After intermediation of the Catholic Church (the Red Cross refused for only mediating between armed actors and never between civilians) they stopped participating in any direct or indirect form in the war by ceasing carrying firearms and not providing food, shelter, fuel, transportation, messaging services and alike to any armed group, legal or not. The peace community has lasted 22 years (Martínez, 2019, apr 9; Trejos Rosero, 2013b).

battle, as a result of deliberate violence, political or criminal, or as a result of the indirect effects of war –privation and disease–“ (Kaldor, 2012, pp. 211-212).

Despite this, one interesting contention is presented by Kalyvas (2006) when he argues that there is a tendency to see noncombatants as always “passive, manipulated, or invisible” victims of violence, and to ignore the fact that “they often manipulate central actors into helping them fight their own conflicts” (p. 390). This contention is supported by Waldmann (2007) when he observes that it is often “difficult to draw a clear separating line between “perpetrators” and “victims,” because an individual can alternate between the two roles depending on the conflict constellation and power relations” (p. 604). This idea is important for being embodied in two remarkable examples of the Colombian society: the wealthy landholders, cattle ranchers and entrepreneurs that were first victims of extortion, kidnapping or assaults by insurgencies, and later perpetrators of displacement and dispossession with the help of paramilitary groups; and the modest and impoverished citizens that were first victims of violence and become perpetrators after joining armed groups.

After formulating the general conceptual and contextual guidelines of our presentation, we borrow from the CEV findings to adapt the Table 2-1 (see Chapter 2) with the inclusion of additional forms of violence not present in their report. The result is presented in table 4-4 (below)¹⁰⁷. The CEV concludes that not only political violence changed its nature, but also began to coexist, overlap and mutually feedback with other modalities of violence. This has resulted in misfortune and death for a great deal of the Colombian population (and a handful of foreign citizens as well), with no major changes since the propagation of violence in the 1980s. Mauricio Romero –quoted in Trejos Rosero (2013b)– defines the situation in Colombia as a “durable disarray” in which the state/government is not capable of addressing the core problems of the society but neither permits the system to collapse completely (p. 114).

¹⁰⁷ The (C) sign denotes the forms of violence reported by the CEV (1988). The (+) sign denotes the additional or mutated forms of violence included by us.

Table 4-4: Classification of violence forms present in Colombia.

Initiator	Target		
	State (Official Armed Forces)	Non-State Armed groups	Civilians
	State (Official Armed Forces)	(+) The state against insurgencies in defense of the status quo.	(C) Official armed forces against civilians with aims to repress. (C) Official armed forces against civilians in illegal and covert counterinsurgent operations.
	Non-State Armed groups	(+) Insurgencies and paramilitary groups against each other in contests for territory or resources control or attempt to mutual eradication.	(+) Insurgencies against infrastructure (public and private) to terrorize and/or extract extortions. (+) Insurgencies and paramilitary groups against civilians in contests for territory or to retaliate or prevent support to enemies.
Civilians	(+) Drug cartels against public officers or politicians to intimidate or silence them.	(+) Drug cartels against insurgencies to protect their assets or in retaliation for damages.	(C) Drug cartels against journalists to silence them. (C) Drug cartels against private individuals or against other criminal organizations for plunder or retaliation. (C) Common delinquency. (C) 'Social cleansing'. (+) Elites against groups claiming for redistribution.

Source: Own construction based on CEV (1988) and Merari (1993).

According to the latest update¹⁰⁸ of the consolidated victim database (Registro Único de Víctimas) between 1985 and 2020, an approximate of 9,000,000 individuals have been uniquely identified and recognized as victims of the armed conflict in Colombia¹⁰⁹. The following table displays a basic classification of the victims reported by the RUV, that according to the GMH (2013) does not include fatal victims affiliated to armed groups (read, combatants) and/or occurred during military actions, which are registered in separate databases by forensic and military authorities.

Table 4-5: Estimated victims classified by victimization type.

Victimization type	Number of victims
Homicide	1,037,271
Forced disappearing	180,524
Forced displacement	8,027,045
Kidnapping	37,402
Torture	10,809
Mutilation due to landmine or unexploded munitions	11,705
Sexual violence	30,092
Bodily injuries	9,481
Land abandonment or forced dispossession	23,054
Loss of movable and immovable assets	119,686

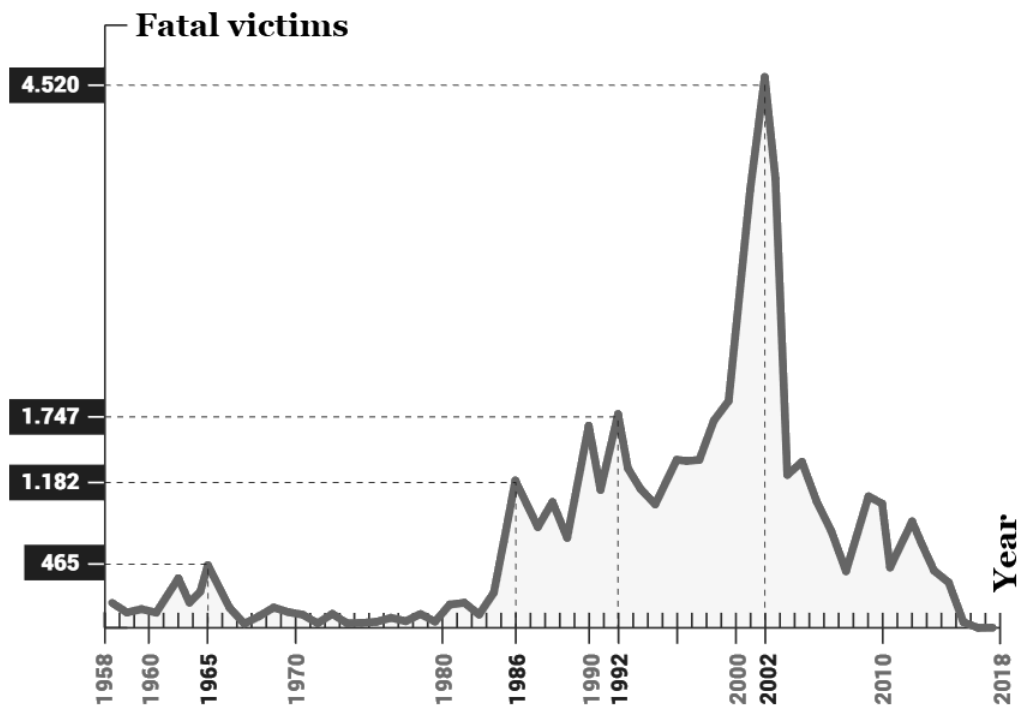
Source: Own construction with data from RUV (2020).

¹⁰⁸ All historic memory databases clarify that the figures are subject to constant change due to the depuration, filtering and refining processes.

¹⁰⁹ The GMH (2013) warns about under-reporting problems in all dimensions of the Colombian armed conflict caused by a late start for data collection and processing combined with logistical and methodological complications, all accentuated by the long duration of the conflict, the constant transformations of the violent repertoires and the overlapping of multiple types of violence (p. 31). Additionally, they observe that the legal framework only recognizes as victims the cases reported after January the 1st of 1985, which automatically excludes 11,200 victims documented by them between 1958 and 1984 (p. 32).

The approximate 46,600 fatal victims of combats between 1958 and 2018 (out of which 3,750 were civilians) (OMC, 2020), compared to the nine million noncombatant victims, reinforce the assertion that lately violence is “directed towards civilians rather than against enemy forces” (Kaldor, 2013, p. 3).

Graph 4-1: Fatal victims in combats, 1958-2018.



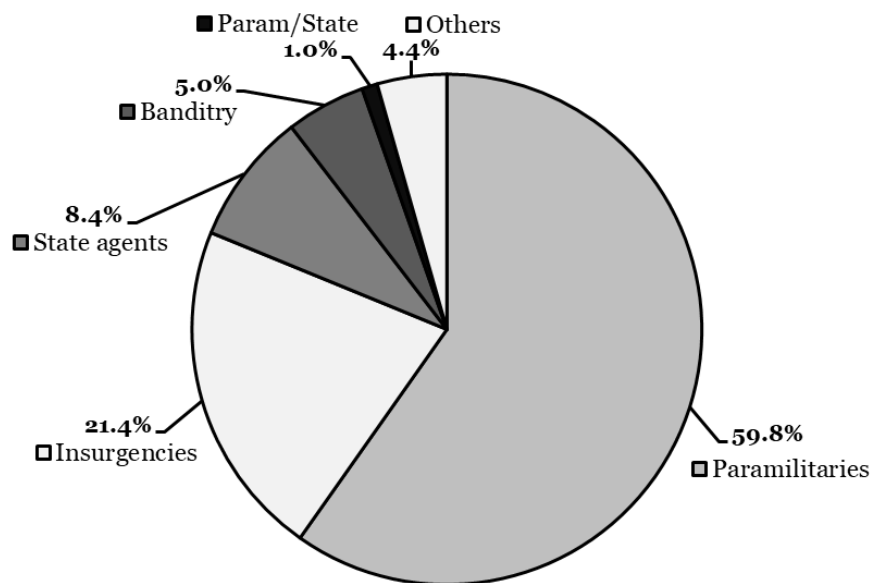
Source: OMC (2020).

Aside from that, there are many instances in which an aggression has not active opposition by the target, configuring what Restrepo, Spagat, and Vargas (2006) define as an ‘attack’ –as opposed to a ‘combat’ in which “there is fire exchange between two or more armed groups” (p. 515). When the attack is executed by organized armed groups such as insurgencies or paramilitaries and has more than four fatal victims¹¹⁰ it tends to be regarded and reported as a ‘massacre’, otherwise it is considered as ‘selective homicide’. Nieto (2012) remarks that ‘massacre’ was not a defined category in International Human Right Law nor in

¹¹⁰ Waldmann (2007, p. 599).

Colombian law until recently¹¹¹, for which he proposes to consider as a massacre –in the Colombian context– all collective extrajudicial or arbitrary executions, performed with cruelty, to people in state of defenselessness. So defined, the OMC (2020) reports 4,210 massacres between 1958 and 2018 in Colombia, with a toll of 24,440 fatal victims, out of which 23,930 were civilians and 480 combatants.

Graph 4-2: Proportion of total massacres by identified author, 1958-2018.



Source: Adapted from OMC (2020)¹¹².

¹¹¹ In 2013 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the following definition in order to be able to investigate massacre reports: “An intentional mass killing of civilians not directly participating in hostilities, or hors de combat fighters, by organized armed forces or groups in a single incident, in violation of international human rights or humanitarian law [including] the war crime of sentencing or execution without due process [and which is] committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population [or] perpetrated pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy [...] may amount to the crime against humanity (p. 10).

¹¹² The ‘Others’ category includes groups identified by the source as ‘post-demobilization groups’ (commonly referred to as ‘dissidences’), ‘non-resolved armed groups’ (undefined), and ‘others’. ‘Param/State’ means incidents in which the joint participation of paramilitary groups and state agents was explicit and noticeable. See for instance ‘Operation Orion’ (Verdad Abierta, 2012, oct 16). The source listed 673 additional events in which the armed group was never fully identified.

Regarding victimization forms against civilians, Ávila (2019) remarks that “the FARC used more kidnapping, paramilitaries privileged massacres and displacement, and the ELN preferred the sabotage to the national energy infrastructure [which] does not mean that armed actors did not employ all kinds of repertoires” (p. 49).

Massacres became ‘useful’ for commonly being followed by massive displacement, a situation that was often exploited by opportunists to later dedicate the newly evacuated areas to agribusinesses, livestock, and mining (Ávila, 2019; Villamizar, 2017), but also to produce what Avila calls ‘political homogenization’, this is, the gradual removal of political dissent by decimating union members, agrarian leaders, and human rights advocates, alongside with obligatory support to determined political candidates (p. 404). *Revista Semana* (2013) accounts the assassination of almost 3,000 union members and 137 journalists between 1977 and 2012, and another 3,000 mayors, councilmen, candidates and public officers since 1986.

Based on survivor stories, the GMH (2013) underlines how in spite of being ordinarily attributed to paramilitaries alone, the vast majority of their massacres counted with official support, be it through action or omission:

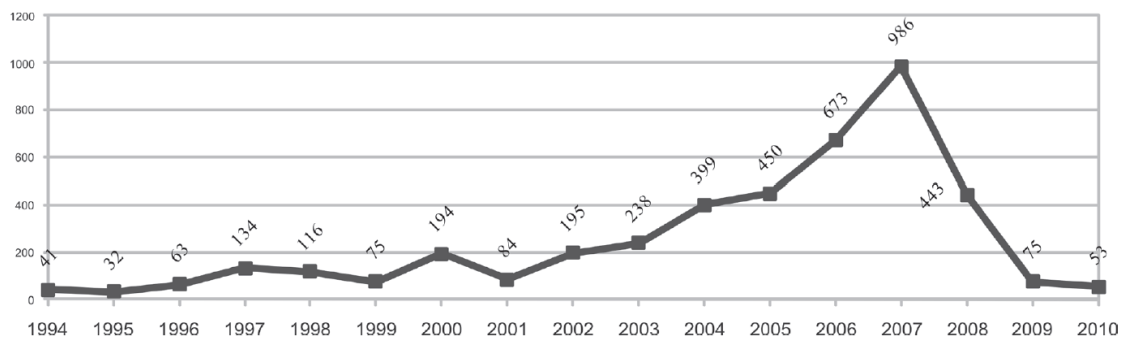
Paramilitary massacres were usually marked by the unusual absence of authorities. It is incredible that armed groups arrived to and departed from a town by foot, with dozens of hostages, or mobilized in pickup caravans filled with armed men, without being detected, especially in regions with large military bases or police stations in the way or the area (p. 343).

In addition, they stress how at some point, by request of their legal counterparts

Paramilitaries switched from massacres to single murders because in their words “one thing is to investigate a massacre and another thing to investigate isolated murders” [...] it was necessary to improve the international image of the country in terms of human rights protection (p. 199).

A special case of massacres –that gained major notoriety in the last two decades– are the extrajudicial executions organized and performed by members of the armed forces with the intention of demonstrating improvement in operational results to obtain rewards. According to the FIDH (2012) the executions responded, on one side to the increasing demand for “quick, tangible and measurable results” on the ‘war against insurgency’ derived from the growing investment in national defense and that gradually deformed into the consideration of battle-deaths as the better indicator of operational success; on the other, to the assignation of sizable budgetary provisions –subject to discretionary management by battalion commanders– to the implementation of reward systems split in (a) the payment of cash to civilians for providing information leading to the capture or death of insurgency leaders or drug lords, and (b) the payment of cash and/or the granting of vacation permits, commendations, decorations, and promotions to military personnel reporting improvements in operational results (read, battle-deaths).

Graph 4-3: Extrajudicial executions by Colombian armed forces, 1994-2010.



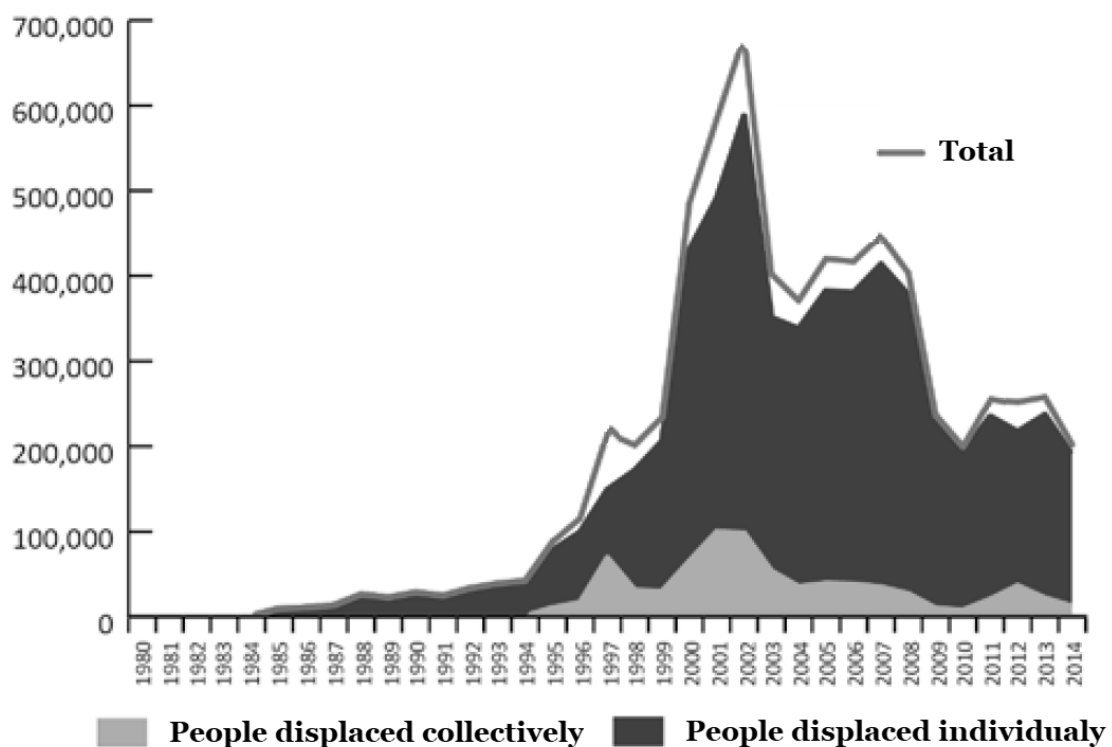
Source: CCEEU (2013, p. 24).

Members of the Colombian armed forces, in conspiracy with civilians, recruited (with false job opportunities) or kidnapped young people in poor regions to execute them and later dress them with military gear and weaponry, and present them as ‘insurgents killed in combat’; peasants previously assassinated by paramilitary groups were also reported as insurgents killed in combat in a practice commonly known as ‘false positives’. The Human Rights Observatory of

the CCEEU attributes 4,251 extrajudicial executions with direct responsibility of the Colombian armed forces between 1994 and 2010 (2013, p. 12).

Moreover, motivated either by the urgency to escape crossfire between different armed groups, or by the selective pressure of multiple actors coveting their territories, millions of Colombian citizens have been displaced from their lands (CNHM, 2015).

Graph 4-4: People forcedly displaced in Colombia, 1980-2014.



Source: CNMH (2015, p. 57).

Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, and Vargas (2015) found correspondence between displacement and land accumulation by studying land occupation patterns in one municipality¹¹³ characterized by high levels of armed confrontation and

¹¹³ 'Las Pavas' was a large estate used for livestock breeding before the 1980s until Pablo Escobar's uncle bought the hacienda. When the ELN and the FARC began to extort him, steal cattle and kidnap landowners, the Escobar family left that one and many other surrounding estates abandoned. Peasants associations used those lands for farming until paramilitaries –

peasant migration. They conclude that the expansion and degradation of armed conflict was not only used as a military strategy to deprive enemy factions of social or economic support, but also as a cover to a deliberate process of primitive accumulation, and a gradual transition from small-scale farming to commercial agriculture. While they prevent against generalizing ‘a macro narrative’ out of one single case, they consider it representative of the effect of armed conflict in rural economies. As noted before, an extensive literature analyzes the relation between the expansion of agribusiness, mineral extraction, and infrastructure projects, and the aggravation of armed conflict in some regions, but is not presented here to center our attention in a ‘characterization’ with a view to the analysis of enrollment¹¹⁴.

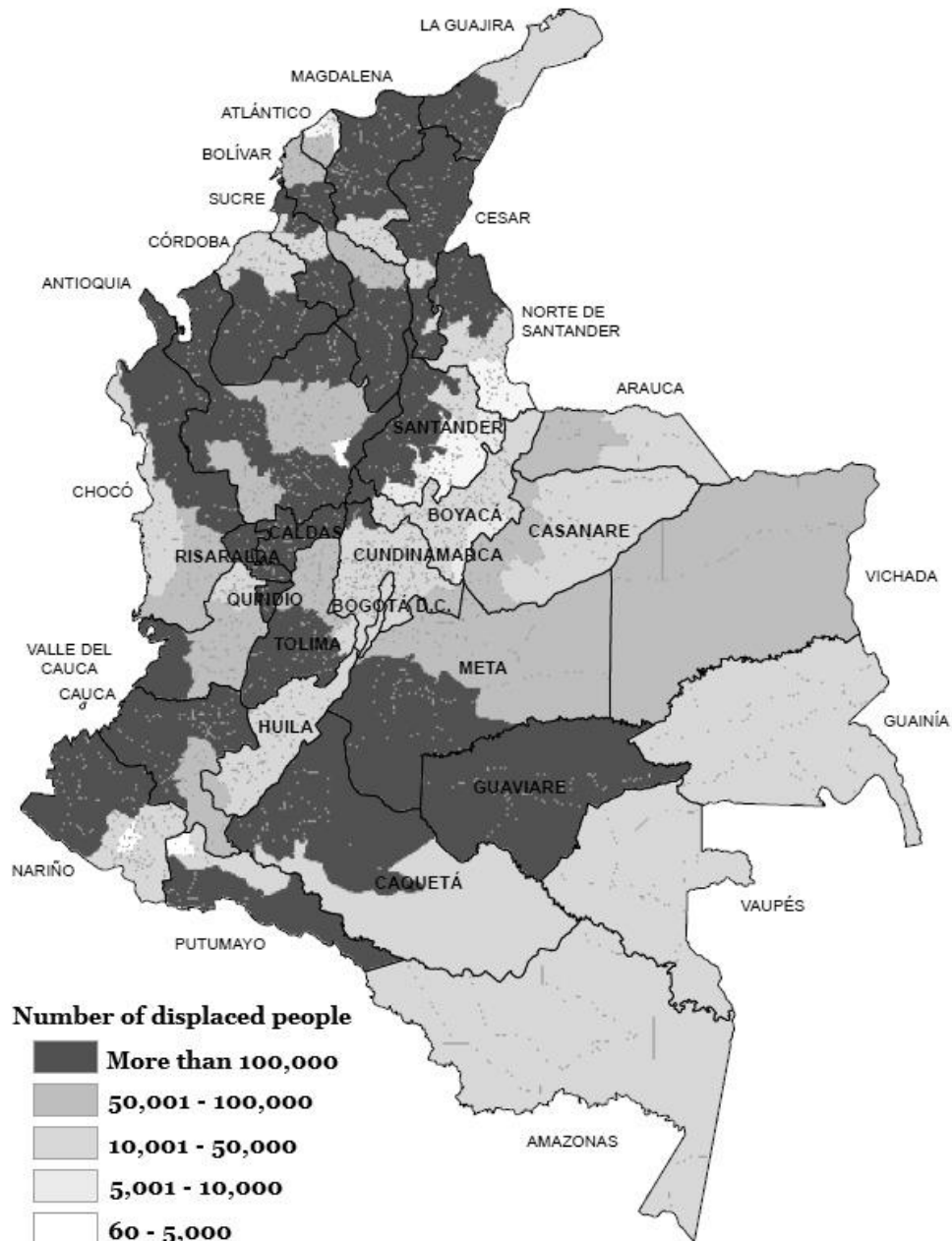
Lastly, we present a general panorama of forced displacement, drawing from the work of the CNMH (2015). Although the phenomenon affects nearly the whole country (see Map 4-1, below), the regions most affected share characteristics such as being marginal areas of late colonization, with large concentration of land property and abundant history of agrarian struggle, with emerging economic development poles despite of having low average income, and often being ancestral territories of black and indigenous communities, in which the aggravation of the armed conflict brought constant disputes for control and the simultaneous confluence of diverse armed actors (p. 144). Displacement most often goes without report and much less indictment or conviction, for which commonly remains unpunished. The victims declare fear for retaliation, uncertainty about the alleged perpetrator, and even complicity of the authorities receiving the complaint with the perpetrators to cover their actions (p. 313). Regarding responsibility, 2.7 million displaced declare not knowing the identity of the perpetrator, another 2.7 million blame insurgencies, 1.4 million blame

acting on behalf of the Escobars— expelled them in the early 2000s. After paramilitary demobilization peasants regained control of the lands, only to be expelled again in 2006 by armed groups at the service of an international commodity conglomerate that brought the land to produce Palm oil (Gómez, Sánchez-Ayala, & Vargas, 2015, p. 262).

¹¹⁴ See Note 74 in Chapter 3.

paramilitaries, 250,000 blame new banditry groups and 20,000 blame the state armed forces for their displacement (p. 323).

Map 4-1: Historical intensity of forced displacement.



Source: CNMH (2015, p. 137).

The GMH (2013) remarks that almost every displaced family moves to cities only to live in appalling conditions, which further contributes to deteriorate

their quality of life, reinforces their vulnerability, and ensnare them in constant situations of precariousness in which daily subsistence is priority (p. 325).

In socio-economic terms, the CNMH (2015) posits that contemporary Colombia has been profoundly affected by displacement in terms of rural depopulation, accelerated –but disorganized– urbanization and/or reconfiguration of the cities that receive the displaced population, as well as the generalized increase of structural poverty (p. 225); Kay and Salazar (2001) believe that the rural population of Colombia is the biggest victim of the armed conflict inasmuch as it is victimized by its four major political (we would add, armed) actors, namely, the state, the paramilitaries, the insurgencies and the drug lords (p. 174); and Flores (2014) observes that while “rich landowners consistently could access the local and national state apparatus to protect their interests, smallholders found the same avenues closed to them” (p. 24).

For the GMH (2013) violence in Colombia is commonplace, albeit, firstly, frequently atomized in few or individual acts (e.g. two homicides, one rape, one attack, etc.) which limits its visibility to the local sphere, and secondly, vastly concentrated in rural areas, thus invisible for the major urban centers which perceive it as distant from a relative economic comfort and political stability atmosphere. Regarding this, we borrow from Jeong (2008), who remarks how the harmful “nature of [a] stalemate is not clear-cut in a low intens[ity] conflict with costs being dispersed over time” (p. 188), for which, if compared with the estimated casualties of the World Wars¹¹⁵ in a combined span of 10 years, the 9 million victims¹¹⁶ resulting from the Colombian armed conflict over a period of 50 years would appear insignificant.

¹¹⁵ Royde-Smith and Showalter (2020) estimate 8,5 million military deaths and 13 million civilian deaths in the World War I, and Royde-Smith and Hughes (2020) estimate between 35 and 60 million total deaths in the World War II, in both cases, without considering other forms of victimization such as displacement, wounding or disabling.

¹¹⁶ Registro Único de Víctimas (RUV) (2020).

4.6. Conclusion

In spite of being predominantly applied in issues related to education and human resources management, the concept of motivation and its theoretical constructs have served to open our eyes to the complexity of human decision, especially with respect to the involvement in armed confrontation, nevertheless, its variation across individuals and situations, its ever-changing character, the combination of psychological and social (read, environmental) factors at interplay, and the impossibility to measure or determine it with certainty or objectively constitute major challenges to its analysis. In addition to such dilemmas, the complexity of the interactions between the social, political and economic context, the armed groups, and the individuals, has brought additional layers of intricacy to an already complicated matter.

With aims to simplify the phenomenon in order to better grasp it, the development of conceptual devices such as the homo-economicus led the analysis astray, and only in recent times, heterodox visions on the matter have reemerged to broaden and deepen the analysis, to include sociological, anthropological and psychological approaches to the research of the issue, thanks to which academics have also reached partial agreement in terms of acknowledging that joining an armed group is not always a carefully pondered, rational and well-informed decision as commonly assumed, but neither a completely free and voluntary choice.

Regarding the analysis of motivations to join armed groups in Colombia, the research is scarce but detached from the homo-economicus interpretations, and in spite of taking into account the multiplicity of factors involved, it is often restricted to the enumeration of motives, guided by the assumption that armed groups (and their recruiting strategies) are homogenous in time and space, and that despite of their specificities the people that join such organizations do it on account of a common victimizing background. While the second contention might be true to some extent, stalling the analysis at that point might misguide the conclusions and policies to tackle the situation.

The most comprehensive studies for Colombian recruits are focused on minors –probably under the assumption that the enrolment of adults is a totally voluntary decision (like choosing a job), or a choice, for that matter– and conflict dynamics (such as escalation or stagnation) are often overlooked as modifiers of the interactions between the individuals, the armed groups, and the society as a whole.

Lastly, homicide and displacement are the most commonly cited and analyzed forms of victimization (trap in which we ourselves have fallen along this work), but violent repertoires such as forced disappearing, kidnapping, torture, mutilation, wounding, sexual abuse, forced dispossession and the psychological anguish and trauma that all this entails, constitute, first, evidence of the permanent utilization of violence in Colombia to settle political and economic conflict, and second, potential incentives for people to enroll in armed group in order to procure protection, revenge, or compensation, which we will discuss further in depth in the following chapter, by placing an emphasis on comparing the disparate (or similar) circumstances generated by the interaction of social, political and economic factors.

As stated in the opening quote of this chapter “human action is purposeful behavior”, accordingly, we want to understand better the purposes of tens of thousands of individuals to join insurgencies in Colombia.

5. MOTIVATIONS TO JOIN INSURGENCIES IN COLOMBIA

“Before going to the guerrilla I only had training
in hunting, shooting arrows and spears”

–I-006

5.1. Introduction

The quote opening this chapter comes from one demobilized from the FARC insurgency in 2017. I-006¹¹⁷ describes how after passing the traditional manhood test of his tribe –training in hunting– at age 12 he became a ‘Raspachín’ (read, coca leaf collector), and how after some months performing that activity he decided to join the FARC with “interest in obtaining a job and handling a firearm” as the reason to do so.

I-006 is (or was) a member of the Nukak, the last nomadic tribe officially contacted in Colombian Amazon rainforest, which, after being first contacted by land colonists in 1965 and their own accidental incursion into ‘civilized’ territories in 1988, has been gradually displaced from their ancestral homelands and subsumed into the cultural, political and economic dynamics of the modern world (Mahecha & Franky, 2011). The situation of the tribe worsened during the 1990s when the constant presence of ‘the white people’ –as they call them– in their territories brought diseases to which they were not immune, decimating the majority of its population, and later in the early 2000s, when paramilitary groups and the FARC began competing for control of the region –with aims to use the Guaviare jungles for the production of coca– aggravating the displacement situation, forcing tribespeople to work as sharecroppers in nearby haciendas or to put themselves at the service of such armed groups. Currently, those who want to return to their territories after the demobilization of the paramilitary groups and the signature of the peace agreement with the FARC cannot do it because the region is plagued with anti-personnel mines (Mahecha & Franky, 2011; Zimmermann, 2016, dec 09).

This case –although exceptional– demonstrates the extent to which armed conflict and/or drug traffic have spread across Colombian territory and society,

¹¹⁷ In compliance with the confidentiality agreement established with the data source and to ensure the protection of their identity, henceforth all direct quotations from interviewees will be referenced in the format I-000, meaning ‘Interviewee’ or ‘Individual’ number 000, with numbers ranging from 001 to 578.

but the response of I-006 also draws attention to the fact that one member of a hunter-gatherer tribe was (or is) interested in securing “a job”. This relates to a controversy reviewed by the UN (2009) about the growing disturbances generated by the arrival of resource-extractive, touristic and infrastructure projects to indigenous habitats, the loss of traditional lands and territories, the commoditization of ancient tribal knowledge (i.e. consumer products, pharmaceutical drugs, cosmetics and handicrafts), the loss of tribal cultural expressions and traditions, and in general, the “lack of control over their own ways of life” (p. 21), which often forces their migration to urban areas.

In this case, and as quoted several times in this work, the war (and the production of cocaine) came to the Nukak tribe instead of them going out to search for it, for which it is essential to examine to what extent I-006 joined, the coca industry first and the FARC insurgency later, out of his own volition.

Aside from the fact –already demonstrated by diverse authors for diverse contexts– that economic factors are neither the main nor the only motivation to join armed groups, that individual and group motivations constantly change, that the motives the former do not necessarily reflect the broad motivations of the latter as a whole nor vice versa, and that joining an armed group is rarely a well-informed or carefully examined decision and much less a completely free and voluntary choice as commonly assumed, cases such as the one of I-006 reveal how the motivations to join an armed group might result precisely from the forced influence of such group in the individual’s environment.

In the following pages we present our main argument regarding the motivations to join insurgencies –and by extension armed groups– in Colombia, based on a more detailed analysis of the information extracted from interviews to demobilized combatants, namely, that the ‘greed or grievance’ notion has little explanatory power or that it is unable to capture the nuances of the individual process of enrolment into armed groups –at least for the Colombian case– and that in case of being motivated by material rewards, the economic motivations of people in Colombia to join armed groups should not be considered as ‘greed’.

5.2. Data presentation

In the early 2000s, when the conflict reached new highs under increased governmental military offensive, there was also a drastic increase in the number of demobilizations from NSAGs. Combatants of diverse armed groups began surrendering themselves individually into military bases across Colombia, which according to the related literature responded to several factors: the new escalation of the armed confrontations that began to generate weariness in the society at large; the consolidation of a favorable legal framework (in terms of the guarantee of shelter, food, clothing, transportation, and legal assistance) to demobilized combatants (CIDH, 2007, pp. 36-37); and the combination of strategies –beyond the military sphere– among which the most prominent is the use of advertising campaigns (mostly television and radio commercials) aimed to demoralize insurgent troops and to encourage individual demobilization through messages –based in interviews made to former demobilized and/or infiltrators– in which the state invited combatants to leave behind the hardship and frustrations of the insurgent life (e.g. strenuous physical work, incapacitating injuries, impossibility to spend holidays with the family, constant military siege, legal liability, etc.) and to make use of the juridical, social and economic benefits of the demobilization programs (Berrío, 2012).

As a result, in the last twenty years of the armed conflict –according to the most recent reports of the ARN (2020)– an approximate of 75,000 people have demobilized from diverse NSAGs in Colombia, being 36,400 from the AUC; from the FARC 19,900 individually and 13,300 in compliance with the peace agreement signed in 2016; 4,800 from the ELN; and 570 from other armed groups.

The Group of Humanitarian Attention to Demobilized (Grupo de Atención Humanitaria al Desmovilizado, GADH) –attached to the Colombian army– is the office in charge of the assistance to individuals that demobilize formally from NSAGs in Colombia. The process of demobilization includes detailed open interviews made by social workers, psychologists, and physicians covering (a) a

psychosocial, health, and educational evaluation at the moment of demobilization; (b) a review of the major milestones in life history, and familiar and productive context prior to the enrollment into the armed group; (c) a summary of the psychosocial, health, and educational evolution of the demobilized during the intervention process for their reintegration into civilian life, and (d) the life project foreseen by the former combatant for his/her new life as a civilian after concluding the process of intervention and resocialization.

Under their surveillance –and governed by a strict confidentiality contract– the GADH granted us access to the interview repository of approximately 1,300 demobilized individuals attended by the bureau between 2015 and 2017, allowing us to extract annotations regarding familiar and productive context prior to enrollment, as well as the specific motivations to join. To the best of our knowledge there are no audio recordings of the interviews, and the information accessed consists of the transcripts (written in third person) made by the professionals in charge of the interviews, with occasional quotations in first person perspective for specific details recounted by the interviewees.

Within the ‘life history’ section of the interview, the former combatants describe biographical excerpts of their own life and of their immediate family members; the educational attainment and their profession and income (if any) at the moment of enrolment; the particular circumstances that led them to join (or collaborate with) the armed group and the motivation(s) they had at the moment to do so; their role and personal experience inside the group; and the motivation(s) to abandon the group. Due to the access limitations we managed to extract only the following information from the interviews:

- Gender
- Department of Birth
- Maximum educational level attained before enrollment
- Reason(s) to stop education
- Age of start of working life
- Occupation prior to enrollment

- Daily income prior to enrollment¹¹⁸
- Income use
- Age at the moment of joining
- Reason(s) to join the armed group
- Armed group to which the individual enrolled
- Year of enrolment
- Type of involvement, and
- Membership of family members in armed groups at the moment of enrolment.

The following pages present a generic review of the information extracted (adding notes regarding its limitations and advantages) while postponing the in-deep analysis and the methodological approach of the research to the next sections.

As acknowledged by the aforementioned works of Arjona and Kalyvas (2012) and Ugarriza and Craig (2012), given that all interviewees are demobilized, a common critique to this type of sample is its potential ‘selection bias’, defined as “a systematic difference between [...] those who participate in the study and those who do not (affecting generalizability)” (Barratt, Kirwan, & Shantikumar, 2018, para. 19). In addition to that, Vargas and Restrepo-Jaramillo (2016) observe that “using official sources to study an internal armed conflict is a debatable choice as the data and even the definition of variables may be biased” (p. 477), yet, in defense of this specific cluster –and of related studies based on similar samples– we can argue that comparisons with other groups (e.g. enticed but non-recruited, active combatants, collectively demobilized, etc.) prove always challenging because obtaining first-hand information on the matter is generally difficult (Gutiérrez, 2008), data collection becomes ever more limited and/or a dangerous activity during war time (Cramer, 1999; Wessells, 2015), and “active combatants live in clandestine sites” (Villegas de Posada, 2009, p.

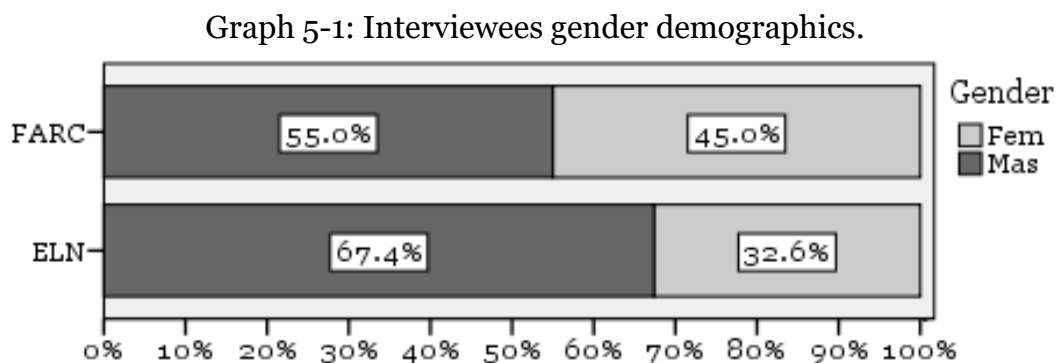
¹¹⁸ Only a small minority of the selected interviewees (exactly 32) provided specific figures regarding income, most likely because they were not asked.

268). What is more, to the best of our knowledge, neither *in situ* or *in tempore* surveys have been made to inquire newcomers about the circumstances that led them to be there or their personal motivations to join, nor ethnography-like studies that collect detailed information of the groups in their common location or under everyday settings.

In essence, in Colombia, (almost) all the information regarding the functioning of armed groups comes either from official sources such as the army (intelligence services, military divisions, etc.), non-military governmental agencies in charge of humanitarian attention to the general population, armed groups commanders, and former members, all of which is susceptible of being catalogued as duplicated, flawed, incomplete or biased. However, first, it is the best –if not the only– source at disposal, and, for instance, the exhaustive works presented by the CNMH (2017) and HRW (2003) –also based in interviews to demobilized children– have not being regarded as spurious by academia, because even though “surveys of ex-combatants cannot fully account for the complex nature of discourses, attitudes, and emotions [involved in the process of enrollment, or the armed conflict development] the data generated [allows] to identify important relationships between variables” (Ugarriza & Craig, 2012, p. 454). Second, as remarked by Korostoff (2017, feb 21), “big data, survey research, ethnographic studies, focus groups, and customer analytics all have in common [the fact that] they are all imperfect [...] they have their respective strengths, but none of them yield perfect data” (para. 1-3). In view of the above, we work with the best available inputs.

While the insights presented here are by no means generalizable to current or former combatants, they provide pointers that can be useful to understand better the phenomenon of enrolment into insurgencies in Colombia, and later, to expand its analysis beyond the ‘greed’ assumptions.

Our cluster consisted of 592 interviews¹¹⁹, but 14 were discarded for belonging to former members of the EPL (a group we do not analyze here), resulting in 578 functional interviews, out of which 440 belong to former FARC members and 138 to former ELN members. Out of the total, 335 individuals (58%) are males and 243 (42%) are females¹²⁰. The graph 5-1 (below) summarizes the gender distribution of our cluster according to the NSAG.



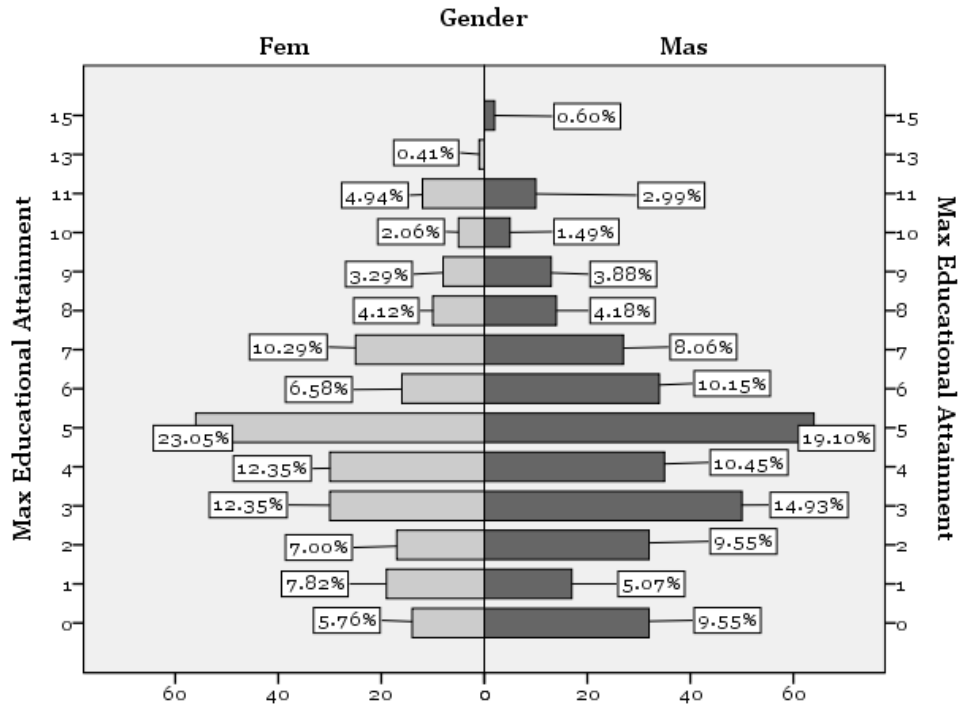
Source: Own construction.

Regarding educational attainment, the Graph 5-2 (below) displays the maximum level of schooling reached by the individuals before their enrollment into the insurgencies, segmented by gender. The majority of the respondents (350, or the 60.6%) reached only elementary school (grades 1 to 5), and 179 of them (the 31%) reached secondary school (grades 6 to 11); regarding tertiary education, only one person declared to have received technical formation, and two university education –although not completed. Lastly, 46 people (the 8%) did not receive schooling at all (zero in the graph).

¹¹⁹ Interviews were in digital format (DOC, PDF) and separated in folders by year. After merging all files in one single folder, interviews were selected by generating a random number between 1 and 1,321 in the website www.random.org, nevertheless we do not posit that the interviews serve as a statistically representative or unbiased sample of the universe of combatants or demobilized, given that all correspond to individual demobilizations, limited to the 2015-2017 period, and no formal techniques were used to establish an optimal sample size or to select them, for which we will avoid the use of the word 'sample' to avoid identifying our work with statistically-based studies.

¹²⁰ None of them identified as belonging to a non-binary gender identity.

Graph 5-2: Educational attainment by gender.



Source: Own construction.

Among the reasons to stop the educational process (summarized in Table 5-1, below), the enrolment into the armed group stands out within the single reasons with 22.8% of the cases, nevertheless, economic-related reasons such as insufficient resources to cover the expenses (tuition, transportation, school supplies, or food), the beginning of working life (often forced by parents), and the need (or eagerness) to obtain income agglomerate 42% of the cases.

We borrow from Stewart (1985) in our operative definition of ‘basic livelihoods’ as a determinant of the ‘need’ or ‘eagerness’ for income described by the interviewees. The access to food and water, shelter and clothing are considered as a bundle of goods that “every human being ought to have in order to live a decent life” (p. 2) and that –in spite of being society-specific– in conjunction with universal access to health and education services, represent the vital minimum required to contribute to the ultimate objective of improving “the conditions of life (or quality of life)” (p. 3).

Table 5-1: First reason declared to stop education¹²¹.

Reason	Gender		Total	%
	Fem	Mas		
Enrollment to armed group	85	47	132	22.8%
Insufficient resources	30	46	76	13.1%
Start job life	21	47	68	11.8%
Lack of interest	19	48	67	11.6%
Eagerness for income ¹²²	2	37	39	6.7%
Need for income	6	32	38	6.6%
Relocation	10	18	28	4.8%
Forced to work	8	14	22	3.8%
Difficult access	13	8	21	3.6%
Educational context problems	8	9	17	2.9%
Parents forced retirement	11	3	14	2.4%
Armed conflict incident	4	4	8	1.4%
Marital union	6	2	8	1.4%
No school available	3	4	7	1.2%
Displacement	3	2	5	0.9%
Ran away from home	3	2	5	0.9%
Familiar problems	-	5	5	0.9%
Pregnancy	4	-	4	0.7%
Medical condition	3	1	4	0.7%
Orphanage	1	3	4	0.7%
Domestic violence	1	1	2	0.3%
Caretaking sick parent	1	-	1	0.2%
Military service	-	1	1	0.2%
Avoid military service	-	1	1	0.2%
Kidnapping	1	-	1	0.2%

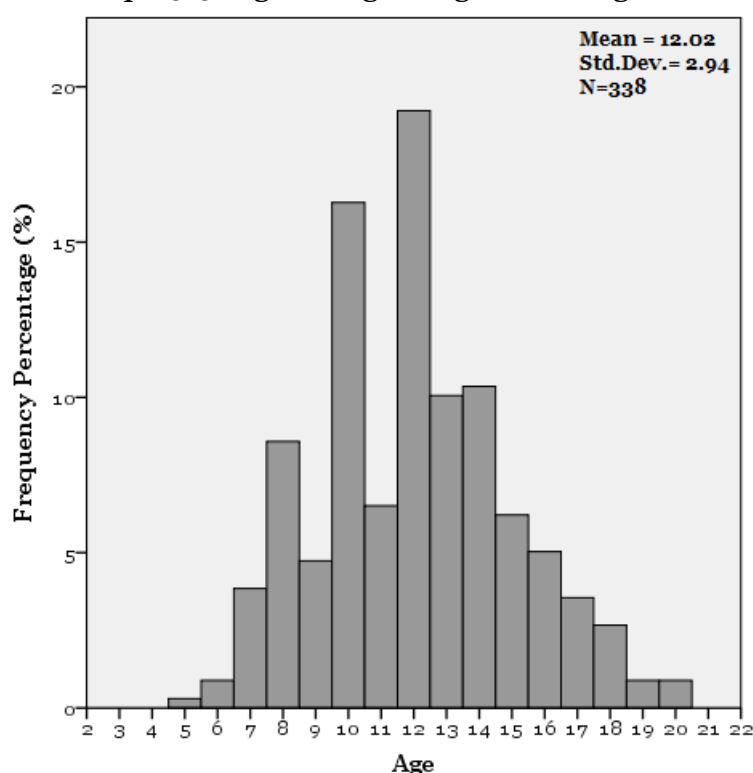
Source: Own construction.

¹²¹ All the categories presented in this section correspond to the literal responses of interviewees, which is patent in –for instance– the category “ran away from home”.

¹²² We coded two separate categories in this regard depending of the description of the situation made by the interviewees: ‘Need for income’ is when obtaining income was urgent for the satisfaction of basic personal or familiar livelihoods, while ‘Eagerness for income’ is when basic livelihoods were covered but the individual wanted to satisfy personal indulgence wishes such as branded clothes or footwear, technological devices (commonly mobile phones), or vehicles (usually motorbikes and cars). The ‘necessary’ or ‘luxurious’ character of mobile phones or cars in modern life is not debated here.

Graph 5-3 (below)¹²³ displays the age at which the demobilized individuals of our cluster began to work¹²⁴. The outcome underscores the assertion made by Navarro —quoted in Patiño Orozco and Patiño Gaviria (2012)— of how “at the rural level the youth does not exist as a symbolic category in the same way that it is understood in the city, inasmuch as young people assume rapidly the same roles of adults” (p. 518).

Graph 5-3: Age of beginning of working life.



Source: Own construction.

¹²³ It is worth mentioning that not all the interviewees provided an answer to this question (or were not asked about it), for which the graphic is based only in 338 interviews.

¹²⁴ Works is defined as “any activity performed [...] to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for own use [...] irrespective of its formal or informal character or the legality of the activity, [but excluding] activities that do not involve producing goods or services (e.g. begging and stealing). [It can be performed] in market units (i.e. corporations), non-market units (i.e. government and non-profit institutions), or in households that produce goods or services for own final use [...] in exchange of pay or profit, but also in the form of unpaid training or volunteerism” (ICLS, 2013, pp. 2-3).

Table 5-2: Occupation before enrolment into insurgencies.

Occupation	Gender		Total	%
	Fem	Mas		
Farm worker (wage)	15	102	117	20.2%
Student	90	24	114	19.7%
Farm help (family estate)	35	73	108	18.7%
Coca collector	3	47	50	8.7%
Various occupations ¹²⁵	9	38	47	8.1%
Housework	29	2	31	5.4%
Maid	21	-	21	3.6%
Cook	12	-	12	2.1%
Peddler	4	8	12	2.1%
Store clerk	6	4	10	1.7%
Construction worker	-	9	9	1.6%
Miner	-	8	8	1.4%
Babysitter	6	-	6	1.0%
None	2	3	5	0.9%
Bartender-Waiter	4	-	4	0.7%
Cattle management	-	3	3	0.5%
Mechanic	-	3	3	0.5%
Fisherman	-	2	2	0.3%
Wood worker	-	2	2	0.3%
Multinational employee	1	1	2	0.3%
Driver	-	2	2	0.3%
School teacher	1	1	2	0.3%
Sexual worker	2	-	2	0.3%

Source: Own construction.

Regarding occupation before enrolment the Table 5-2 (above) displays the occupation of 99% of the interviewees¹²⁶. Here it is worth noting that 47.6% of the cluster was dedicated to agricultural work before their enrollment, out of which, 50 individuals were working as coca leave collectors (known as ‘Raspachínes’ in Colombia). We will come back this issue in the next sections, but at this point, we caution about a second major limitation (or criticism) to the use of interviews: the truthfulness of the answers.

¹²⁵ For clarification, ‘various occupations’ is not a regrouping created by us, but (again) the literal answer of interviewees that –we presume– had multiple short-term occupations.

¹²⁶ The remainder embodies six occupations with only one case each.

Puyana and Barreto (1994) posit that life-story interviews are commonly intended to provide alternative versions of social history, on the grounds of personal experiences and subjective connections between the individual and social institutions (p. 185), and which cannot be done in closed interviews or through closed questionnaires (with fixed answers to fixed questions). Ojermark (2007) adds that life-story interviews allow researchers “to examine the relationships between cause and effect, and agency and structure [and to link] macro and micro processes” (p. 2), given that

Life history interviews allow individuals to discuss not only themselves, and their lives, but also the social, economic, and political spaces that individuals inhabit. Thus, they can be used to communicate how structure and agency intersect to produce the circumstances of a particular person’s life. Lastly, life histories capture processes of change (p. 3).

Despite of such advantages, Veras (2010) observes that “in the 1940s, along with the development and great acceptance of advanced statistical techniques, this kind of instrument [life story] was relegated to a less noble area of social sciences [under arguments of search of total] objectivity in the sciences” (p. 143). For us, the connections between the individual and the social context tend to be completely neglected in econometric models, and –drawing from Veras (2010)– “the qualitative information was transformed to single dimension (numbers) and some of the qualitative meaning was lost” (p. 157).

Common criticisms to open and/or life-story interviews are the influence of the particular settings of the interview (location, procedures, length, level of rapport, etc.), or characteristics of the interviewer (race, class, gender, age, authority level, etc.) that can generate dominance or resistance to determined issues; restraints that might push interviewees to compromise meaning or accuracy for the sake of expediency (read, fast responses), or that might drive them to respond what they think the interviewer would like to hear; and the potential information loss resulting from transcriptions that omit non-verbal aspects of communication (tone, intensity, gestures, etc.) (Scheurich, 1995, p. 244). On the other hand, “a person might have a well-rehearsed story to tell

[and let alone the fact that] stories are likely to change over time and in their retellings” (Nunkoosing, 2005, p. 701). In addition, Scott and Alwin (1998) remark that “most people have imperfect memories of their past lives” (p. 125), for which “in general, the longer the recall period, the greater the concerns about the reliability of retrospective data” (p. 118).

The latter authors add that “retrospective data also can be very misleading, especially when the individual efforts to present a coherent, socially acceptable [image of themselves]” (p. 126), which relates to Tourangeau and Yan’s (2007) contention that survey questions regarding ‘sensitive topics’ (e.g. drug use, sexual behaviors, voting, and income) (p. 860) tend to suffer from major problems of error generated by misreporting or nonresponse, given that such issues entail “questions that trigger social desirability concerns, [...] that are seen as intrusive by the respondents, or that raise concerns about the possible repercussions of disclosing the information” (p. 859). All in all, aside from its scarcity and retrieval intricacies, obtaining personal information regarding participation in armed conflict suffers from common problems such as reporting biases, ‘colored’ memories and imperfect sampling frames (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008, p. 453).

The GADH interviews can be reproached for several of those characteristics. First, they were conducted by (civilian personnel of) the Colombian army, in a context in which participants are aspiring to be accepted and become recipients of the benefits offered by reintegration programs, for which they might have felt pressured to provide specific answers. Second, transcriptions were made by diverse professionals in different office branches, which might have reduced uniformity in the questions, direction, or development of the interviews, for which some interviews provide information others do not (e.g. motivations to join, exact enrolment location, income figures, etc.), and no explicit investigative agenda is noticeable. Third, ‘sensitive issues’ such as involvement in or commission of crimes (kidnapping, theft, traffic, bombing, rape, homicide, etc.) as well as embarrassment for being part of what the majority of civil society finds as deplorable or outrageous behaviors, might have compelled interviewees

to misinform their specific motivations or activities within the group; what is more, potential juridical implications of their actions could also urge former combatants to overemphasize ‘forced recruitment’ as the reason to enroll, thanks to its potential mitigating effect in legal terms. Lastly, people that joined decades ago –and even those who joined few years ago– might have rationalized¹²⁷ their vision about the whole experience, including the reasons for enrolment. Our defense of the data source has two strands:

In the theoretical realm of the matter, it is possible to quote Pedraz Marcos et al. (2014) when they remark that the word investigation –as in the English word research– is rooted in the Latin expression *vestigium*, which literally means “traces” or “clues”; for them, research is the way in which data (defined by them as a minimum unit of information about something) is used to gain partial knowledge about reality, through ‘vestiges’. While data on measurable aspects of society and life is commonly quantitative and treated through statistical methods with a view to determine causal explanations, qualitative data is more useful when attempting to “capture the social meaning of things, a meaning that cannot be counted or measured, but that must be gathered through interpretation” (p. 13). Roulston (2010) quotes Mishler to remark that in qualitative studies (like ours) “the ‘critical issue is not the determination of one singular and absolute “truth” but the assessment of the relative plausibility of an interpretation when compared with other specific and potentially plausible alternative interpretations” (p. 202), for which the credibility of participants (interviewees) and witnesses (interviewers) is more important than the guarantee of “evidence-based, replicable, objective, and generalizable” knowledge (p. 220). Ultimately, “the quest for absolute and certain knowledge [...] is replaced by a notion of defensible claims” (Kuzmanic, 2009, p. 43).

¹²⁷ Rationalization (in psychology) is defined as the replacement or modification of explanations for one’s actions, thoughts, or feelings with more socially acceptable ones, in order to cover up the real motives and/or better deal with internal emotional conflicts (Knoll, Starrs, & Perry, 2016).

In the same line of thought, Guba (1981) argues that “there are many paradigms for arriving at [the] “truth” [and researchers seek] to select that paradigm whose assumptions are best met by the phenomenon being investigated” (p. 76). For him, while the ‘rationalistic’ approach focuses in the scrutiny of one single reality, attempting to make generalizations (read, enduring truth statements that are context-free), and rigor is the best criterion to assess quality, the ‘naturalistic’ approach considers the existence of multiple realities, in which many rationalistic assumptions are unsuitable and “generalizations are not possible, [for which the] best what one can hope for are “working hypotheses” that relate to a particular context” (p. 77). Therefore, given that “human behavior is rarely if ever context-free” (p. 78), the ‘naturalistic’ approach is the best option to analyze social and behavioral phenomena, with a view “to form working hypotheses that may be transferred from one context to another depending upon the degree of “fit” between the contexts” (p. 81), and having relevance as the major criterion for assessing its quality. Following Kuzmanic (2009), “according to this account, there is no sense in establishing validity in qualitative research as the search for ‘truth’ itself makes no sense” (p. 41), since there is no universal truth on these matters.

Regarding the type of interviews available for our research, for Atkinson (2002) “a life story is the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived [as well as] what the person remembers of it and what he or she wants others to know of it” (p. 125) for which “historical truth is not the main issue in [such type of] narrative; telling a story implies a certain, maybe unique, point of view [and] it is more important that the life story be deemed “trustworthy” than that it be “true”” (p. 134). For Nunkoosing (2005) in spite of its deceit problems (yet to be solved), the interview is not the end of the research process but rather a tool for “the “generation of hypotheses or theories that lead to further studies” (p. 701), and while perhaps not all of “what is talked can be an exact replication of what [was indeed] lived and experienced” (p. 705), it cannot be assumed that it is completely untrue, irrelevant or disconnected from the context in which it happened or is described. For Junqueira et al. (2014) what the individual tells is a reflection of what he/she experienced or what is real to him/her, and lastly, for

Maines –quoted in Scott and Alwin (1998)– “all social science data are made up of human interpretations, and nearly all such data are reconstructions or representations of past events and experiences” (p. 127).

We also adhere to Puyana and Barreto (1994), who remark that the goal is to find commonalities in the diverse stories –without neglecting particularities and specificities– for which the ligation between personal life stories and social, cultural, and economic contexts can lead to the construction of representative cases that shape a ‘major history’ that at the same time can be the story of one, of any, or the story of none of the individuals interviewed (p. 194).

Based on the foregoing, we do not pretend to find “the truth” about motivations to join insurgencies in Colombia –because there is none– but rather to outline a plausible articulation mechanism between the socioeconomic context, the recruitment necessities and strategies of armed groups, and the personal motivations to enroll into such groups, as well as to assess the interpretations given to the phenomenon thus far. For this reason, the crucial attributes for our study should be credibility (of the sources), relevance, and plausibility, which we underpin in the empirical realm of the issue.

Regarding those attributes (credibility, relevance, and plausibility) we plead that, firstly, the (transcriptions of the) interviews do not display positions of authority by the interviewers, nor pressure with the purpose of obtaining information beyond physical or psychological health, life history milestones, or progress made during the reintegration process. There are no signs of interest in the confession of crimes, the admission of guilt, or the disclosure of military intelligence information regarding insurgent groups¹²⁸.

¹²⁸ None of the interviews reviewed contained questions regarding the participation in military activities (e.g. attacks, bombings, etc.) or the commission of crimes; neither requests of intelligence information (operational capabilities, geographical data, staff, etc.) nor statements such as “[NAME] refuses to provide information regarding [TOPIC]”. On the contrary, in sensitive issues like interpersonal relations or sexual matters (abuse, abortions, etc.) it is common to see expressions such as “[NAME] prefers not to talk about it at the moment”, which

Secondly, there are no indications that benefits of the reintegration program are granted or removed depending of the circumstances of enrolment or the information provided, even when demobilized individuals admitted the commission of crimes¹²⁹; the comments of the interviewers are limited to recommendations on psychological attention or reinforcement of educational processes rather than punishment, threats, or exclusion from the benefit program based on the stories related. Additionally –as we shall see below– while ‘forced recruitment’ appears often as the main reason of involvement, the vast majority the interviewees admitted openly other types of motivations (read, voluntary), which does not suggest fear to legal repercussions or exclusion from the reintegration program.

Thirdly, it should be noted that the stories provided by participants are cross-checked in order to distinguish real from fraudulent demobilized¹³⁰. The verification of –among other things– the front (read, squadron) they were part of, the geographic location of activities, the names and aliases of commanders and colleagues, etc., as well as cross-references given by other participants (often family members or intimate partners) of the demobilization program, helps to determine the consistency of the story, to either admit the demobilized in the program or to face the legal consequences of their false testimony and

would suggest that the interviews resembled a conversation respectful of interviewee’s privacy and choices rather than a military interrogatory.

¹²⁹ Alternative and reduced sentences are granted to former combatants, in parallel to humanitarian assistance (education, health, formal identification, economic support, and entrepreneurial and legal guidance), in order to facilitate their adequate reintegration into civil society, even before their submission to the Special Justice System for the Peace (or Justicia Especial para la Paz, JEP in Spanish), and also before the verification of their testimonies, as we describe in our third argument.

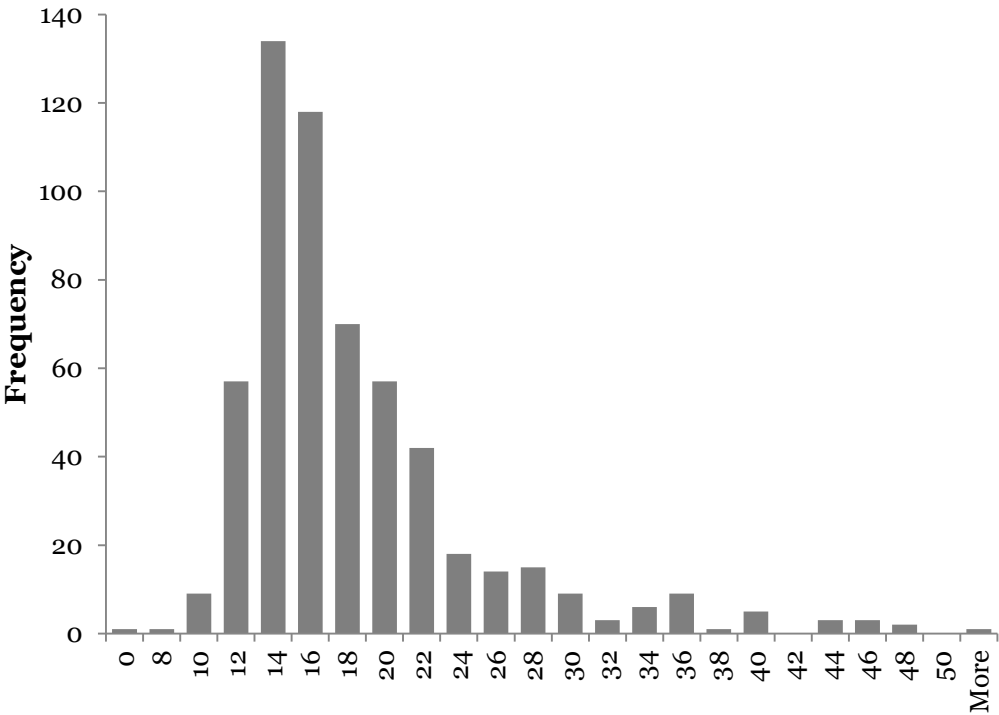
¹³⁰ Diverse sources report spoof demobilizations intended to exploit the individual juridical benefits provided to demobilized (e.g. drug traffickers and common delinquents) (El Nuevo Siglo, 2019, apr 25) or to make a demobilization process look greater than actually was to disguise the absence of important leaders (Gallón, 2017, sep 28). The colloquial term in Colombia is ‘colados’, meaning ‘people that slips-through’.

attempt to embezzle the state, for which we are confident in the overall truthfulness of their declarations.

Lastly, the majority of the aforementioned studies regarding motivations to join armed groups in Colombia have been based on similar (or equal) interviews, often quoting personal stories not far from the ones found in our cluster, and although they have explored different research avenues, they have not being flagged as apocryphal or fabricated.

Returning to the data extracted from the GADH interviews –and introducing the core of our research– the Graph 5-4 (below) presents the frequency histogram of the age at which the interviewees joined their respective insurgency. The graph endorses assertions of previous studies regarding the prevalence of child recruitment as well as the emphasis placed on its exhaustive study given its relatively frequent basis.

Graph 5-4: Age at the moment of enrolment.



Source: Own construction.

The Table 5-3 (below) presents the first motivation declared by the interviewees to join the FARC and ELN insurgencies, bearing in mind one important caveat: most of the interviewees (416) declared¹³¹ only one reason to join insurgencies, but many (135) declared two, or even three (16). We limit our presentation to the first (or main, according to the interviews) given that weighting complementary motives within an individual (for instance to say that is 60% materially motivated, and 40% ideologically motivated) is impossible, and the consideration of multiple motives at the same time clouded our analysis.

Table 5-3: First reason declared to join insurgencies.

Reason	Gender		Total	%
	Fem	Mas		
Forced	40	31	71	12.3%
Allure for weapons	14	42	56	9.7%
Income opportunity	17	33	50	8.7%
Income promises	19	25	44	7.6%
Job opportunity	7	26	33	5.7%
Peer recommendation	18	14	32	5.5%
Sentimental relationship with member	14	6	20	3.5%
Armed group influence area	8	11	19	3.3%
Ideological identification	1	16	17	2.9%
Coca work link	2	15	17	2.9%
Familiar problems	12	4	16	2.8%
Domestic violence	5	8	13	2.2%
Revenge	4	9	13	2.2%
No Data (ND)	2	9	11	1.9%
Familiar reencounter	8	2	10	1.7%
Promises of life improvement	6	3	9	1.6%
Protection	4	5	9	1.6%
Began running errands	0	8	8	1.4%
Escape from sexual harassment	8	-	8	1.4%
Threats by NSAG	3	5	8	1.4%
Appeal for armed group life style	2	5	7	1.2%

¹³¹ Henceforth we use the verb 'declare' or the adjective 'declared' as means to underscore the impossibility of determining whether or not the interviewee told his/her genuine motivations, or if in general the information provided is completely authentic. As stated before, people might lie in surveys and interviews for diverse reasons, yet we work under the assumption that their testimonies are authentic while acknowledging the possibility of pretense.

Dissatisfaction with current life	2	5	7	1.2%
Deceived	5	2	7	1.2%
False promises	3	4	7	1.2%
Promises of education	7	-	7	1.2%
Curiosity about the group functioning	5	1	6	1.0%
Impulse	3	3	6	1.0%
Debt to armed group	1	5	6	1.0%
Promises of goods and money	1	5	6	1.0%
Natural step after beign 'Miliciano'	-	5	5	0.9%
(quest for) Status	2	3	5	0.9%
Spite for broken relationship	1	4	5	0.9%
Wish for new experiences	3	2	5	0.9%
Following close person's enrollment	3	1	4	0.7%
Rebellious act (as in a whim)	4	-	4	0.7%
Promise of economic help for family	1	3	4	0.7%
Economic hardship	1	2	3	0.5%
Despair after parent's passing	2	1	3	0.5%
Evade authorities	-	3	3	0.5%
Fight for social justice	-	2	2	0.3%
Rejection in official armed forces	-	2	2	0.3%
Search for a recruited sibling	2	-	2	0.3%
Drunk decision with friend	-	2	2	0.3%
Escape from prostitution network	1	-	1	0.2%
Losing legal custody of her sons	1	-	1	0.2%
Promise of money for son's surgery	-	1	1	0.2%
Threat by official armed forces member		1	1	0.2%
Exchange for deserted brother	1	-	1	0.2%
Born within ¹³²	-	1	1	0.2%

Source: Own construction.

The table displays the reasons declared by all the 578 interviewees for joining the FARC or the ELN. It is worth noting that although forced recruitment is the most mentioned reason of the cluster, the aggregation of economic-related reasons (seeing the enrolment as an income opportunity, income promises made by the armed group, or economic hardship, etc.) reaches the 24.2% of the

¹³² Most likely the son of high or mid-rank commanders, given that multiple studies report that rank and file soldiers are forbidden to have children while on the organization, and pregnant combatants are commonly forced to have abortions. See Aguilera Peña (2013a), Ferro and Uribe (2002), Gutiérrez and Carranza Franco (2017), Hernández and Romero (2003), Herrera and Porch (2008), and Villacampa and Flórez (2017).

cases, turning them into the most common reason. Another interesting pattern is observed regarding the explicit mention of ‘promises’, as the aggregation of its mentions reaches 13.3% of the interviewees, even exceeding the mentions of forced recruitment. A detailed analysis will be presented further ahead.

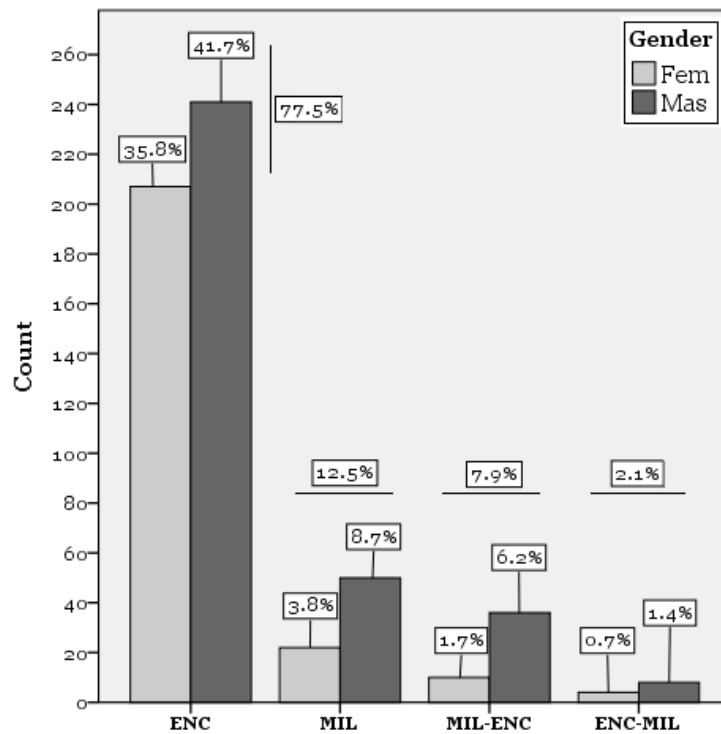
Graph 5-5 (below) displays the type of involvement, for which we defined four typologies¹³³:

- ‘Encuadrillado’ (ENC) refers to the individual who joins a combat unit upon its enrollment into the armed group.
- ‘Miliciano’ (MIL) refers to individuals that collaborate with armed groups providing goods or services such as intelligence, transportation, or brokering without participating in armed confrontations.
- MIL-ENC refers to individuals who began as ‘milicianos’ but ended up joining a combat unit after a gradual process of engagement with the armed group.
- ENC-MIL refers to individuals who began as ‘encuadrillados’ and later switched to a non-combating role upon the approval of the senior commanders of the respective armed group.

While the vast majority (79.6%) went directly to form part of the armed branches of the insurgencies and got isolated into remote regions, those who began as (or limited its participation to being) ‘milicianos’ (20.4%) cannot be overlooked. For instance, the interviewees that declared that their affiliation to the armed group began by running errands for them often share also the fact of declaring as a second or third reason to join living in area of influence of the group and allure for weapons.

¹³³ We present the terminology used in the interviews given that it reflects more the reality and local context of the situation, but further ahead we might use ‘encuadrillado’ and ‘combatant’ indistinctively. When the involvement was not as combatant we will use ‘miliciano’ or ‘collaborator’.

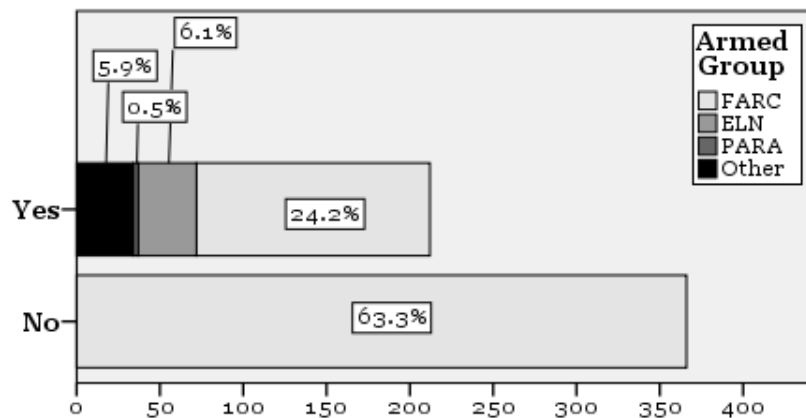
Graph 5-5: Type of involvement by gender.



Source: Own construction.

Lastly, we present the answers regarding whether or not the interviewees had any family members involved with armed groups at the moment of enrolment (Graph 5-6, below), and in such case, in which armed group. The 36.7% of the clustered interviewees declared having relatives in armed groups, which has important implications in terms of the process of involvement, as we will analyze in the next section.

Graph 5-6: Family members involved in armed groups.



Source: Own construction.

5.3. Methodological approach

The theoretical and empirical literature exploring the motivations to join armed groups in Colombia (explored in Chapter 4) has contributed in the enumeration and description of diverse personal motives, push and pull factors, and nationwide social contexts that compel individuals to join armed groups, yet –to the best of our knowledge– no study has taken to the task of comparing personal choices under different contexts or relating those factors with those contexts, or as Gutiérrez (2010) puts it, to delve into “the intersection between story and history, between personal trajectories and big processes” (p. 140).

As noted in the previous chapter too, Henriksen and Vinci (2007) criticized the inadequacy of prevalent analyses of the motivations to join armed groups because of, first, the tendency to oversimplify the causes into singular binary notions (greed or grievance); second, the disregard for the polymorphic and dynamic character of motivations –and we would add, of war itself– in time; and third, the fusion of what they call agency (individual factors) with structure (environmental factors) into a single body; and in order to address such shortcomings they proposed a framework which broadens the viewpoint on the matter by establishing cross contrasts between three types of motivations and three types of contexts, into what they call the ‘combat motivation framework’ (see Table 5-4, below).

Table 5-4: Combat motivation framework.

		Types of motivations “agency dimension”		
		Economic (mercenary)	Communitarian (soldier)	Existential (warrior)
Types of context “structure dimension”	Insurgency			
	Terrorism			
	Warlordism			

Source: Henriksen and Vinci (2007, p. 98).

While the framework represents a step forward in the analysis of motivations to fight in armed groups –and one step away from the preeminence of the homo-economicus– it replaces a binary pattern with a ternary one, both in terms of the personal motivations, as in terms of the typologies of armed groups. For the former, they allude to three ‘ideal typical actors’ (mercenaries, soldiers and warriors), and for the latter, they reduce the context to three types of armed groups according to three general types of goals pursued: political power or territorial secession (insurgencies), political, religious “or other” goals (terrorist groups), and economic gains (warlordism) (pp. 92-93). Besides the typologies and their resulting combinations and specific features, they stress the “fluid” character of the process, this is, the possibility of individuals and groups to reshape their interests and move from one category to the other.

Here we want to remark that while the formal definition of the word ‘greed’ is “a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (such as money) than is needed” (“Greed,” n.d.), the armed conflict analysis literature has commonly used it as synonym of ‘material ambitions’; and while the definition of the word ‘grievance’ is “a cause of distress [...] felt to afford reason for complaint or resistance” (“Grievance,” n.d.), the armed conflict analysis literature has used it as synonym of either ‘political’ or ‘non-material ambitions’. In our view the latter can encompass both material and non-material aspirations, and the former is most of times misused because of aggregation or misjudging the fund-raising activities of insurgent groups; nevertheless, we will partially conform to such commonly used connotations in order to advance our argument and elaborate our criticisms and recommendations later.

To overcome –at least partially– such limitations and to situate the debate in the realm of the aforementioned intersections between personal trajectories and big processes, we propose on one hand, to replace the ‘structure dimension’ axis in Henriksen & Vinci’s framework with a context dimension that allows establishing comparisons (including, but) beyond the armed-group-type level, between, for instance, regional, historical (read, conflict phases), or demographic clusters.

On the other hand, while we agree on considering ‘essentialization’ (read, the reduction of armed conflict and individual and group motivations to singular and static causes) as detrimental for the analysis of armed conflict and for its treatment, we –based on the data presented– became aware of the tremendous complexity of the issue at hand, and how the analysis of human decisions often –if not always– calls for the use of taxonomical clusters and categories as means to simplify and better understand it, given the significant levels of subjectivity.

In light of the above, we propose to replace Henriksen & Vinci’s ‘agency dimension’ with a body of motivations that does not label individuals in restricting taxonomies, but that reflects their aspirations related to the situation at hand, for which we will arrange the motives declared by the GADH interviewees to join voluntarily according to the following classification¹³⁴:

- Personal grievance: perceived offense or deprivation at personal/individual level that generates affliction and/or outrage and becomes a reason for complaining, resisting or battling personally.
- Collective grievance: perceived offense or deprivation at communal/group level that generates affliction and/or outrage and becomes a reason for complaining, resisting or battling collectively.
- Psychological grievance: related to the mental or emotional state of an individual or group, and
- Material grievance: related to the physical (or biological) state of an individual or group, or the material means to redress psychological needs.

We also argue that the latter group (material grievance) contains two types of stances, namely

¹³⁴ Forced recruitment and the cases in which interviews do not register any motivation to join (No Data) cannot be allocated to any of the categories.

- Survival greed, understood as attempts to fulfill material ambitions with aims to satisfy –recalling Stewart (1985)– basic needs (read, food and water, shelter, clothing, and personal safety) for oneself or dependent people, and
- Opulence greed, understood as actions aimed to the accumulation of resources, after having basic needs secured, intended to gain (or not lose) prestige or prominence, or for the sake of affluence.

Table 5-5: Classification of motivations to join armed groups.

Level of grievance			
Type of grievance	Personal		Collective
	Psychological	Parents killed by armed group (Goal: Revenge)	Social group discriminated (Goal: Recognition)
	Material	Survival Individual (or household) has no source of income (Goal: Income)	Survival Unfair land property distribution or biased labor contracts (Goal: Agrarian/Labor Reform)
		Opulence Basic needs covered, but person wants to buy a luxurious item (Goal: Income)	Opulence Elite group controlling a vast array of economic resources (Goal: Impede redistribution)

Source: Own construction.

Here, it is important to remark that psychological grievances are those related to deficits regarding the ‘basic psychological needs’, meaning “imperative or

essential to fostering psychological growth, integrity, and wellness¹³⁵ and opposed to ‘physiological needs’, understood as biological wants focused on satisfying “physical growth and health” (Vansteenkiste, Ryan, & Soenens, 2020, p. 5). We say ‘opposed’ to remark that they relate to disparate issues, but the literature always underlines their synergic and interdependent character.

Sirgy (2018) for instance, observes that “material possessions serve to satisfy a variety of human developmental needs, and as a result, play an important role in increasing the sense of well-being [for which] material resources are used to satisfy psychological needs” (p. 295), while on the other hand, Vansteenkiste, Ryan, and Soenens (2020) stress that “deprivation or frustration of [material needs] diminishes [personal] flourishing and increases risk of ill-being and psychopathology” (p. 5), for which the satisfaction of material needs and ambitions also has an impact in the psychological condition of people. The arrows in the vertical axis of the table denote this idea.

In addition to that, it should be noted that –as we remarked in Chapter 2– communal identity, solidarity, and the framing of the issue are important factors in the shift of personal grievance –or the conflict between two private individuals– to a collective level, but that at the same time, collective issues are often the cause of personal grievances. For instance, a paramilitary group defending the interests of a political party kills one person’s parents, triggering his/her individual psychological desire for revenge; on the other hand, a labor reform that undermines workers’ rights or generates massive layoffs might compromise individual household sources of income, yet motivate collective movements against it. The Colombian case –as described in Chapters 1 to 3–

¹³⁵ For Vansteenkiste, Ryan, and Soenens (2020), autonomy (referred to experiencing that one’s actions, thoughts, and feelings are self-endorsed and authentic), relatedness (concerning the experience of bonding, care, and feeling significant to others), and competence (defined as the experience of capably engaging in activities that allow the use and extension of one’s skills and expertise), are the commonly accepted set of basic psychological needs, yet they acknowledge that the debate and catalogue is still open (p. 3).

provides plenty of examples of each category, but we will come back to this later. The arrows in the horizontal axis of the table denote this idea.

While it is perhaps impossible to separate the satisfaction of material and psychological needs from each other or to determine their relative importance in the decision –as remarked in the two previous paragraphs–, we will classify the responses of GADH interviewees by giving greater importance to the first of their answers, inasmuch as the interview transcriptions show that those were the reasons the respondents considered preponderant, and because multifactorial analysis rendered our tests unusable. Transcriptions with more than one reason (either to abandon school or to join armed groups) always included expressions such as “above all” or “to a lesser extent”, indicating some sort of ‘prevalence’¹³⁶.

Finally, given that the categories presented in Table 5-5 would complicate the arrangement of our depiction, in the following table we illustrate our proposed modifications to Henriksen & Vinci’s model, as well as the general framework with which we will inspect our data.

Table 5-6: Contextual Motivation Framework.

Motivation Context	Personal Grievance			Collective Grievance		
	Psych.	Mat. (S)	Mat. (O)	Psych.	Mat. (S)	Mat. (O)
Context A +Region A +Historical phase A +Group A						
Context B +Region B +Historical phase B +Group B						

Source: Own construction.

¹³⁶ Or what is called ‘preference’ in economics, meaning “prioritization, favoring or choice ranking” (Hansson & Grüne-Yanoff, 2017).

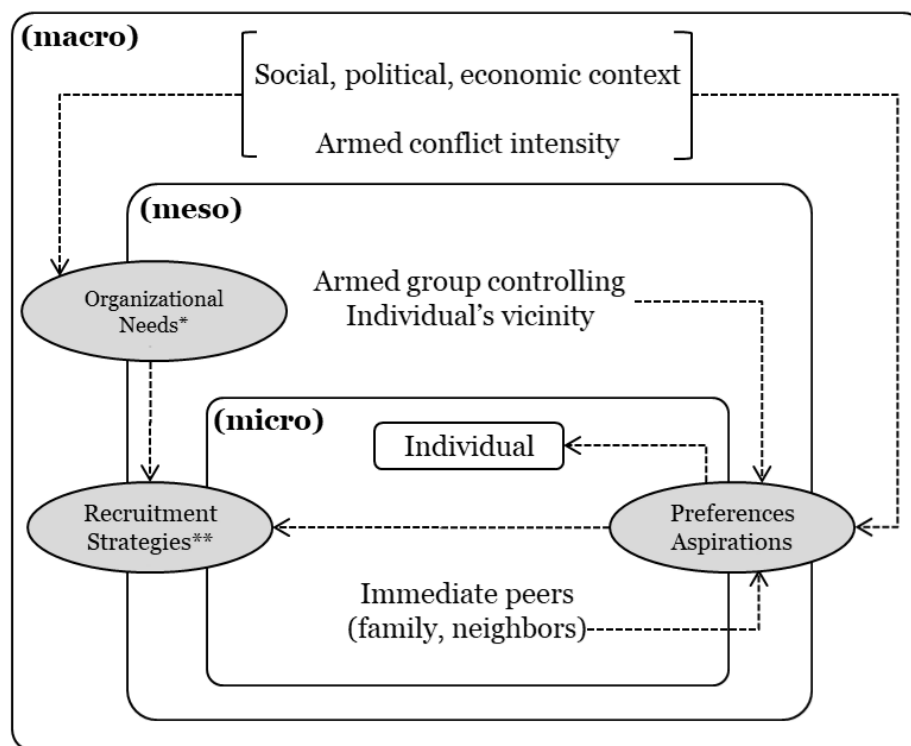
The proposed redesign intends to provide a framework in which the analysis of the motivations to join armed groups in Colombia includes to some extent the nuances of the personal history of the individuals (represented and classified in the horizontal axis), contrasted or related to the nuances of determined sociohistorical contexts of the armed conflict itself (represented in the vertical axis). By placing each individual data entry into one category we can attempt to capture differences or similarities at macro-level (regional, historical, or group) context, as well as at micro level by clustering the declared reasons of the individuals. In addition, we can benefit from the historical analysis of the conflict to define ways through which the pull and push factors (meso level) come into play and influence the decision.

Conceding that the proposed framework constitutes just a different form of clustering (or ‘essentialization’), the personal motivation dimension we propose could allow deconstructing some particularities which have tended to be omitted or reduced into generalization when analyzing personal motivation to engage in armed conflict. The most common example is the association of the greed-like behavior of warlords –also called ‘war entrepreneurs’– as an automatic reflection of the motivations of fighters. Under this scheme, an individual joining an insurgency in order to raise money to pay for the education of his/her children and one joining to use violence in order to dispossess and accumulate lands have radically different motivations; we would catalogue the motivation of the former as material survival and the motivation of the latter as material opulence, while most of the mainstream literature would categorize both as ‘money-driven mercenaries’.

We argue that recruits pulled or pushed by economic (read, material) factors should neither be standardized as ‘greedy mercenaries’ –given that personal motives differ considerably– nor biography-like individualized to lose the capacity of capturing the general circumstances linking people with armed groups, and that a more balanced analysis of the motivations –connected to the surrounding economic and social environment– is required.

Rather than assuming isolated decisions made by perfectly -informed and -rational individuals, we chose to exhibit the ways in which their embeddedness in conflict-affected milieus determines their interests and behavior, even prior to enrolment. In turn, the milieu is depicted as the result of historical social, political and economic trends that provoked the transformation of private skirmishes into collective violence, and the emergence and transformation of multiple armed actors that generated changing levels of armed confrontation, and in which the recruited individuals had little or no incidence, and on the contrary, in which most often were victims of the armed groups' actions. Additionally, we propose a characterization of the enrolment process that builds from the nuances of the personal history of the individuals (based on the information provided by the personal interviews) related to specific aspects of the armed groups derived from the social, political, and economic context in which the armed conflict itself unfolded. The figure below displays the general blueprint of our analytical framework.

Figure 5-1: Analytical framework.



*Quantity and "Quality" of recruits ** Incentives or coercion

Source: Own construction.

While we acknowledge that the complexity of the issue restrains complete reviews and that the more accurate and complete the analysis revision, the more complex (and lengthy) it becomes –something we risked in Chapter 3– we consider that the major milestones pertaining the Colombian armed conflict have been presented in Chapters 1 to 3 as well as in the tables 2-3 and 3-1, providing a great deal of the elements required for the context (macro) dimension of the analysis; on the other hand, the data extracted from the GADH interviews will provide us elements to characterize the personal dimension (micro) of the analysis, and by integrating both, we hope to be able to contribute to the understanding of the personal motivations to join, especially vis-à-vis intergroup, intertemporal and interregional conflict dynamics variations.

While the genuine thoughts of the interviews are part of their psyche and perhaps unattainable for any external entity, we now proceed to analyze the GADH interviews in an aggregated semi-biographic style in order to examine more in depth where, when, how and why people became FARC and ELN insurgents after the emergence of such groups during the mid-1960s.

5.4. The nuances of joining¹³⁷ insurgencies in Colombia

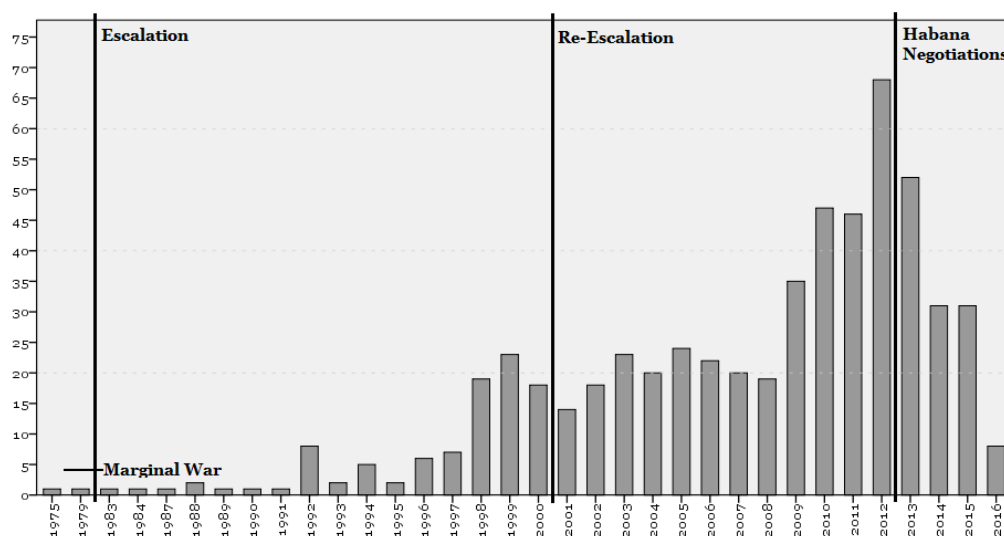
The analysis of motivations to join armed groups tends to be stationary, this is, analyzed only at the moment of joining, as the binary switch from civilian to combatant, often overlooking previous individual experiences and/or progressive acquaintance with the armed group. While it is obvious that people always experiment “transitions from one state to another” such as unmarried to married and then to divorced, or from civilian to combatant to demobilized, it is key to understand the process, or “how he or she got there” (Scott & Alwin, 1998, p. 101).

¹³⁷ We will use the terms ‘join’ and ‘enroll’ indistinctively although both imply voluntariness, yet in many cases the participation was forced. In the latter case, we commonly use ‘forced enrollment’ or ‘forced recruitment’, provided that ‘recruitment’ responds more to strategies orchestrated by the armed groups than to people’s individual initiative.

Similarly, the existence of the armed groups (insurgencies in this case) is assumed to be unchanging, disregarding the differences between joining an armed insurgency at its infancy when it has dozens of people concentrated in a small locality, versus joining when it has thousands of individuals spread all across the country. Here below we analyze those aspects for our interview cluster.

The following graph displays the enrolment year of our cluster subjects and marks the macro historical periods we summarized in Table 3-1. It is worth mentioning that these periods respond to the events described in Chapter 3 and differ significantly from periodizations proposed by other authors.

Graph 5-7: Interviewees year of enrolment.



Source: Own construction.

When compared to Graph 3-2 the graph above displays no resemblance –even if adjusting historical periods to accommodate to our framework– because in the former graph the escalation (in terms of recruitment) begins in the mid-1980s and declines after 2002, while in the latter (ours) it is possible to see an increase only in the second half of the 1990s and a marked downturn after the beginning of the peace negotiations between the FARC and the Santos administration in 2012. This contrast might be due to several factors. First, the fact that our cluster is not statistically representative of all the combatants enrolled to the

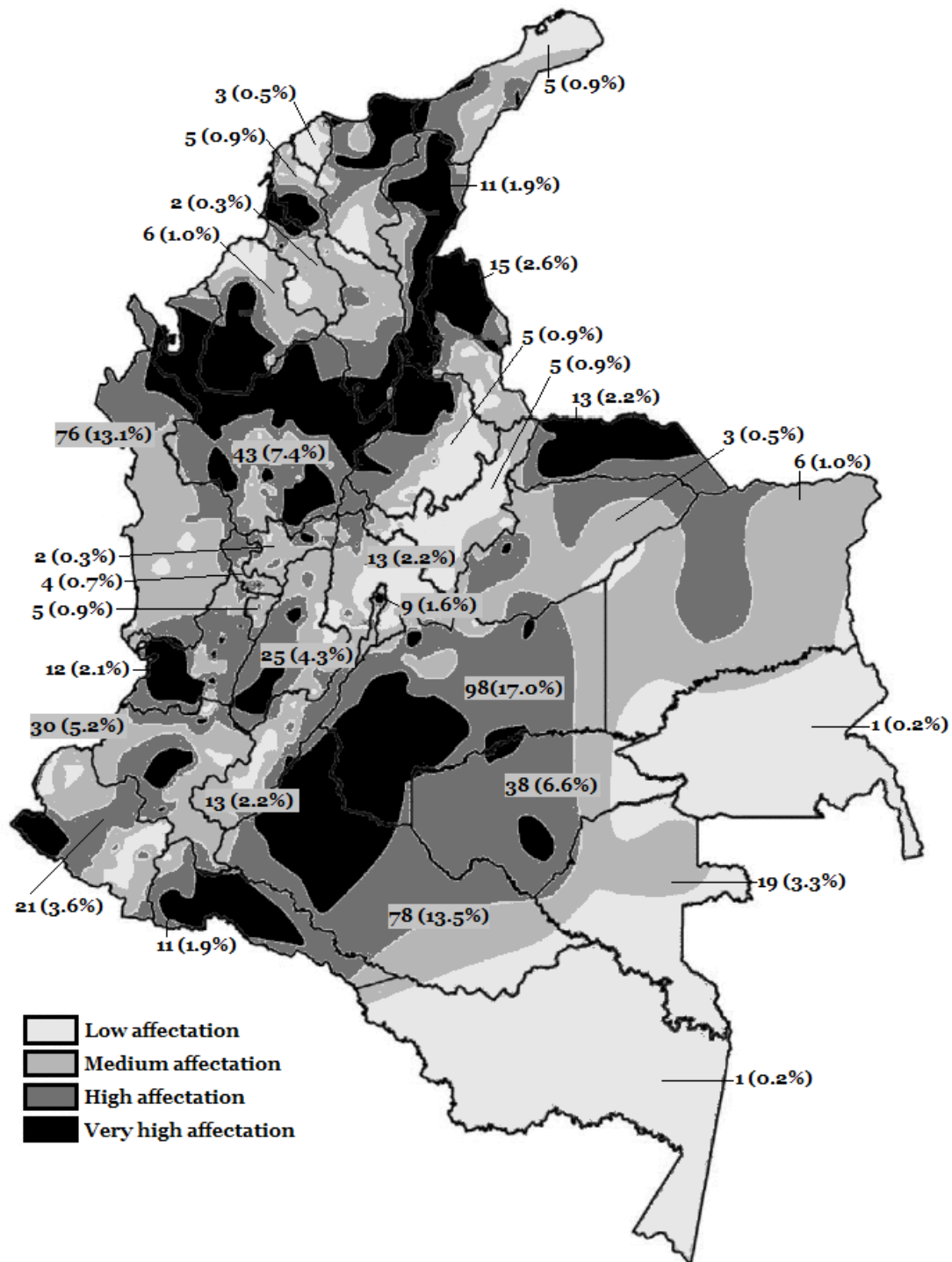
FARC and the ELN in the history of the armed conflict. Second, while both graphs coincide in the low levels of recruitment of the ‘marginal era of insurgence’ (see Chapter 3), the Graph 3-2 (Echandía, 2015) shows the national enrolment trend of the confrontation as a whole –with a stagnant phase going from the 1960s until the beginning of the 1980s, intensification until 2002, and decline beginning in 2003– whereas Graph 5-7 (ours) pertains to the recruitment trend of what the literature describes as the retreat of insurgencies to their traditional rearguard areas after the implementation of the ‘Plan Colombia’ and President Uribe’s ‘Democratic Security Policy’ in the early 2000s (Ávila, 2019; Pizarro Leongómez, 2006) and that we labelled as ‘re-escalation’. Lastly, the different geographical origin of the analyzed combatants by virtue of the phase of the armed conflict, given that early insurgencies –as described in Chapters 2 and 3– were concentrated in regions such as Tolima, Huila, Cundinamarca, Boyacá and the Santanderes (asterisks in the Map 5-2), while our cluster consists of combatants joining twenty years later, when armed groups were penetrating the rainforest in departments such as Meta, Caquetá, Chocó or Guaviare, to name a few.

Our contentions are supported by the maps below. The Map 5-1 shows the distribution in absolute and relative terms of the birth places of the GADH interviewees, overlapped with the map of historical affectation¹³⁸ of armed conflict (1986-2015) presented by Salas-Salazar (2016). Out of the 32 departments¹³⁹ in which Colombia is divided administratively and politically, eleven departments (Meta, Caquetá, Chocó, Antioquia, Guaviare, Cauca, Tolima, Nariño, Vaupés, Norte de Santander and Arauca) concentrate almost 80% of the recruits of this cluster, and not coincidentally, those departments are the ones in which the intensity of armed conflict has been historically higher.

¹³⁸ Salas-Salazar (2016) considered the following variables to build the map: combats, homicides, displacement, kidnapping, massacres, land dispossession, forced disappearance, victims of anti-personnel mine, killing of communal leaders, union members and local authorities (p. 51).

¹³⁹ There are officially 32 departments, plus Bogotá (the capital) as a special territorial unit within the department of Cundinamarca.

Map 5-1: Birthplace of interviewees.

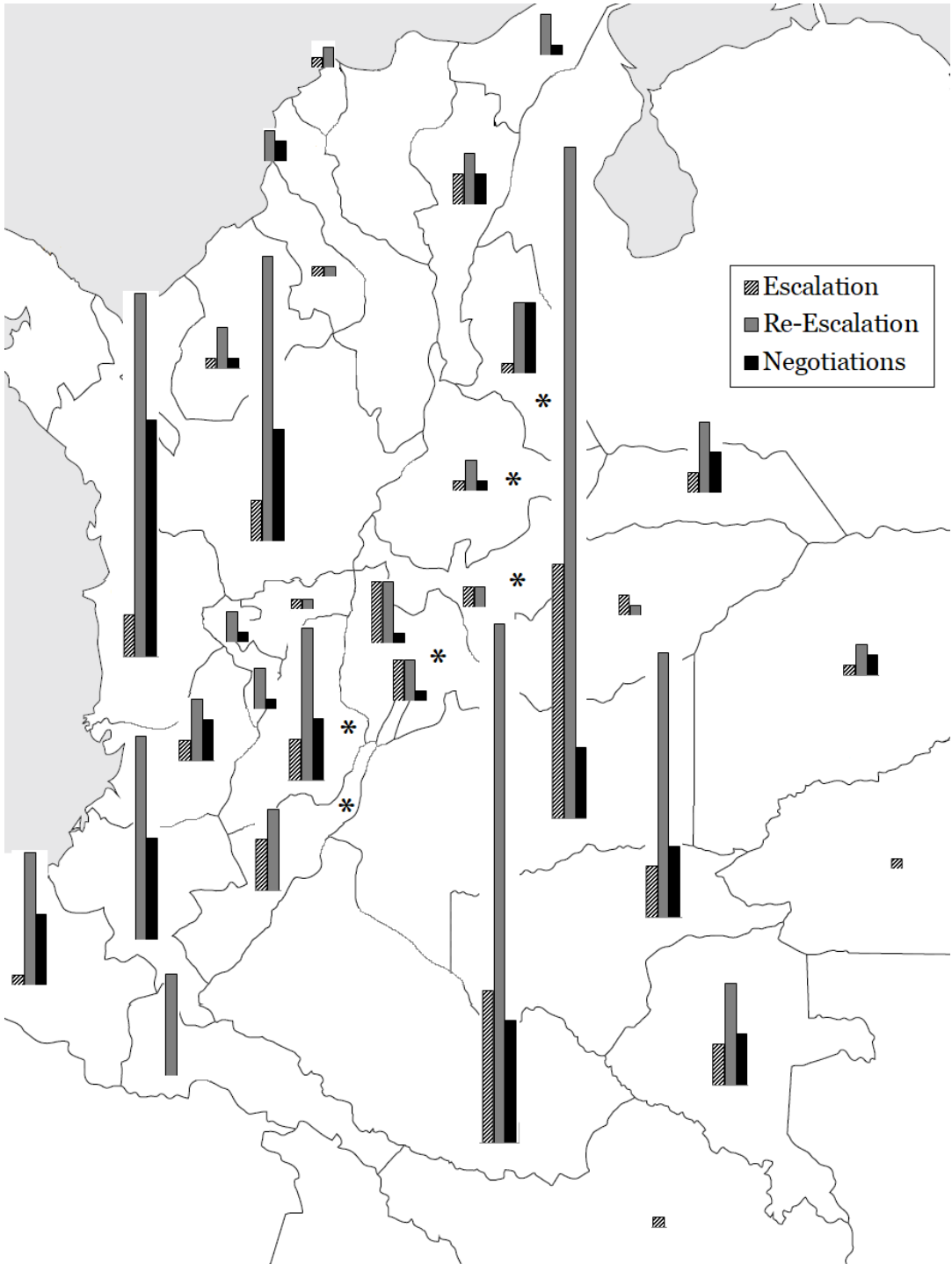


Source: Own construction over map from Salas-Salazar (2016, p. 52)¹⁴⁰.

¹⁴⁰ In order to maintain a less visually-polluted appearance, the majority of the data points are placed outside the map, but the connecting lines do not signify that the subjects were born in one specific (colored) region. All figures correspond to departmental level.

On the other hand, the map 5-2 (below) presents the geographical origin of recruits in our cluster related to the period of enrolment.

Map 5-2: Birthplace of interviewees and period of enrolment into insurgency.



Source: Own construction.

This latter map shows that the majority of recruits in our cluster joined during the re-escalation period¹⁴¹, in a phase in which (a) colonization (armed and not) was moving even further away from the political and economic centers of the country, a trend that coincides with the yearly data of forced displacement exhibited before (Graph 4-4); (b) the increased military power of the Colombian armed forces (and the paramilitaries) pushed insurgencies back to their traditional rearguard areas (See, Ávila, 2019); and (c) the general feeling of saturation with and censure to war –which drastically reduced support to armed mobilizations¹⁴²– and the rising demobilizations described at the beginning of this chapter (that began in the early 2000s) threatened the sustainability of insurgencies.

The last two factors have an important implication for our analysis: first, the more deaths the insurgent groups incurred (due to the state and paramilitary military pressure) the more urged they were to recruit hastily in order to replenish forces, and the less social support they had, the more difficult was to recruit fighters. Combining both circumstances, armed groups could rely on forced recruitment, which is consistent with the testimonies of our cluster and the 12.3% of it declaring being forcibly recruited.

“I was alone at home taking care of my younger siblings when the guerrillas passed by, entered my house and asked me for drinks, they searched the house and told me I had to go with them” (I-257).

¹⁴¹ Only two of our interviewees enrolled into the analyzed insurgencies during the ‘marginal war’ period (one in Boyacá and one in Putumayo); 98 joined during the escalation period (1980-2000); 356 during the re-escalation period (2001-2012); and 122 during the peace negotiations (after 2012).

¹⁴² According to CINEP (2016) since the late 1990s there has been in Colombia a steady growth in civilian mobilization and international diplomacy against war, aimed to exert pressure across government levels in order to start peace negotiations with armed groups, even to the point of increasing social and political polarization between the groups supporting negotiation and the groups supporting (military) confrontation.

According to I-463, the FARC went regularly to the [indigenous] community to take people and enroll them, allegedly as a mandatory act of “participation with the organization” (Interviewer).

In the village where she (I-473) lived with her family the FARC took twelve children. The commander said they will make a ‘first-aid course’ of one month and then return to their homes. They never came back (Interviewer).

Only 35 individuals (a 6%) of our cluster were born in either of the fourteen Colombian major urban centers –defined by Ramírez and De Aguas (2017) as those with the highest urbanization levels, population density and with better connections to all the remaining provinces–, corroborating the PNUD (2003) assertion that in Colombia “90% of recruitment takes place in rural areas [and that commonly] municipalities besieged or isolated because of the armed conflict report higher rates of recruitment” (p. 264).

While accepting that birth place of the recruits cannot be automatically associated to the place of enrollment, the works outlined in the previous chapter and the data collected from our sources give no indication of significant geographical mobility in the recruits. However, the cases of I-011, I-012, I-051, I-126, I-251, I-543, I-547, I-550, all of whom were forcibly recruited while they were spending vacations away from home, exemplify the likeliness of remote enrollment. One woman that spent 13 years in the FARC describes her situation in the following words

“Given that it was the first time I was seen in the area and nobody knew me, [the guerrilla] told me I must stay for three months [in order to make a background check] after which they would let me out, but they never did” (I-051).

As remarked by Cederman and Gleditsch (2009) “violence rarely engulfs entire states, but typically occurs in confined areas” (p. 487), and according to the CEV (1988) the regions most affected by armed conflict in Colombia have been the regions of spontaneous colonization, of enclave and of depressed peasant

agriculture, all of which coincide with the darker areas in Map 5-1 and the origin departments of GADH interviewees shown in Map 5-2.

The majority of the recruits in our cluster were born or relocated to regions that evolved as a byproduct of the processes of land accumulation exerted by legal and illegal entrepreneurs since the late 1980s, and the consolidation of a synergy between armed groups and drug producers in which the former authorized the operation of the latter in exchange for monetary contributions. Borrowing from Tilly (2003), who includes tax collection and military conscription as key functions of the state, the insurgencies acted as the state in such regions. As described by Trejos Rosero (2013b), the Colombian armed conflict has created

Territories outside the control of the state, which offer drug traffickers, guerrillas and paramilitaries large tracts of land [in which] people's lives are closely related to illicit activities [and in which] those who control arms and economic power become the state in such regions (p. 133).

Nevertheless, as remarked by Arjona (2016), “far from being chaotic and anarchic, war zones are often orderly” (p. 2) on account of the level of intervention exerted by armed groups in social, political or economic matters. The situation in which armed groups “intervene broadly in civilian affairs” (p. 11) –and that she calls ‘rebelocracy’– is exemplified in the testimony of one local leader in Cundinamarca who states that

The FARC were everything in this village. They had the last word on every single dispute among neighbors. They decided what could be sold at the stores, the time when we should all go home, and who should leave the area never to come back [...] They also managed divorces, inheritances, and conflicts over land borders. They were the ones who ruled here, not the state (Arjona, 2016, p. 1).

Some of the GADH interviewees confirm those contentions by observing that in some regions

“The community had a cordial relationship with the guerrilla (FARC) because thanks to them there were no thieves, drug users, or abusers; life was good thanks to their presence” (I-030).

These testimonies support what we outlined in Chapter 3, the influence exerted by insurgencies in regions distant from the political and economic centers, and that gradually created an state-like image of the armed groups, which at local level contributes to the passage from civilians and noncombatants to collaborators and/or combatants, inasmuch as the presence, activities, decisions and impositions of the local armed group are seen as ‘normal’ by the population.

Besides having a chance of being born in –or displaced to– conflict-affected areas (or being recruited when visiting one), as remarked by Brett and Specht (2004) “war is the cause of many of the other conditions, such as the closing of schools, exacerbated social tensions, family breakup, and increased poverty, which can also contribute to [people’s] involvement” (p. 10); 42% of our cluster left school before completion because of economic reasons such as not having enough resources to cover the associated expenses (transportation, clothing, school supplies, etc.), case in which they decide to begin their work life. As one interviewee declares:

“I did not want to attend school anymore because I was feeling bad without clothes and supplies. No one helped me. My family did not have enough resources, so I decided to go to work” (I-212).

In other cases, the withdrawal from the school system is forced by parents, as reported by the professionals in charge of the interviews:

I-560 notes that she was removed from school at age 9 so she could help with house chores and in farm work (Interviewer).

In addition to the aforementioned, many interviewees (the 35.1%) mentioned difficult access to the nearest school, intra-family problems (such as violence or sexual abuse), trouble within the educational system (low grades, conflicts with

peers, etc.), and lack of interest, as common causes for not completing their education. These factors coincide with the findings of Hunt (2008) when analyzing school dropout and permanence in Asia and Africa, where income shocks, the necessity to work, migration, orphanhood, and early pregnancy are also identified as prominent causes school abandonment; Hunt's study also speaks of armed conflict, but the mention is limited to potential affectations in financial security, mobility, and physical safety, and it is O'Malley (2007) who remarks how armed conflict incidents (such as bombings and combats) that destroy the infrastructure, displace or kill teachers and staff, or generate forced displacement, are also –and more noticeably– associated with the interruption of studies and with forced recruitment into armed groups. This situation is aggravated by the fact that in Colombia 70% of the young people who has no access to education is located in rural areas and remote regions (Gutiérrez Avila, 2019, apr 3).

Our contention here is that intra-familiar problems, setbacks within the educational system, lack of interest, and economic hardship cause abandonment of school in diverse regions of the world, yet not everywhere the dropouts can immediately join armed groups, as the 22.8% –the majority– of our cluster declared. For instance, Sweeten, Bushway, and Paternoster (2009) found that high-school dropouts in the United States usually interrupt their studies due to pre-existing factors such as poor families, academic failure, and even their previous insertion in criminal peer networks, but that their participation in delinquent activities (such as gangs) is reduced at first when the walkout serves economic reasons –following the intention of finding a job– but later increased when their condition (high-school dropout) makes it difficult “to secure meaningful employment” (p. 78); in other words, participation in delinquency results from the impossibility to secure a job rather than automatically from abandoning school.

For our case, insufficient resources (to cover the associated expenses), the obligation to begin to work and provide income for the household and enrollment into armed groups lead the causes of early school abandonment, but

the connection to armed groups –excluding the third aspect– is not immediate. While Ribetti (2007) considers that –in general– Colombian insurgents have been “too young to have great financial burdens and too uneducated to ‘know about ideology’” (p. 699) and the aforementioned cases chronicling early abandonment of school might support the second contention, the GADH interviews contradict the first one.

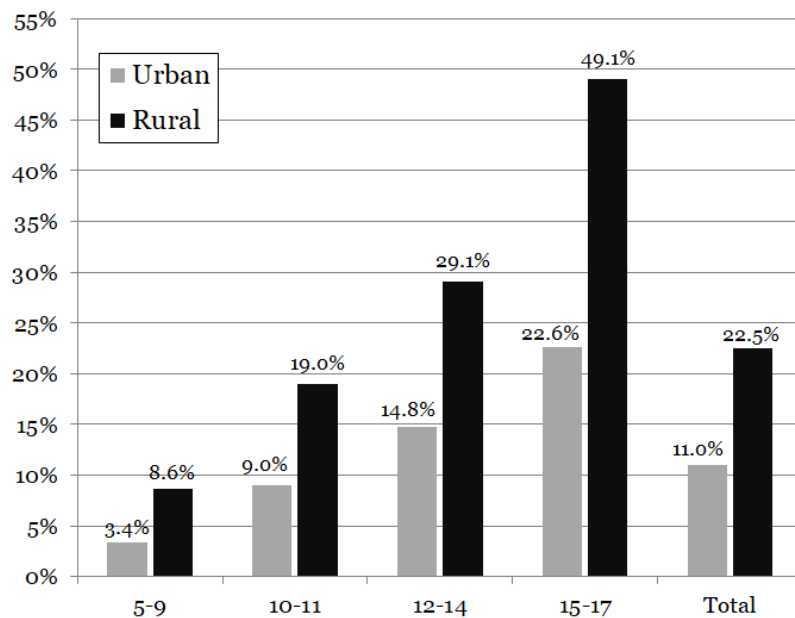
As we already quoted, Navarro –quoted in Patiño Orozco and Patiño Gaviria (2012)– observes that in rural spaces youth is experienced in a different way than in urban spaces. The individuals of our cluster declare to have started their working life at ages as young as 5, which might sound preposterous, but it is a reality not only in Colombia but in the world. The ILO (2002) estimated a total of “211 million children aged 5-14 engaged in some form of economic activity” (p. 16), and more recently has observed that –for 2016– (a) with 48% of the total, children between five and eleven years of age constitute the majority of the world child labor; (b) agriculture is the most important sector, employing 70.9% of the child labor; and (c) “the incidence of child labor in countries affected by armed conflict is 77% higher than the global average” (ILO, 2017b, p. 31).

Such assertions have been corroborated for Colombia by Flórez and Hincapié (2009), who have found that “child labor is higher in rural than in urban areas, increases with age, is closely related to socioeconomic status, is concentrated in agriculture and commerce, and is mainly un-remunerated or low paying” (p. 374). The graph 5-8 (below) illustrates the first two ideas of their conclusions. Quoting other studies, the same authors observe that after starting at 4.2% (at ages 5-9), the percentage of the contribution to the household income of Colombian children workers rises to 20.4% when they reach the ages between 15 and 17, and up to 52.1% of the household income –for the same age group– in the poorest income quintile.

The overall outlook worsens given that almost all the occupations declared by the GADH interviewees (presented in Table 5-2), have in common being either

informal¹⁴³, poorly paid, and/or illegal; a trend in line with the findings of the ILO (2017a) for Latin America: historical high unemployment rates, poor creation of high-quality jobs, and the proliferation of new jobs created because of self-employment and informal work (p. 11). The DNP (2015) found that informal jobs, low educational achievement, lack of health care coverage, critical overcrowding, and long-term unemployment are the main problems afflicting rural Colombia (p. 17). We contend that besides dropping out of school early, the people in this cluster did it for low quality jobs.

Graph 5-8: Child employment rates by age and area of residence, 2001.



Source: Adapted from Flórez and Hincapié (2009, p. 370).

¹⁴³ Defined by the ILO (2012) as those forms of employment comprising own-account workers, contributing family workers (understood as not having explicit written contracts of employment, which in turn are commonly not subject to labor legislation or social security regulations), informal workers (understood as those working in un-declared jobs, casual jobs, or jobs of a limited short duration, or with wages below a specified threshold), and workers engaged in the production of goods exclusively for own final use by their household (such as subsistence farming or domestic housework) (pp. 9-11). Interestingly enough, in spite of matching perfectly the definition, the organization does not include agriculture as informal employment because of “practical data collection reasons”, given the complications and costs of survey operations for the agricultural sector (p. 4).

In addition, 48.4% of our cluster was employed in agricultural jobs before their enrolment into armed groups, out of which almost one fifth (or the 8.7% of the cluster total) was involved in coca production activities, because as many interviewees declare

“Collecting coca leaves was the only profitable occupation in my village” (I-474).

In 1996, leaders of small-farmer communities dedicated to illicit crops declared that it was more profitable to work as ‘Raspachín’ (coca collector) and earn \$16,000 Pesos per day than to work in legal crops or in land clearing, in which the common daily wage for a sharecropper was \$7,000 Pesos (El Tiempo, 1996, mar 23). Using 2007 prices as reference, Carrillo González (2014) compared the production of maize and coca leaves (not cocaine), and determined that the production of 1,500 kg of the former generated a net loss of \$50,000 Pesos (approximately USD 25 of the time), while 920 kg¹⁴⁴ of the latter generated a profit of \$1,850,000 Pesos (approximately USD 890 of the time).

The involvement in the coca economy often begins at home and at an early age. I-034 was removed from school by his parents at age 10 so he could help with coca leaf collection in his parents farm; the same happened to I-241 at age 15, and to I-445 and I-510 at age 13. While not the majority of this cluster, the importance of coca cultivation as a relatively steady job is undeniable for the rural population, especially in the late colonization regions. O’Connor (2009) quotes Grosse to report an estimate of 68,000 households as directly dependent of the coca economy in Colombia, with between 100,000 to 135,000 growers and a few thousand people more involved in diverse activities such as chemists, transporters, and accountants (pp. 97-98). One example of the lifeline granted by coca cultivation (and often cocaine production) to rural families is portrayed by one of the GADH interviewers in his/her report:

¹⁴⁴ The same author remarks that –in average– from those 920 kg of coca leaves, 2 kg of cocaine base (the stage previous to final product) can be extracted. UNODC (2018) estimated a wholesale price of USD 53,380 in Europe and of USD 31,000 in the United States for one kilo of cocaine in 2007.

When she was 17 years old she was abandoned by her partner and with no other job opportunity available to raise her son, I-497 began to work as coca collector, and later to cook food for the workers of the coca farm, which was the only way in which she could meet her economic needs and sustain her household for several years.

Little can be said about income of individuals prior to the enrolment –at least for this cluster, given that only 32 of them provided specific figures on the matter–, nevertheless, while 42.6% of the respondents did not have income (most of them for being students at the moment of enrolment) and 4.8% used their income for indulgence (read, treats such as branded clothes or technological devices, after having basic needs covered by someone else), 19.9% declared using theirs to cover their own living expenses and 32.7% to support the household. All things considered, Colombian youngsters –especially in rural areas– do have financial burdens, despite of being young.

Moreover, it is also common that family members of the recruits are involved with armed groups (as shown in Graph 5-6) and that the latter gradually begin to partake in its activities, for instance, one interviewee

Influenced by his uncle –who had been working for the FARC for twenty years– along with his brother began running errands for the organization (collection, transportation and delivery of money and gear), to later switch to obtaining intelligence information about the army movements, which he says he enjoyed very much (Interviewer, about I-357).

On another note, I-156 declares that

“They helped me with some money for my daughter’s disease, for which I began to work with them running errands”

Nevertheless, the participation is not always symbiotic, as in the case of I-194, to whom the insurgency controlling the area (FARC) demanded support with information and specific activities, under penalty of being expelled from the region.

The main implication of the aforementioned is in line with David Matza's notion of a process of involvement with armed groups –as quoted in Florez-Morris (2007)– in which many of the inhabitants of insurgency-controlled regions develop closeness and affinity with them for being directly or indirectly involved in the activities of the armed organization, voluntarily or not.

Regarding declared motivations, the 578 clustered interviewees –as well as the tens of thousands members of armed groups in Colombia– can be said to represent 'unique' cases of enrolment inasmuch as the particularities of their life trajectories cannot be repeated, and it is not possible to find two individuals with the exact same life story. However, in order to apply our methodological approach, we must group and reclassify their experiences according to the categories proposed in Table 5-5, a task that –aside from the cases of forced recruitment and of no answer– brought several challenges to the surface.

Some interviewees declared to join because of 'peer recommendation' (commonly by family members, friends or neighbors) (32 cases), but it is not explicit what type of grievance they were trying to address by joining the group or what were the benefits offered or described by their peers for joining; a similar situation occurs for the cases in which interviewees declared joining because of 'promises of life improvement' (9 cases), because of 'false promises' (7 cases) and for having been 'deceived' (7 cases). In order to be able to include them (or not exclude them as unclassifiable) we will use the secondary reason (when provided) declared for a proper reclassification.

Secondly, those interviewees that reported joining because they lived in an area of influence of the armed group (19 people), and those who considered joining 'the natural step after being a miliciano' (5 people) or after 'running errands' for the armed group (8 people) are not directly revealing their motivation to join but rather stating that a process of affinity was built, either by force or by progressive cooperation with the group activities; something that can also be argued for the individuals (17 cases) that declared joining because of having a 'coca-related job' before enrolment. It is not clear if they joined the armed group

to obtain (or increase their) income, to guarantee their personal safety, to follow some sort of ideological consideration, or to alleviate any sort of psychological needs. Here too, the cases in which it is provided will be properly reclassified based on their secondary reason. In the end, 14% of the cluster cases cannot be uniformly classified in our framework and will be identified as ‘unclassifiable’ (e.g. ‘evade the authorities’).

Other problematic cases are those (7 interviewees) that declared being ‘unsatisfied with their lives’ at the moment of enrolment as their main motivation, because it is not clear if the dissatisfaction was caused by material or psychological causes, or a combination of both. We will include them in the personal psychological category given that the literal response stressed the feeling of dissatisfaction –psychological in nature– rather than explicitly remarking a material or economic aspect as other respondents did by declaring ‘income opportunity’, ‘debt to an armed group’ or ‘promise of money’. The same argument will be used to categorize the responses ‘familiar problems’.

Interviewees that reported joining because of ‘ideological identification’ will be classified as dealing with collective psychological grievances, following the idea that “ideologies are socially shared [and] acquired, used and changed in social situations, and on the basis of the social interests of groups and social relations between groups” (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 135). In this line of thought, Camacho Guizado (2002) observes that the ideology in question might be one that proclaims the urgent necessity of change in the prevailing conditions of the society (p. 144).

Bearing in mind that the motivations –declared and not declared– of people to act respond to multilayered, multifactorial, and multifaceted emotions and thoughts that perhaps cannot be truly captured in the form of raw data, the result of our transformation provides a completely different picture to that presented in the Table 5-3 and to the common assumptions of the literature analyzing armed conflict.

Table 5-7: Transformed motivations to join armed groups.

Motivation	Gender		Total	%
	Fem	Mas		
Personal Psychological	108	123	231	40.0%
Personal Material (Survival)	56	103	159	27.5%
Unclassifiable	33	48	81	14.0%
Forced	41	33	74	12.8%
Collective Psychological	3	18	21	3.6%
No Data (ND)	2	10	12	2.1%

Source: Own construction.

At first glance the table reveals the greater importance given by people to addressing psychological needs such as familiar or amorous reencounters, revenge, wish for new experiences, the pursuit of status, or escaping from victimizing environments –to cite a few– with 40% of the motivations of this cluster being explicitly related to personal psychological grievances. What is more, the unclassifiable motives such as ‘promises of life improvement’ and ‘deception’ –that darken the type of grievance under discussion– accentuate the complex and arcane character of the issue at hand by increasing the subjective explanations in 14%; adding the respondents that declared being forcibly recruited results in a total of 70.4% of the cluster that can be said to not being explicitly motivated by material or economic benefits, which represents a major inconsistency vis-à-vis the tenets of the ‘Greed and Grievance Theory’. Some of the most significant testimonies in this regard follow:

“After an argument with my father, who beat me for going to a party without permission, I decided to go to the guerrilla” (I-016)¹⁴⁵.

The army burnt his house and displaced his family, so he decided to join the (FARC) guerrilla to seek revenge (Interviewer, about I-025).

¹⁴⁵ This story is almost identical to the one provided by I-441. We verified that the interviewees were not the same person. The former joined the FARC in 2009 in Guaviare at age 12, and the latter joined the FARC in 1999 in Guainía at age 14.

I-105 states that she joined the ELN in order to take revenge against the father of her sons, who abandoned her and never provided child support (Interviewer).

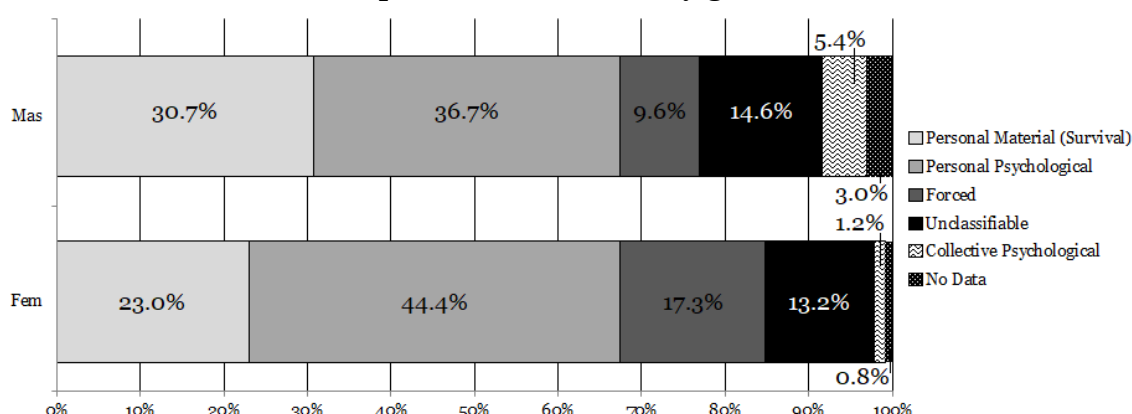
She joined the ELN at age 16 seeking protection from the mistreatment and beatings of her husband (Interviewer, about I-339).

“My sister was in the FARC, so I joined to be with her” (I-374).

Her mother’s husband sexually abused her, and due to the disbelief on the accusation, the powerlessness and injustice she felt, she asked to be enrolled in the ELN (pretending to be motivated by the group ideology) with aims to obtain revenge (Interviewer, about I-405).

In terms of gender, this cluster displays slight –but observable– differences regarding the higher salience of material motivations in the case of males, and of psychological motivations in the case of females. Ideological affinity with the armed group is modest in both genders, although declared as motivation by males three times more than by females. Forced recruitment has been exerted almost twice as often on females than on males in this cluster, as manifest in Table 5-1, which shows how the majority of interviewees stopped education due to their enrolment into insurgencies (85 females and 47 males), as well as in Table 5-2, which shows that more females (90) were recruited while being students (versus 24 males).

Graph 5-9: Motivations by gender.



Source: Own construction.

When grouped by period of enrolment, the demobilized of this cluster display increasing material motivations throughout the history of the conflict, decreasing ideological and psychological motives, and relatively identical levels of forced recruitment, with an upsurge in the first escalation period, which we address hereunder.

Table 5-8: Motivations and period of enrolment.

	Marginal ¹⁴⁶	Escalation	Re-Escalation	Negotiations
Personal Material (Survival)	-	15.3%	24.7%	41.8%
Personal Psychologic	50.0%	41.8%	40.7%	25.4%
Collective Psychologic	50.0%	8.2%	2.8%	0.0%
Forced	-	17.3%	11.5%	10.7%
Unclassifiable	-	15.3%	18.5%	18.9%
No Data	-	2.0%	1.7%	3.3%

Source: Own construction.

These observations are in line with the assertions made by the UN (2001) with regard to the effects of the war in terms of the economic, political and social disintegration of the population. Generated by, in conjunction with, or aggravated by the widespread physical and economic insecurity caused by armed confrontations, displacement, and the breakage of production and distribution cycles, “conflicts create extensive emotional and psychosocial stress associated with attacks, loss of loved ones, separation from parents and destruction of home and community” (p. 205), which, in turn, results in thousands of citizens “malnourished, uneducated, without skills and psychologically scarred” (p. 207)¹⁴⁷.

If the studies made by Beltrán Villegas (2014) and by Florez-Morris (2007) (which examine individuals who belonged to the first generation of insurgencies) are taken as reference in replacement of the marginal war period

¹⁴⁶ As aforementioned, only two of our interviewees enrolled into the analyzed insurgencies during the ‘marginal war’ period.

¹⁴⁷ The UN document refers to children, but we –again– contend that the effects and participation dynamics are the same for adults.

–for which we do not have compelling data– it is possible to observe a substantial change in the motivations to participate in rebel movements. The former are described as having significant involvement in social issues (through peasant, union, and student organizations) prior to their enrolment (Florez-Morris, 2007), as well as personal and familiar history in resistance movements such as the ‘liberal guerrillas’ or the UP Political party (Beltrán Villegas, 2014); in addition, “most of the interviewees did not come from marginal or deprived socioeconomic groups” (Florez-Morris, 2007, p. 633). For these reasons the literature characterizes them as preeminently ‘ideologically motivated’ (read, collective psychological in our terms) and focused in collective material achievements (e.g. land redistribution, better working conditions), in contrast with late insurgents, commonly described as motivated by personal material grievances. While the latter –at least in our cluster– occasionally mentions to be ‘ideologically identified’ to the group they joined (see Table 5-3), none of them mentions collective goals such as agrarian or labor reforms in their narrations, and expressions such as ‘equality’ or ‘social justice’ are rather scarce¹⁴⁸.

Our first contention is that the (former) combatants of this cluster display a higher inclination to join insurgencies (in an attempt) to address personal matters rather than collective ones, in response to the increasing impacts generated by the armed conflict in their immediate surroundings. Without forgetting that early insurgent movements were originated in personal issues such as obstacles to land property or abusive labor practices, the rationale and operationalization of the grievances seems different. We will return to this idea further ahead.

¹⁴⁸ In the cluster only three interviewees (I-335, I-535, and I-543) refer explicitly to ‘social justice’ and ‘equality’ as part of their convictions to participate in the insurgencies; the last two joined the FARC in 1998 and the former the ELN in 2011. One possible explanation is the process of transcription, in which the interviewer might have summarized as ‘ideological identification’ all instances in which the interviewee elicited such concepts in detail. The expression ‘inequality’ appears more frequently in interviewees’ life stories when describing the reasons to demobilize; commonly chronicling privileges for commanders when compared to rank and file soldiers.

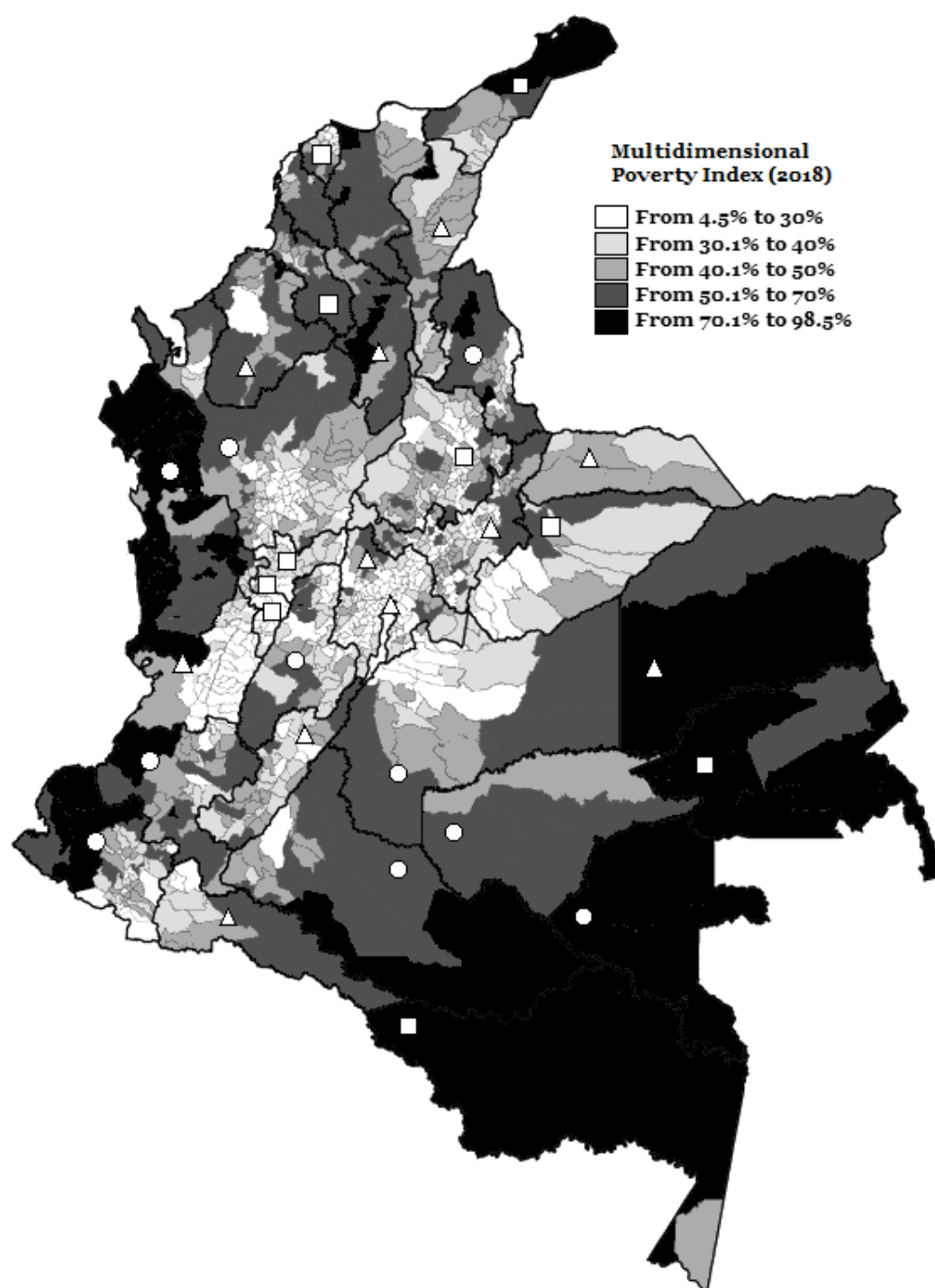
In regional terms, the table below Map 5-3 (in next page) shows that there are no marked differences in terms of the type of motivation according to the region¹⁴⁹ of origin of the interviewees. Although it could be expected that recruits from departments with higher levels of multidimensional poverty¹⁵⁰ would declare material ambitions as motivation to join more often, the proportion of personal material motivations, personal psychological motivations, and ideological (read, collective psychological) motivations is quite similar in all regions, especially material ones. The table echoes the prevalence of psychological grievances in the departments that contribute the largest number of recruits. The map also shows the resemblance between the historical affectation of armed conflict (shown in Map 5-1), the magnitude of recruitment in departments (shown in Map 5-2), and the concentration of poverty in the regions situated far away from political and economic centers. Even if armed actors recruit more in poorer regions, the declared motivations of recruits do not display great variation across departments, although psychological ones stand out.

While not saying that it is null, several authors remark that the impact of armed conflict in large urban areas is much lesser than in rural areas: reduced to the detonation of explosive artifacts with terrorist purposes (Salas-Salazar, 2016), the violence associated to drug trafficking and cartel wars, the constant inflow of violence-related migrants (Vargas & García, 2008), and the growing presence of paramilitary warlords and mafia networks in urban spaces in order to conduct strategic economic and political activities (Duncan, 2005). In other words, the bulk of the armed conflict is concentrated outside political and economic centers, in rural Colombia, where the majority of the violence and of the recruitment happens, and where its effects in terms of economic, political and social disintegration are more patent.

¹⁴⁹ Table presents groups of 10 departments according to the number of recruits of the cluster. Two departments (San Andrés Islands and Magdalena) have no recruits in this cluster.

¹⁵⁰ Calculated through fifteen indicators analyzing educational achievement of the household, barriers to access to educational and health services, job stability and formality, and access to public services such as water and sanitation (DANE, 2018).

Map 5-3: Motivations according to department of birth.

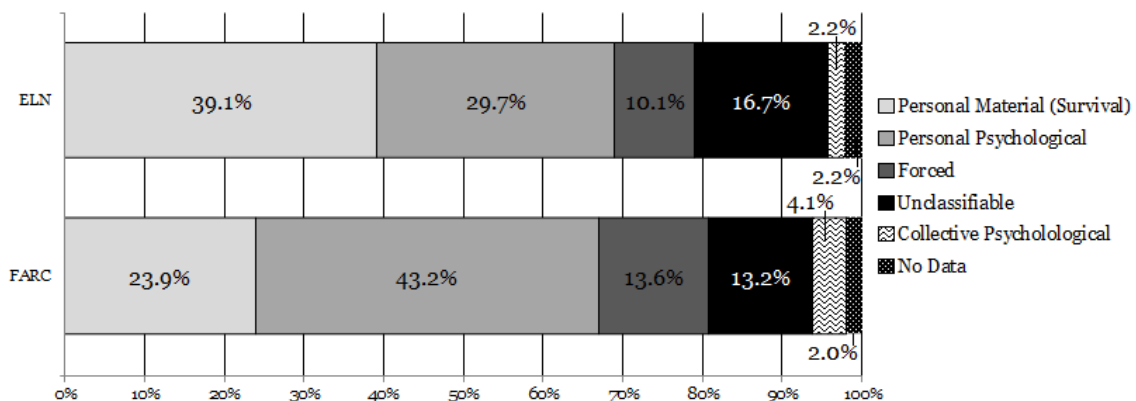


	(%) of Total Interviewees	Personal Material (S)	Personal Psychol.	Collective Psychol.	Forced	Unclassifiable	No Data
Top-10	○ 76.6%	28.0%	39.5%	3.6%	13.1%	13.5%	2.3%
11-21	△ 18.0%	25.0%	45.2%	2.9%	9.6%	16.3%	1.0%
22-31	□ 5.4%	29.0%	25.8%	6.5%	19.4%	16.1%	3.2%

Source: Own construction over map from DANE (2018).

In terms of the groups, all categories display proportions akin, except for material and psychological personal grievances within each group, in which differences between the FARC and the ELN are noticeable despite that the aggregated proportion of recruits that joined on the expectation of resolution of either are almost identical in both groups: 67% for the FARC and 68.8% for the ELN; however, rather than responding, this picture raises important questions.

Graph 5-10: Motivations by armed group.



Source: Own construction.

On the one hand, despite their subjectivity, the psychological motives (that are preponderant in this cluster's responses) might have a relatively straightforward explanation: reasons such as escape from familiar problems (e.g. domestic violence or sexual abuse), revenge, protection from other armed groups, loneliness, or allure for military life style, find grounds on the fact that by joining an insurgency the new recruit can belong to an armed group that is seen as authority and obeyed and feared in the proximity¹⁵¹, and in spite of the risks associated (legal problems, automatic enmity with contending groups, and potential damages to personal integrity), it can be said that the new recruit can find solace through his/her participation. Quoting previous studies, Tezcür (2016) remarks that "individuals may participate in an insurgency due to familial emotional and moral commitments regardless of the costs and expected outcomes" (p. 249).

¹⁵¹ In the case of familiar reencounters and love relationships with group members, there is no choice but to join the group in which one's loved one is enrolled.

Nevertheless, if the relationship between the community and the armed group is as close as assumed from the fact that their presence in the territory is not transitory, and often symbiotic rather than predatory or parasitic, it is difficult to understand that potential recruits, constantly in contact and communication with insurgency members, are in no way aware of the hardships of insurgent life: long working hours, scarce food, strenuous work (e.g. cooking for large squadrons, digging trenches and latrines, cutting firewood), constant military attacks, witnessing the mutilation and death of fellow combatants, and in the case of women, constant sexual abuse and forced abortions (González, 2020, feb 13). Even more puzzling is the fact that dozens of interviewees declare that the major motivation behind their enrolment was the recommendation made by a family member or a close peer:

“I saw that my cousin was always fine, with nice clothes and money, he always told me that life there was good, that permanence there was not compulsory and that the day I wanted to leave they would allow me to do it; that was my motive to go with him” (I-213).

Similar arguments have been presented by recruiters, and –as we will describe some pages ahead– most often accompanied by promises of economic or educational benefits aimed to persuade potential recruits to join.

“Many guerrilleros went to my house and told me that life there was good, and I, tired of raising all the children my mother was having, seeing all the needs we had, hearing that in the guerrilla I could get an education, I fell for it” (I-136).

“They told me “look at yourself, full of bruises; is that is the life you want? Come with us and have a good life.”” I-502.

In addition to that, there are cases in which the enrolment is paradoxical and difficult to explain:

Two of his brothers were executed by the FARC in a war council. The oldest for allegedly collecting extortions on behalf of the group, and the youngest (at age 12) for allegedly selling marihuana to members of the army [...] In spite of this, he

joined the FARC, arguing that “they told me after a mandatory test period of one year I will start receiving money and a motorcycle... all lies” (I-301).

Here we want to recall one contention presented by one important analyst of the Colombian armed conflict; Gutiérrez (2012) argues that armed groups in Colombia “have high barriers to both entry and exit” (p. 181); the testimonies of our cluster confirm the second part, but contradict the first. The GADH interviews reveal that both the FARC and the ELN recruit combatants and ‘milicianos’ in open contradiction to their official recruiting policy, breaking self-promulgated rules such as the lower limit age of 15 years, and the background checks aimed to avoid infiltration.

The offering of false benefits to potential recruits responds to what the literature calls the ‘selective incentives’ for participation in rebellion. For instance, Andvig (2010) summarizes previous research to remark that “given extensive hunger, poverty, youth unemployment, and the absence of educational opportunities, joining an armed group may be a relatively attractive opportunity, thereby reducing the material incentives required” (p. 86), while Weinstein (2007) argues that “rebel leaders build armies by making credible promises about the selective incentives they can provide to participants in the future” (p. 621), and Ginges and Atran (2009) remark that “it is possible that selective incentives are nonmaterial goods, such as reputation and status” (p. 119). On the other hand, authors like Weinstein (2005) and Forney (2015) stress the adverse selection¹⁵² problems faced by armed groups given that potential recruits might lie about their capacities and commitment, and others like Beber and Blattman (2013) model the relation between armed groups and recruits as one in which “rebel leaders [are] the principal and a civilian [is] the agent” (p. 69).

Our data allows us to suggest that –if understood in that way– the information asymmetry and the adverse selection risk happens much more in the opposite

¹⁵² Defined as “a situation in which one party in a deal has more accurate and different information than the other party [for which] the party with less information is at a disadvantage to the party with more information” (Nickolas, 2020, apr 3).

direction; this is, recruits do not know what really awaits them when joining insurgencies, the bulk of the benefits offered by recruiters are bogus or unattainable in practice, and the achievement of personal objectives –especially material ones– is very unlikely to happen due to the nature, structure, and orientation of the groups in question. The following testimony is very telling:

The participant enrolls voluntarily (to the FARC) because her brothers were there and the recruiter promised her to bring them together. Sometime later she found they were both dead for some years (interviewer, about I-275).

At this point, we also contend that in the cases in which it resembles a voluntary decision, enrolment responds to the conjunction of the credibility¹⁵³ of the armed group and the aspirations of potential recruits, both of which depend on their “location in existing power structures, legal entitlements, customs and social practices, [and] institutional and [regional] priorities” (Hart, 2016, p. 336). Both notions reflected in the following testimony

“Looking other kids joining the guerrilla as something so normal and later see them arrive to the village with uniforms, weapons, money and motorcycles... it generates a lot of jealousy” (I-204).

As argued by Stutzer (2004), “human beings are [...] constantly drawing comparisons from their environment, from the past or from their expectations of the future” (p. 90), for which we contend that the inclination to join the FARC and the ELN –in the cases analyzed in this data cluster, and when voluntary– is, first, explained by Gurr's relative deprivation theory (described in Chapter 2) given that the lack of certain resources (be it material or immaterial) in relation to others in the community has been encouraging civilians to join insurgencies, and second, characterized for happening most commonly in areas in which the FARC and the ELN exert social, political, and economic control on what we

¹⁵³ “A person’s perception of the truth of a piece of information” (Umeogu, 2012, p. 113).

reckon as a ‘captive population’¹⁵⁴. Given that “people typically think that they were worse off in the past and will be better off in the future” (Easterlin, 2008, p. 465), many of the individuals captive under insurgent control foresaw a better future inside the insurgencies than outside them, most likely ignoring key information about the realities of participation.

Furthermore, mobility is not a viable option for the (materially or psychologically) aggrieved individuals, in the sense of choosing a different armed group to that one present in their environment or even departure in search of better opportunities. Without resources to plan and bear the costs of relocation, and not risking being killed for exiting one region without authorization or for arriving to a new region as a stranger, for whatever reason people decides to join an armed group, they are somewhat constrained to join the armed group in their vicinity. In other words, aggrieved (or even avaricious) individuals could redress their grievances (or material deficits) through channels different to NSAGs (the FARC and the ELN insurgencies in this case), if only those groups did not exist in the first place, or if those groups did not govern their homeland, or participate or control their (legal or illegal) familiar economic activities, as well as the social and political life in the locality.

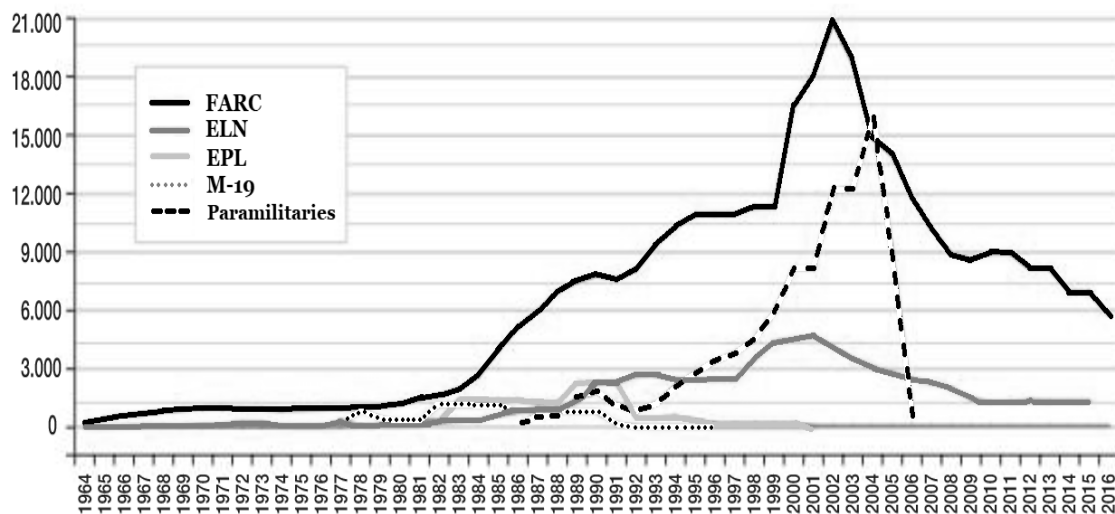
While Ugarriza and Nussio (2015) argue that only a small minority of former combatants see themselves as forcedly recruited, our cluster reveals it as the most common reason to join¹⁵⁵, and aside from the explicit response ‘forced’, it is possible to add those recruits that declared been ‘deceived’, as well as those who mention ‘false promises’, given that their participation would probably not have taken place without deceit. Contrary to the assertions of Wessells (2015), who considers that “forced recruitment by armed groups is not contractual” (p.

¹⁵⁴ Defined as people who “find themselves in a context [...] where they are constrained” (Vandebosch, 2008, p. 67). The concept is commonly used in social qualitative studies.

¹⁵⁵ The same authors also warn about the potential effect of the sample they used (demobilized) as explanation for the recurrence of ‘forced recruitment’ statements –especially in former members of insurgencies– given that people recruited forcedly could tend to desert more than people genuinely motivated to enroll (p. 201).

253), in Colombia it is, inasmuch as withdrawal and attempts to escape are punished by death, even in the cases in which the enrolment resulted from recruit's initiative. Going back to Gutierrez' words, the barriers to enter insurgencies are much lower than those for exiting, and without what for us resembles abduction rather than recruitment, insurgencies would have probably extinguished long before.

Graph 5-11: Total members of NSGAs in Colombia, 1964-2016.



Source: Ugarriza and Pabón Ayala (2017, p. 288).

The Graph 5-11 (above) allows appreciating the dimension of this phenomenon: the total demobilization of the M-19 and the partial demobilization of the EPL (visible in the graph in the mid-1990s) precedes the swelling recruitment (especially by the FARC and paramilitaries) that resulted from the escalation associated with the tandem insurgencies-drug traffic since the early 1980s, and that reached its peak in the early 2000s. This peak coincides with the highest numbers of yearly fatal victims (see Graph 4-1) and forced displacement (see Graph 4-4), for which we gather that the escalation of war increased victimization levels (motivating people to join insurgencies under a promise of economic or physical safety) while at the same time decreasing the general population support to war (discouraging potential recruits to join insurgencies, and encouraging the less committed combatants to desert); with the latter trend being stronger than the former, insurgencies relied more often on deceptive

(promises of economic or physical safety as a decoy) or forced recruitment upon the inhabitants of the remote regions under their control as means to replenish and/or increase their forces, aggravating the desertion trend and validating the governmental advertising campaigns aimed to encourage individual demobilization that we mentioned at the beginning of section 5.2.

Official demobilization¹⁵⁶ jumped from eight people in 2002 to 3,510 in 2003 and to 5,555 in 2004. Between 2005 and 2006 an estimate of 34,000 people demobilized (mainly from paramilitary organizations after negotiations with the Uribe administration), and in the years thereafter an average of 1,300 people have demobilized per year (ARN, 2020).

Numerous GADH interviewees remark the extent to which belonging to the insurgencies represented an automatic improvement in terms of personal status and empowerment, which summed to the control exerted by the group in the area, gave credibility to the promises made by recruiters in terms of educational and economic opportunities –lending support to the assertions presented some paragraphs above regarding impoverishing contexts that make joining insurgencies an ‘attractive opportunity’ for getting material (e.g. money, vehicles) and immaterial (e.g. status, protection) benefits. Nevertheless, under a general context of increasing military pressure and reducing social support (macro), both the FARC and the ELN seem to have relaxed their incorporation mechanisms and extended the use of false pretenses or threats for recruiting (ultimately increasing indiscriminate recruitment) while at the same time forbidding resignation under death threats (meso). For us, this gradually undermined their internal cohesion and exposed the groups to increasing levels of desertion, and intelligence and military breaches (micro), for which the cure began to do more harm than the illness.

¹⁵⁶ Before 1999 no official demobilization program existed, and all demobilizations occurred ‘in masse’ within the framework of amnesty laws resulting from formal negotiation processes (ACR, 2016). At individual level, paramilitary onslaught, official armed forces reticence, and potential retaliations from the abandoned group make reasonable to think that individual demobilizations occurred always surreptitiously and were never reported before the early 2000s.

5.5. Greed or need?

Zartman (2005) posits that “all conflicts are about identity [and] all conflicts are about basic needs” (p. 256) inasmuch as “grievances occur over a deprivation of basic needs of some sort” (p. 262). For him, when the needs that put groups in conflict are based on identity they take the form of ‘creed’ (read, strong beliefs), and when the conflict is ‘hijacked’ by personal benefits, the original group struggle falls into a ‘greed’ stage.

For the Colombian case, Guáqueta (2002) argues that in spite of having genuine political and socioeconomic grievances in the 1960s, and conserving a great deal of their general identity as ‘Marxist insurgencies’ to this day, it is likely that the FARC and the ELN have undergone a change in direction, specifically towards criminalization. Her argument is two-pronged: a change in the combatants’ preferences and interests derived from the protraction of the confrontation, in which for dedicating more time to economic activities (a necessity to stay in combat) many of them have been contaminated by “a sort of corruption of the rebel cause” that compels them to seek for personal profit (p. 32); on the other hand, a change in the insurgencies’ identity, derived from the accelerated rate of recruitment that prevented new recruits from “assimilating and strengthening the insurgent discourse [for which] their motivations have been linked more to the economic opportunities granted by the armed power provided by an organization with strong territorial control” (p. 32). This view is shared by a large segment of the national and international commentators on the matter.

For us, both contentions are based on the tenets of what we described in Chapter 3 as a ‘stalemate situation’, and in which actors’ refusal to negotiate and ensuing protraction ultimately leads to a deviation from the original objectives of the struggle and to focus in the securing resources to either defeat the contender(s) or personally benefit from what Keen (1998, 2000) called the ‘apparent chaos’ generated by the continuation of the armed conflict.

In our view, Guaqueta's assertions summarize the generalized view on Colombian armed conflict, and although they are partially accurate, they are overall mistaken. Insurgent groups have in fact engaged in questionable practices to gather funds (e.g. kidnapping) and have developed economic partnership with somber actors (such as drug traffickers), but as we argued in previous chapters (a) any economic activity carried out by rebel groups is by definition criminal: the financing of the rebel groups that achieved the French and American independences (epitomes of social justice) were considered illegal by the reigning monarchies at the time; (b) state governments have also used questionable practices –deemed as legitimate– such as food blockades and attacks to economic infrastructure with aims to tilt military balances on their favor, under 'demoralization of the enemy' arguments; (c) the equalization of the interests of the armed groups with those of the recruits and vice versa is problematic, especially if the group was formed fifty years ago. The general idea is that if the FARC and/or the ELN nowadays exploit –say– cocaine as a source of financing, by association, their fighters are not interested in whatever struggle or ideals the group professes, but in profiting from the drug traffic business as well; and (d) the interests of the combatants are assumed to be the same to their interests before being properly combatants, and all along their participation. This last issue is the central point in our argument.

Several interviewees in our cluster declare that recruiters from both the FARC and the ELN

"Offered me a good monthly salary, money for my own house and periodic permissions to visit my family" (I-415).

Analogous –not to say exactly the same– statements were provided by I-213, I-272, I-320, I-395, I-400, I-424, I-448, I-497, I-509, and I-547, and similar stories including promises of education, monthly allowances for family members in the outside, and prompt solutions to personal problems, were reported by dozens more in the cluster, only to find after arriving to the insurgent camp that exit is not permitted, there are no salaries, and the group

does not address personal feuds of their recruits. All in all, one fifth (19.4%) of this cluster arrived to the insurgency either by direct coercion or by false promises regarding solutions to whatever problem they had at the moment; this without including those who saw their enrolment as an ‘income opportunity’ (unaware of the dismal reality in terms of payments) and that we nonetheless coded as ‘materially motivated’.

Despite that neither the FARC nor the ELN pay salaries to their combatants, the proceeds of their activities are not individually appropriable, and the resources their exploit are hardly ‘lootable’¹⁵⁷ for individual profit, large –yet dissimilar across groups– proportions of recruits in this cluster declared joining with the hope of alleviating material needs.

Gutiérrez (2010) remarked that in Colombia there are many more “profitable and less risky” alternatives to ‘guerrillas’ from which to choose for people with precarious employment opportunities that decide to work illegally (p. 135). Following our data we disagree in terms of the choice capacity of the individuals, because, first, the armed group that controls the region in which one is born –or arrives after (voluntary or forced) relocation– is something given, and completely out of personal control; this circumstance responds to historical dynamics. While our cluster might not be statistically representative of the whole population, it is evident that a large proportion of them happen to be in regions controlled by armed groups (or one particular armed group) as result of longstanding processes (land accumulation, drug production expansion, and/or armed conflict dynamics) that began decades ago, as well as in regions with a long history of economic precariousness. Citizens cannot control either the armed group that arrives to their (say, previously peaceful) locale, nor the natural resources available, or the economic initiatives developed by such groups to obtain funding. Therefore, if one’s region is endowed with gold or emeralds, or if its climate and location is suitable for the cultivation and trade of coca or poppy, and one particular armed group decides to control such

¹⁵⁷ See Chapter 3.

resource, there is not much one can do about it, especially because of the mobility restrictions we mentioned in the previous section.

On the other hand, under a context of –paraphrasing Weinstein– generalized poverty, unemployment, and absence of educational opportunities, all aggravated by, first, more limited access to basic services (thanks to the privatization wave initiated during the late 1980s that conditioned access to payment); second, increased labor flexibility and uncertainty; third, deceleration of licit rural production; and fourth, higher levels of concentration of land property –especially by armed means– (macro), more inhabitants of the remote regions experienced material and psychological hardship (See map 5-3), developing incentives to join armed organizations as means to redress them under the belief that such groups were –quoting one interviewee– “a vital lifeline” (I-552) (micro); such circumstances were exploited by armed groups to either lure (based on credible promises) or coerce (based on military control and fear) the population to join their ranks, most often exploiting an information asymmetry regarding the real conditions and vicissitudes of insurgent life (meso). The following testimony endorses this contention:

“Given that in the restaurant I was working I was not earning enough to feed my family, and they told me they were going to pay me more and treat me well, I joined, but ultimately it was all lies” (I-243).

Leaving aside the fact that they do not represent the preeminent type of motivation of this cluster (with 27.5%), the cases we coded as ‘personal material motivations’ –and that the literature commonly calls ‘selective benefits’– reflect more what Zartman (2005) has described as “unmet needs, unwarranted deprivation, felt hurts, and resentment against the withholding of just deserts” (p. 263) that, in turn, have created “conditions of penury [in which] some parts of the population felt neglected” (p. 265). Our interpretation is visible in the repetitive appearance of terms such as ‘job’ and ‘education’ in the stories of the interviewees, such as in the following examples:

“At the moment, jobs were scarce and they offered me one” I-201

She was prompted by a recruiter who told her that inside the group she would receive education and all she needed (Interviewer, about I-211).

He became unemployed at age 20 thanks to the Illicit Crop Eradication Programme, for which he joined the ELN (Interviewer, about I-321).

Being 35 years old, he joined the group [FARC] because they were constantly stopping over his farm and, in his words “jobs were really bad, and they promised me some money for me and my family” (Interviewer, about I-346).

“My parents could not afford to pay for our studies; my wish was to study, to have my uniform and my notebooks, but they were really poor. They sent us all to the farm to work, so none of my siblings received education. We are all illiterate. I joined [the FARC] to be able to study” I-364

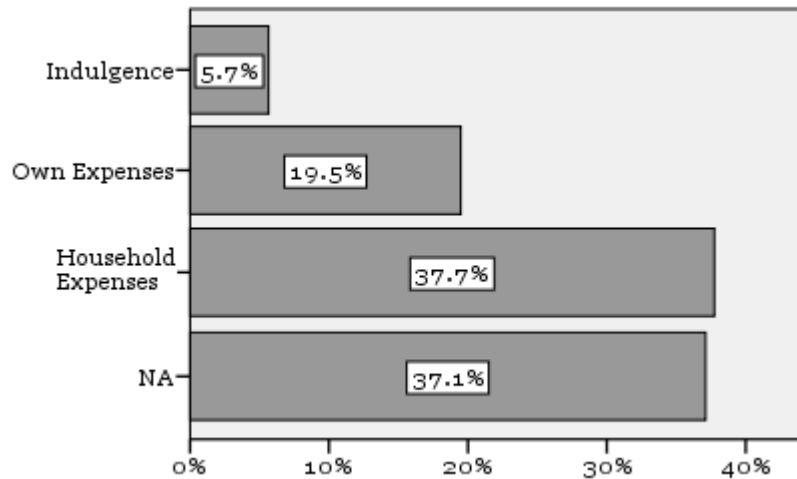
She joined along with her husband, because his cousin offered them a good and stable job with the group (Interviewer, about I-546).

Following the definition we presented above, rather than reflecting ‘greed’ (read, “a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed”), the stories of the GADH interviewees resemble more any of the four connotations of the word ‘need’¹⁵⁸. In our cluster, the closest thing to a ‘greedy’ individual were those instances in which interviewees declared eagerness for income as a reason to abandon school (6.7% of the cluster), commonly longing to acquire branded sneakers, mobiles phones, or motorcycles, in spite of having basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, and personal safety) covered. A multidimensional poverty analysis of those households might be required in order to assess the quality of their food and shelter, and the real extent of their physical safety, given the constant influx of armed groups in their neighborhoods.

¹⁵⁸ (1) Necessary duty; (2) a lack of something requisite, desirable, or useful; a physiological or psychological requirement for the well-being of an organism; (3) a condition requiring supply or relief; and (4) lack of the means of subsistence (“Need,” n.d.).

As shown in Graph 5-11 (below), before joining insurgencies, the majority of the interviewees that explicitly declared material motivations to join destined their income to household or personal living expenses (57.2%), or did not have income at all (37.1%). The latter case –as aforementioned– more frequent in the case of students and females dedicated to housework, commonly unpaid.

Graph 5-12: Income destination of ‘materially motivated’ recruits.



Source: Own construction.

In connection with the above, none of the responses in this cluster was coded as ‘personal opulence’, neither as ‘collective opulence’, nor as ‘collective survival’, which in our view is explained by several factors. First, none of the respondents explicitly declared joining in pursuit of personal enrichment, and if that had been the case most probably they would not have openly admitted it; a similar situation may occur in the case of collective movements. Nevertheless, ‘material opulence’ –at personal or collective levels– is noticeable in the Colombian case in examples such as the paramilitary commanders that accumulated tens of thousands hectares of lands through their private armies, and the reluctance of rural elites to the redistribution of land in diverse moments from the eighteen century onwards, as described in previous chapters; in the former case, a change in attitude –after participation– derived from the discovery of private gain opportunities during the course of the confrontation can be the explanation, for which it is hardly identifiable *ex-ante*. Another form of personal opulence is often visible in drug traffickers’ propensity to accumulate and flaunt the

property of haciendas, majestic marble mansions, flamboyant jewelry, gold plated weapons, and the like (Acosta Ugalde, 2014), but as already mentioned, aside from those who declared abandoning school with intentions to satisfy indulgence beyond basic needs, the GADH interviewees display low levels of ambition for these types of ‘personal opulence’.

Secondly, in spite of having similar –for not saying the same– basic economic grievances, ‘collective material survival’ does not surface in the testimonies of the GADH interviewees of this cluster in same way in which it is described by historians as the major motivation to organize or join insurgencies in Colombia during the mid-twentieth century. While this might reflect what Villegas de Posada (2009) calls a ‘more pragmatic orientation’ to participation, we consider that both early and late insurgents follow a pragmatic approach (understood as giving preponderance to the practical utility of one’s actions) and both aim to redress what Lichbach (1994) calls “specific, well-defined, limited and local” grievances (p. 389), nonetheless, early insurgencies agglomerated the multiple wants of different aggrieved populations (be it sharecroppers, small plot tenants or enclave workers) in collective movements thanks to processes of communal identity, solidarity, and effective framing made by local leaders, and precipitated by governmental repression to previously pacific and legal organized claims. Conversely, late insurgents mobilize individually into an already existing group, under scenarios of reduced social connectedness resulting from increased individualism under the perception that “they are separate from others and the environment in which they live”, and under the conviction that increased “personal freedom and choice” are the perfect reflections of the liberation from chains such as religious dogma, class oppression, discrimination, or political tyranny (Eckersley, 2006, p. 254). In other words, devoid from communal identity and solidarity frameworks, they concentrate in their more immediate sorrows, single-handedly, as (allegedly) free-will individuals.

In our view, this circumstance is in line with two notions: first, Jacoby’s (2008) differentiation between egoistic deprivation (experienced internally and driven by personal goals) and fraternal deprivation (experienced collectively and

commonly inducing participatory responses such as social movements, political parties, trade unions and the like) (p. 122); and second, the mismatch between personal and collective goals described by Tollefsen (2014) and Miller and Tuomela (2014), in the sense that the latter rely on shared knowledge of the issue at hand and coordinated participation in the achievement of a collective solution. The latter authors quote Rousseau to remark that a collective goal does not emerge from being “accidentally” shared by the members of a collective alone, but because of their active participation in the attainment of the “group interest” (p. 35).

In this vein –in our view– in spite of ‘accidentally’ sharing conditions such as limited access to educational and economic opportunities or insufficient health, justice and security coverage, the accounts of participation in insurgencies provided by the interviewees of this cluster do not reflect a feeling of fraternal deprivation or determination to achieve collective goals through participation. As aforementioned, very few respondents in this cluster reported joining because of ‘ideological identification’ and in none of those cases the tenets or the objectives of such ideology are explicit; if the presumption is that insurgencies are looking to redress issues such as income and/or land property inequality, uneven political rights, insufficient access to basic services, and the like, such kind of claims are not present in their descriptions. Social goals such as –say– state funds for education, economic infrastructure for the region, or resolute institutional actions towards domestic violence, are not mentioned in the interviews like insurgencies or political movements would, and neither smaller-scale collective goals such as the construction of a local school, local allotment of lands, or the modification of labor contracts within a specific company, as organized collective movements do.

For us, the recruits in this cluster seemed focused in the solution of their personal grievances (both material and psychological) without taking into consideration (or expressly indicating to do so) or aiming to redress too the (similar or equal) grievances of their peers as a group.

At this point another important contention emerges: the equalization of joining an armed insurgency because of economic needs with warlordism. The latter we defined in Chapter 2 as the “use of military experience to exercise control over certain territories through private armies intended to privatize state functions and [personally] profit from diverse forms of illicit or informal economy” (Williams, 2008, p. 9), and according to Guáqueta (2002) this parallel gained prominence when the works of Paul Collier gave the debate of armed conflict economic emphasis due to the evidence of military leaders (warlords) enriching themselves in the midst of African armed conflicts.

Through an association of ideas it is said that the FARC and the ELN are exercising control over certain territories and privatizing state functions as means to prosper from their involvement in drug traffic and other types of illicit activities, and that individuals that join those organizations are not really interested in using them as a political platform to make statements or to stimulate transformations about socioeconomic conditions such as poverty, inequality or access to education, but merely as platforms for personal benefit, which means that Colombian insurgencies are formed by thousands of ‘warlords’.

Here we want to rekindle an important contention presented by Goodhand (2004), who separates between combat economies (related to the production, mobilization and allocation of economic resources to sustain a conflict), shadow economies (those economic activities conducted outside state-regulated frameworks), and coping economies (or the activities carried out by population groups to survive), and who also stresses that “there are no clear boundaries among these three economies” (p. 157). He presents the following example:

For a resource-poor farmer, poppy is part of the coping or survival economy; for the landowner leasing his land or for the opium trader, it is part of the shadow economy; and, for [the armed group] commanders that tax poppy, it is part of the combat economy. [For which] opium is simultaneously a conflict good, an “illicit” commodity and a means of survival (p. 164).

While his analysis is based on the situation of Afghanistan, it applies perfectly to the Colombian situation, and allows us to suggest that even though Colombian insurgencies do participate in questionable financing practices such as kidnapping and drug traffic (to sustain their combat economy), such activities are by definition –and due to their objective– illegal in nature (part of the shadow economy), and even though many recruits of our cluster explicitly declared to join motivated by the opportunity of obtaining material or economic benefits, (a) they are not the majority within the cluster, since many more interviewees joined hoping to solve psychological needs, and even ‘forced’ and unclassifiable responses –aggregated– account for a higher proportion (28.9%); (b) their responses do not display warlord-like interests such as land or real estate accumulation¹⁵⁹, but rather solutions to mundane issues such as access to education or employment; (c) the description of their wishes does not match the description of ‘greed’. As remarked by Jackson (2005)

Despite popular prejudices, not all participants in violent economies are greedy rebels or predatory warlords. Many ordinary people become dependent on violent economies. Nor are there always easy distinctions between “conflict entrepreneurs” who control violent economies, “conflict opportunists” who exploit subordinate positions in these economies, and “conflict dependence” at the bottom who subsist precariously within them (p. 153).

In the cases in which coca is the cornerstone of the coping economy before enrolment, ‘greed’ is not visible either:

With the coca money many of us have given an education to our sons. I have my three kids studying in Pasto [capital city of Nariño department]. In the village many families have managed even to provide university education to their sons thanks to the coca money. (Forero Rueda, 2020, may 14, par. 9).

Although its authenticity can be questioned (given the strict controls exerted by insurgencies to contact with the outside) one of the GADH interviews presents an exceptional case in terms of the economic benefits of joining insurgencies:

¹⁵⁹ Assuming they declared their true motivations to interviewers.

During his time in the FARC guerrilla his adoptive mother used to send him, through her contacts in the coca farm, money for his expenses; between one and two hundred thousand Pesos per month (Interviewer, about I-428).

The 23.9% of the FARC and 39.1% of the ELN recruits in our cluster declared joining because of (the opportunity of accessing) material benefits –often resigning their salaries– in despite that in neither group the assets are personal property of the combatants, and –assuming the testimony of I-428 as authentic– even depending on remittances from family members to withstand economic hardship within the insurgency.

We contend that the transformation of insurgencies in bodies of authority along with their linkages with profitable shadow businesses (e.g. coca) gradually gave the inhabitants of areas under their control the impression that those were able to provide goods and services handsomely. In the same way in which policy makers and governmental authorities tend to assume that the shadow business insurgencies use as financing source constitute their main (or only) goal, the assets (weaponry, vehicles and money) of the insurgencies gave civilians the impression that life in the insurgencies granted automatic access to such material and immaterial (e.g. safety or status) benefits at personal level, and that any promises made by insurgents were credible in the sense of the existence of palpable evidence of close acquaintances or family members being (or alleging being) beneficiaries; this is particularly true for the youngest¹⁶⁰. The provision of public goods such as security and justice might also have reinforced this idea.

Pressured by unfavorable economic conditions and by situations constantly threatening their personal safety, the inhabitants of these isolated, impoverished and violence-affected regions, often opted for heuristic decision processes (described in Chapter 4), taking peers' words at face value, and steered by the social, political and economic influence displayed by insurgencies

¹⁶⁰ The Graph 5-4 illustrates the tendency of this cluster in terms of age of enrolment.

around them. Recalling Gutiérrez (2010), it seems that many subjects of our cluster –assuming they have space of decision– chose the ‘less profitable and more risky’ alternative, thinking they were doing the opposite. Once more, the constant contact of potential recruits with insurgency members allows asking whether the former were aware of the soundness of the benefits offered by the latter, or the real life conditions behind-the-scenes, given the open possibility of obtaining better information about the armed group inner functioning. Our interpretation of this situation has two strands.

First –as we already mentioned– the participation of the individuals in our cluster reflects a high level of constraint. Be it because the majority of the population is forced by circumstances such as living in an insurgent-controlled region; because neutrality is almost unworkable and the population in such regions is explicitly forced to take sides –as Fichtl (2004) described in Chapter 4; or because mobility with aims to escape the situation is economically or logistically unattainable –as well as hazardous, given the two previous points. On another note, as shown in Table 5-9 (below), the percentage of recruits that declared joining voluntarily because of material benefits but began their involvement as ‘milicianos’ is higher in both insurgencies, which could be interpreted as a testing phase in which it is possible to conserve some degree of freedom in terms of mobility and ordinary life while complying their obligation to display allegiance, and –in the case of tradesmen– obtaining regular profit from collaboration.

Table 5-9: Motivation according to group and role.

	FARC		ELN	
	ENC	MIL	ENC	MIL
Pers-Mat (Survival)	21.7%	33.8%	34.0%	52.6%
Pers-Psycho	43.3%	42.5%	36.0%	13.2%
Forced	15.0%	7.5%	10.0%	10.5%
Unclassifiable	14.2%	8.8%	17.0%	15.8%
Collec-Psycho	3.9%	5.0%	2.0%	2.6%
No Data	1.9%	2.5%	1.0%	5.3%

Source: Own construction.

Nevertheless, as registered in one interview

The FARC called him to collaborate as *miliciano* given his expertise and connections as merchant in the region. He agreed because of fear that the armed group could close his shop or expel him from the region (Interviewer, about I-070).

For us the situation resembles the ‘one-company towns’ described by Commander (2018): firms that concentrate employment due to their location “in distant places with relatively limited alternative local employment opportunities” (p. 7) and usually dedicated to mining or manufacture. While in both cases (companies and insurgencies) their location can be subject to the presence of some specific natural resource (hence its remoteness), the main difference is that in the former case employees might have limited options, but not bound to stay under threat of execution.

Secondly, and perhaps the most important point in our argument, personal aspirations. We draw from Ray (2002), who observes that “individual desires and standards of behavior are often defined by experience and observation [and] do not exist in social isolation as “consumer preferences”” (p. 1). Also from Matthey (2010), who distinguishes between

Aspirations [...] based on vague information and [...] potentially biased by factors like social comparison, self-image, wishful thinking, etc., [and] expectations, in contrast, [...] formed when detailed information becomes available [and less] unbiased in the sense that they correctly reflect the available information (p. 568).

Our final contention is that the milieu in which the subjects of our cluster are born and raised or to which they arrive as product of violent dynamics (e.g. forced displacement) determines a great deal of their motivation to join insurgencies, inasmuch as the society, politics and economy gravitate around armed groups, and therefore –aside their fears for non-compliance to forced collaboration– shapes their aspirations, as the following testimony illustrates:

She declares to join attracted by weapons and uniforms, but especially because they promised she could become a nurse or a doctor there (Interviewer, about I-138).

Given that the social environment is what determines their type and orientation, the aspirations of the GADH interviewees gravitate around common themes such as stable income, accessing education, and guaranteeing the personal safety of themselves and their families, and oftentimes include perks such as having a camouflage uniform, a motorbike and an assault rifle. We risk stating a truism by remarking that if instead of an insurgency our subjects have had in their vicinity a research center they probably would have aspired to study chemistry and wear a white coat. As the following testimonies illustrate:

It was common for people in his age to join the guerrilla, because it was the only authority they knew (Interviewer, about I-080)

“It is common to see them in the village, one grows with them” (I-089).

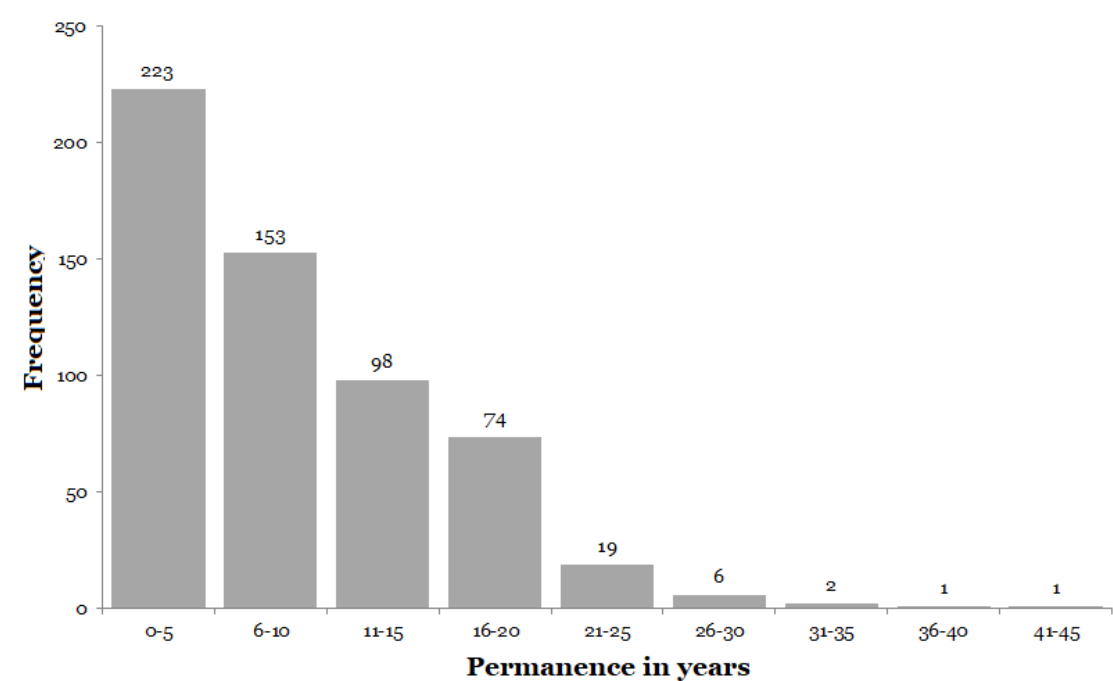
Assuming it is a choice, and it is a profession, we borrow from Thomas (2017) who argues that

Broadly speaking, the influences on people’s decision about their careers can be considered in four groups: people they are exposed to (parents, teachers, those who facilitate work experiences); their situation (social background and economic resources, both of which affect their geographic location) [...]; available information; and their values (p. 125).

As we have showcased through the GADH interviews, Colombian insurgents –in the case in which enrolment was not strictly forced– have been also influenced by the people they are exposed to, their situation, their geographic location, the available information, and their values at the moment of enrolment to join the FARC and the ELN. However, the strategies used by the insurgencies and the methods employed to prevent desertion do not cease to resemble forced conscription; our opinion is shared by Villacampa and Flórez (2017). Having in mind that desertion is most often punished by death, retracting their decision of joining or escaping from unwanted participation is indeed a hazardous decision,

but without the death penalty directive, it is very likely that permanence in Colombian insurgencies would have been shorter. This latter contention is supported by the fact that all the interviewees of our cluster demobilized from these armed organizations after realizing that their personal goals could not be attained (in the case of ‘voluntary’ enrolment), or escaping from forced recruitment, and the majority of them did it in after relatively short stays, as shown in the following graph.

Graph 5-13: Interviewees’ years of permanence in insurgencies.



Source: Own construction.

5.6. Conclusion

Drawing from Lecouteux (2016), who argues that “individuals often make bad decisions (either due to incomplete information, limited cognitive abilities, or to a lack of willpower)” (para. 25), if assumed as a free and voluntary decision, recruits of this cluster were seriously disadvantaged in informational terms: the insurgencies make false promises; family members and close peers misrepresent and/or hide the real life conditions within the insurgency; potential recruits are commonly young and uneducated citizens living in areas

affected by severe lack of social and economic opportunities, who have no access to supplementary sources of information, and mostly under short time constraints; conditions under which such ‘decision’ cannot be regarded as ‘rational’, if we conform to the tenets of neoclassical microeconomics.

In terms of willpower, following the detailed description made by Fichtl (2004) (which we quoted in extenso in Chapter 4), civilians in Colombia –preeminently in rural areas– continuously face the obligation to provide shelter, resources, or information to one armed group in order to be safe from the accusations and attacks of the other; there are few to none ways to leave a region without facing prosecution by armed groups; and opting to remain neutral in the confrontation (not support nor disrupt any group) is out of question in most cases; after joining on its own initiative, reneging on the decision typically means death penalty. By the same token, before the early 2000s regretful (or forcedly recruited) combatants could not openly ‘choose’ to exit insurgencies by cause of being military targets for the official armed forces, paramilitary organizations, drug gangs, and the insurgencies themselves (in the last case, for being defectors), as well as subjects of legal prosecution by the state under criminal charges for rebellion. This might explain why thousands of recruits remained for decades within the organizations or why many others demobilized secretly. In addition, most demobilized “suffer difficulties to find formal employment, to be accepted in their families, and especially live in constant fear of retaliations due to their past” (Agencia AP, 2010, dec 06).

Given the above, we interpret that –with some exceptions– micro-economically and contextually speaking, it is not possible to talk about ‘choice’, but rather about accommodation. As remarked earlier (in Chapter 4), people regularly relies on ‘heuristics’ to make decisions and select choices that are ‘good enough’ (Simon, 2000), for which for us, rather than choosing from a wide range of possibilities or from an array of alternative plans, the interviewees of this cluster display accommodating behavior, this is, adapting to the imposing and overwhelming conditions of the surrounding environment, and acting to serve

their interests in the best possible way, which drawing from MacMullen (2014) would amount to be considered a ‘reasonable’ –as opposed to a rational– choice.

These contentions call for the abandonment of the precepts of the homo-economicus as an analytical tool regarding individual participation in armed groups, given that rather than through isolated rational optimization, people seems to make such decisions based on wishful thinking (Matthey, 2010), aspirations (Ray, 2002), and “social comparison, imitation and repetitive behavior (habits)” (Jager et al., 2000, p. 357) –more characteristic of what the literature calls the homo-psychologicus; additionally, under conditions which cannot be properly consider choice: if we assume Beresford and Sloper’s (2008) requirement of “two or more alternatives from which to choose [both with] some positive value¹⁶¹” (p. 2), and if we extrapolate the medical concept of ‘decision capacity’ –this is, freedom from external coercion, knowledge and capacity to process all the relevant information, and understanding of the potential effects of their decisions (Charland & Hawkins, 2020)– the participation of the vast majority of the individuals in our cluster in insurgencies reflects a high level of constraint, for which in our view they were not truly ‘making choices’ at the moment of enrolment.

In addition to that, as remarked by Deci and Ryan (2012) “the problem is not in “what” was being pursued (the extrinsic goal) but in “why” it was being pursued” (p. 92), which in the issue at hand (enrolment to NSAGs) is commonly explained under a macro umbrella that distorts its workings. The most common assertion is that joining armed groups as means to obtain money is a logic outcome if one is entrapped in a poverty environment, and that recruiting members within poverty environments is a straightforward and effortless crusade, but we also draw from Chambers (2006), who posits that the idea of poverty is commonly framed from the mindsets and purposes of academics and

¹⁶¹ “A ‘choice’ between something which is definitely desired and something which is definitely not desired is not a true choice” (Beresford & Sloper, 2008, p. 2). One pertinent example could be choosing between providing an armed group with information and being killed.

policy makers rather than from the personal experiences of “those who are poor, marginalized and vulnerable”, and who basically are constantly looking to “reduce [their] bad experiences of life [and] to achieve more of the good things in life to which [they] aspire” (p. 4), for which by joining insurgencies –we contend– the subjects of this cluster were trying to reduce their bad experience in living, and to attain more of the good things in life that Chambers references. Economic (and psychological) desperation should not be called ‘greed’.

This brings us to the major problems of the ‘Greed and Grievance’ literature that dominates the analysis of armed conflict, and which based on the mindset of academics that merged the shadow economic activities of armed groups (intended to sustain their combat economies) and the coping economies of (materially and psychologically) aggrieved population, has disseminated – without ever clearly defining or delineating it– a concept with a highly negative moral load. Such terminology disregards the fact that in modern times the normal endeavor of any human being to access the basic goods and services for life is obtaining money to pay for them, and interestingly enough, the continuous accumulation of diverse forms of capital is called ‘entrepreneurial spirit’, ‘material acquisitiveness’, or ‘financial impetus’, whereas the involvement with armed groups in pursuit of daily sustenance is called ‘greed’. Risking to sound non-academic or unprofessional, we see true greed –as in ‘avarice’– in the eagerness to accumulate lands to be left unproductive, the zeal of hoarding sports cars, real estate property, financial securities, or the payment of disproportionate corporate bonuses upon dubious financial operations, rather than in joining an insurgency with the hope of obtaining a stable income or sending monthly remittances to one’s family.

Colombian insurgents of the mid-1960s were also materially motivated, in the sense that –as remarked by Giraldo Moreno (2016)– access to land relates directly to the satisfaction of three basic needs: food, dwelling and work/income. Many of the modern insurgents (such as those brought to light in the GADH interviews) are also materially motivated, and oddly enough, for similar basic needs. Psychological motivations are not new either; during the

late nineteenth century the militias of Victoriano Lorenzo and Tulio Varón were formed in pursuit of revenge for the atrocities committed by conservative leaders and in retaliation for the breach of previous peace agreements, while during the early twentieth century many more emerged to complain about issues such as the impunity surrounding violations of rights by official and paramilitary armed forces, or the limitation of electoral rights (See Chapter 2). In other words, armed groups in Colombia – both in the past and recently– have been enlarged by personal material and psychological grievances alike. On account of the ‘Greed and Grievance theory’ they have been characterized as greedy for wanting income, but for us they are just needy.

Justino (2009) provides an strong argument on the involvement of people in armed groups:

These people must adapt to stressful circumstances to survive. They take on available opportunities (which may or may not include fighting, looting and denunciation of former friends and neighbors), adopt forms of livelihoods that may lead to severe poverty traps but avoid famine (or not), join in informal exchange and employment markets (which may or may not include illegal activities), form social and political alliances in new areas of residence that may allow economic survival or may lead to a life of crime and violence (or both), and take on different social and political identities in response to their anticipated exposure to violence before the conflict” (p. 316)

The goals of the FARC and the ELN founders as aggrieved individuals were as personal (revenge, escape from victimization) and materially oriented (property of a specific plot of land, a higher salary, or fairer contractual terms) as those of modern recruits, but the goals of contemporary FARC and ELN recruits are different not in the sense of not emanating from personal grievances, but in the sense that, in principle, the solution –using our interviewees as reference point– is not the transformation of the political regime, or the social or economic model, but the mere participation in the group. Personal debts, null or precarious income, educational dreams, familiar problems, victimizing situations, and even whimsical impulses, dominate the motivations of this

cluster of contemporary recruits of the FARC and the ELN, rather than collective ambitions such as agrarian or labor reforms aimed to address the economic grievances of the society at large.

By neglecting the fact that personal grievances are most often a combination of material and psychological wants, and by marginalizing the latter under triviality arguments or on account of being beyond its understanding, conventional economism has underestimated the importance of emotional and subjective considerations when deciding to join armed groups and replaced it with oversimplified decision models detached from daily reality. Our cluster shows that familiar reenounters, revenge, the pursuit of status, or escaping from victimizing environments, might be more important catalysts for enrolment than material incentives, and in case that the latter exist, also as means to address psychological needs such as self-esteem, autonomy, competent use of own skills and expertise, social acceptance, recognition, status, power, etc. As remarked by Sent (2018), the bounded rationality of economists might have compelled them to model insurgents as narrow-minded decision machines as means to make them easier to understand, and –we would add– to (unsuccessfully) attempt to provide straightforward solutions to complex problems.

By assuming they are constructed in a vacuum, the ‘Greed and Grievance’ theorists have focused on the ‘rational preferences’ of individuals in order to better understand them, and have either (a) isolated the individual in a decision realm completely disengaged from the meso and macro realities of their participation, and failed to identify the ways in which the armed conflict context has transformed such preferences and aspirations; or (b) linked those preferences and aspirations to macro realities through proxy variables¹⁶² embedded in econometric models that are limited to correlate –say– poverty

¹⁶² “Variable[s] used instead of the variable of interest when that variable of interest cannot be measured directly. For example, per capita GDP can be used as a proxy for the standard of living” (“Proxy variable,” n.d.).

environments with eagerness for income, and thus conclude that individuals joining armed groups are –in average– ‘poor greedy mercenaries’. In the cases in which meso and macro aspects have been taken into consideration, the emphasis has been put into economic facets of the conflict development, and because of logical association, the general conclusion is that individual participation in modern insurgencies (predominantly materially motivated) reciprocates with the illegal objectives and financing methods of rebel groups, evidence of which can be seen in African warlords private wealth (see for instance, Burgis, 2015). It is time that –as remarked by Ballentine and Nitzschke (2003)– “policy-makers distinguish between those who exploit armed conflict for profit and power and those who participate in war economies to sustain their civilian livelihoods” (p. 1).

We would like to close this chapter by quoting an important contention presented by Appadurai (2004) regarding aspirations.

Aspirations about the good life, about health and happiness, exist in all societies. Yet a Buddhist picture of the good life lies at some distance from an Islamic one. Equally, a poor Tamil peasant woman’s view of the good life may be as distant from that of a cosmopolitan woman from Delhi, as from that of an equally poor woman from Tanzania. But in every case, aspirations to the good life are part of some sort of system of ideas [...] At the same time, aspirations to the good life tend to quickly dissolve into more densely local ideas about [...] specific wants and choices: for this piece of land or that, for that marriage connection or another one, for this job in the bureaucracy as opposed to that job overseas, for this pair of shoes over that pair of trousers. This last, most immediate, visible inventory of wants has often led students of consumption and of poverty to lose sight of the intermediate and higher order normative contexts within which these wants are gestated and brought into view. And thus decontextualized, they are usually downloaded to the individual and offloaded to the science of calculation and the market-economics (p. 68).

For us, without the arrival of the FARC and paramilitary organizations to his ancestral territories it is very unlikely that I-006 –the interviewee we quoted at the beginning of this chapter–would aspire to ‘get a job’.

6. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

As remarked by multiple authors analyzing armed conflict, social and economic grievances are somewhat ubiquitous and common to all societies, but armed rebellion and civil war are not. Accordingly, a German, Japanese or Chilean citizen affected by job insecurity, domestic abuse, limited access to education, fear from violent threats, zest for status, fascinated by weaponry or military operations, or seeking personal excitement from travel and adventure, hardly will be able to enroll in an insurgency to redress his/her hardship or to satisfy his/her appetites, because such groups are routinely unavailable in those countries. At most they could join a gang or a crime syndicate, but seldom a rebel insurgency¹⁶³ aiming to overthrow the political regime.

In many countries armed groups have resulted from cultural or religious differences, uneven distribution or exercise of political and economic power, or retaliation for wrongdoings that took place in the past, but in most cases the warring factions have been formed almost entirely by locals motivated to join either side on grounds of personal interests, distress or damages caused by the disputes. The major implication of these introductory contentions is that if armed groups are not present in one's vicinity, there are no familiar or peer links to them, nor coincidental location in their historical influence areas, involvement with armed groups is highly unlikely.

In this work we analyzed the process through which a cluster¹⁶⁴ of demobilized combatants joined the FARC and the ELN insurgencies in Colombia. We insist in portraying the situation as a process because contrary to a common assumption, individuals do not switch from one state (civilian) to another (combatant or collaborator) in a sudden way; even though not always completely voluntarily or peacefully, the involvement of individuals with armed groups is almost always gradual, for which in order to understand the individual reasons to participate in armed conflict it is necessary to understand the chain

¹⁶³ There are exceptional cases (such as the foreigners mentioned in a footnote 105 in section 4.4.) but those are atypical situations.

¹⁶⁴ Considering the limitations of the information and the absence of formal techniques for sampling we avoid calling our data source a 'sample'.

of events that put individuals in such situation. Recalling Marx quote in our first chapter regarding how the history of men is marked by circumstances given and not chosen, we tried to showcase the particular circumstances given for their involvement.

As a first step we recapitulated key topics of conflict analysis theories in order to provide a clearer image of the situation at hand. For instance, the passage from individual to collective conflicts through solidarity, framing and common identity formation, and more importantly, the passage from conflict to violent conflict caused by the use of aggression as means to either settle the situation in favor of one side, or to force antagonists to retreat in their intentions. On another hand, the diverse types of armed groups in function of their objectives (e.g. militias, paramilitaries, insurgencies, etc.) and the ways in which the state gets involved in the confrontation, commonly as an arbiter, but more frequently as the recipient of claims.

Based on historical accounts of the Colombian armed conflict we argue that, despite that the Colombian armed conflict is ordinarily depicted as a fifty-year old war, organized collective violence is much older than that. Historians report peasant resistance groups created in order to make legal and peaceful claims to unfair work and land property conditions in Colombia already since 1875; those initial claims were responded with layoffs, evictions and violence, and confrontations remained latent under a surface of economic and political transformations only to rekindle in the form of numerous civil wars and innumerable local skirmishes during the nineteenth century, that left debris from which more violence emerged in the 1950s in the form of political radicalism. At a later stage, denied the possibility of land property or fair labor conditions in areas already integrated to the national and international economy, thousands of citizens migrated in search for new economic opportunities and began forming semi-autonomous agrarian communities, only to be attacked again by the Colombian authorities following rigid precepts about the so-called 'fight against communism and subversion', forcing the former to shift from a defensive to an offensive stance. Thus, the modern armed conflict

between the Colombian state and insurgencies –that serves as reference frame for this research– officially begins during the 1960s when (a) peasant self-defense groups were organized to protect peasants from official and paramilitary repression to their collective movements; and (b) university students that were part of communist grassroots organizations decided to organize a military front to defend the interests of (oil and banana) enclave workers and to promote by armed means profound transformations in the Colombian society apparently unworkable by alternative means.

Until the 1990s the formation and slow consolidation of insurgencies (described in Chapters 2 and 3) responded to the repeated refusal of elites to allow the Colombian social and economic system to undergo structural change (e.g. in labor conditions and land property) by responding with violent repression and/or biased arrangements to the (initially) pacific claims of organized collectives; also to the increasing participation of drug production in financing immature insurgencies and in helping impoverished population in rural areas to earn a living, which jeopardized the legitimacy of the ends and means of armed struggle; also to the geographical, political and economic isolation of colonization regions that served to bolster political power of insurgencies thanks to their regulatory activities; and finally, to the closure of peaceful routes to organized social protest and alternative political associations, that were stigmatized, prosecuted, and violently silenced by the state and radical sectors of the society, as happened for example to the UP political party. As noted above, violence has tended to be initiated by the establishment and not by rebels.

In this sense, the first wave of insurgencies grew thanks to the claimant communities seeking refuge from the augmenting official and unofficial violence; and at a second stage, thanks to the aspirations of rural colonizers and primeval proletarians that wanted to ameliorate their living conditions in isolated regions, often relying on the support (or suffering the yoke) of insurgent authority, and by activists that found all avenues to social and economic change closed by force.

Here –based in interviews made to a cluster of demobilized insurgents– we examined a more recent wave of individuals that joined insurgencies (namely, the FARC and the ELN) between thirty and forty years after their inception, in order to find elements that –without neglecting particularities and specificities– allowed us to shape a generic narrative of participation that does not build from archetypal entities nor from correlation between proxy or average variables.

To do so, we proposed several modifications to common tenets of the analysis of motivation for participation in armed groups, among which the most salient are:

- Defining ‘greed’ as a selfish and excessive desire for more of something than is needed for basic survival and a relatively dignified life.
- Defining ‘grievance’ as a cause of distress, misery or hardship that moves people to complain, resist, or act in order to remedy it.
- The formulation of a ‘context dimension’ in which it is possible to compare between multiple regional, historical, or demographic scenarios within the same (yet constantly changing) armed conflict.
- The classification of personal motivations to join armed groups in terms of four broad typologies of grievances: personal and collective, and psychological or material. Within the latter category we defined two subcategories that echo the first two notions: namely, material survival (read, ambitions aimed to satisfy basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing or personal safety), and material opulence (read, ambitions aimed to the accumulation of resources beyond basic needs, such as affluence, prestige or prominence).

In addition to that, we used previous studies of the Colombian armed conflict to contour the general settings in which the participation took place –or what the literature calls ‘macro’ factors– as well as certain characteristics of armed groups –or ‘meso’ factors, while from the interviews we extracted the personal motivations of the subjects –or ‘micro’ factors– and diverse strategies used by armed groups to secure new recruits –also, ‘meso’ factors.

In general terms, the demobilized interviewed in this cluster can be depicted as people joining insurgencies since the mid-1990s, frequently dropping out of school early in order to perform low quality (read, informal, poorly paid, and/or illegal) jobs when not directly to join armed groups given its enduring presence in their communities. In spite of being enlisted more in poorer regions of the country, the declared motivations of this cluster of recruits do not display great variation across departments, yet it is possible to see a historical increase in personal material motivations in which yearning for income or education opportunities are common; *milicianos* (read, non-combatant collaborators), for instance, display higher levels of material motivations in both groups (FARC and ELN), but the material ambitions do not –at first sight– seem opulent in kind, but focused on the satisfaction of basic survival necessities. In terms of gender, the only noticeable difference is that forced recruitment appears to be exerted almost twice as often on females than on men in this cluster, and that the former –as noted by previous studies– constantly use enrolment into armed groups as a way to escape victimizing circumstances such as sexual abuse and domestic violence. Personal psychological motivations display consistent high levels in all the historical periods analyzed, with visible prevalence in the regions that contribute the largest number of recruits (commonly, insurgent-controlled regions), in which higher levels of multidimensional poverty and conflict-related victimization are also prevalent.

The interviewees on this cluster endure a context in which violence has been more widespread, but especially in regions developing from land colonization processes most often led by non-state armed groups, and often afflicted (or salvaged) by illegal economies that provide opportunities even in the midst of economic isolation, limited access to basic services, precarious living conditions, and scant state presence for issues aside from public order and illicit crop eradication. A great deal of the recruitment in such regions –when not directly coercive– is based on promises of solutions to specific problems the inhabitants had at one specific moment (e.g. money for medical treatment), as well as forbidden neutrality under suspicion or collaboration with enemy groups.

For us, both periods –the emergence of insurgencies in the 1960s and the recruitment from the 1990s onwards– have in common a context of economic inequality, political rejection to structural change, and personal and communal deprivation. They differ in the way in which individuals tackle deprivation through organized violence. Early insurgents (as described in historical accounts of their participation) raised complaints about their heterogeneous wants (land property, permission to grow profitable crops, better salaries, etc.) bonded by relations of common identity and solidarity precipitated by governmental repression to their demands, which urged them, first, to organize in protection communities (in which the military branch were self-defense militias), and later –faced to increased aggressiveness of national leaders– to use organized collective violence to (attempt to) provoke overarching social and economic changes by deposing the state itself. For their part, modern insurgents, rather than common identity and solidarity to others' tribulations, see insurgencies as the most straightforward answer to their own heterogeneous wants (access to education, stable income, protection from victimization, etc.), deluded by the perceived capacity of insurgents to provide access to basic services and material provisions, but apparently from an individualistic perspective, this is, not through common identity and solidarity with aggrieved peers.

Under conditions in which common identity and solidarity seem reduced, insurgencies have scattered support (which compels combatants to desert more frequently and potential recruits to decline participation), an insurgent past may result in lifelong prejudice and stigma, and in which access to a great deal of basic goods and services is limited by purchase power capacity, present day combatants –if we take this cluster as reference– seem unwilling to risk their lives and endure the harshness of insurgent life for long-term collective goals such as 'social justice' or 'aperture of political spaces', yet to do it for more immediate issues such as paid employment, debt payment, insufficient income, or medical attention. Evidence is present in the shift in the discourse of insurgencies to recruit members in Colombia: from "land for the tiller" in the 1960s, to "you can send money to your family on a monthly basis" or "life there

is good, and you can receive a course on nursing or medicine” more recently. Such pledges of insurgencies (or their recruiters) tend to invoke personal and immediate benefits rather than collective and forthcoming ones, for which in the same way in which Kaldor (2012) differentiates ‘old’ from ‘new’ wars in terms of the goals, financing, and methods of warfare, we risk suggesting a ‘new’ type of combatant: inclined to participate by similar (for not saying the same) grievances of the ‘old combatants’, yet devoid from communal identity and solidarity frameworks prior to their involvement, focused in solving their more immediate needs, individually, and induced by the (perceived) current capacity of armed groups to provide immediate solution to their urgent problems rather than by personal expectations of future widespread social change.

Also, despite that their problems are similar –or even the same– to those of early insurgents of the 1960s (sustained uncertainty regarding food, dwelling and work/income, limited economic opportunities, constrained political participation, and constant threats to personal security), the context for participation is different: firstly, people is born within milieus in which non-state armed groups already control social, political and economic life (what we called above being a ‘captive population’), and by virtue of such control, their options and aspirations are limited; the majority of the population of armed-group-controlled areas (be it paramilitaries or insurgencies) are obliged to collaborate in some way –be it by action or omission– to either band and there are few to none ways to leave a region without facing the menace of armed groups. Secondly, while early insurgencies of the 1960s were fought by official (and paramilitary forces) for being a threat to the political and economic status quo, in modern times they are broadly considered criminal syndicates, for which the official intervention is focused in undermining their (illegal) combat economies and the unofficial intervention is focused in the elimination of competition of (legal and illegal) businesses. Civilian population is caught between multiple crossfires that sustain vicious circles of deterioration of their survival economies, victimization, state neglect, and stigmatization. Joining insurgencies more often than not becomes an escape from dismal present rather than a crusade for a better future.

Apart from that, the information extracted from the GADH interviews both corroborates and refutes diverse assertions made by previous studies. The presence of common denominators such as poverty and unemployment in the areas of recruitment (PNUD, 2003); the young age and low educational attainment levels of the vast majority of recruits (Ocampo, 2014); the low salience of ideological motives (Arjona & Kalyvas, 2012; Villegas de Posada, 2009); the participation as an escape from victimizing environments (especially in the case of women) (Denov & Ricard-Guay, 2013; Hernández & Romero, 2003); the recurrence of lightly-taken decisions based on short-lived emotions (Ribetti, 2007), and the offering of false promises of benefits not really available for participation (Gutiérrez, 2010; Herrera & Porch, 2008; HRW, 2003; Montoya Ruiz, 2008; Villacampa & Flórez, 2017; Villegas de Posada, 2009), are all noticeable in the responses of the interviewees of this cluster.

Conversely, the predominance of psychological grievances over material ones can be interpreted as a novelty, especially under the assumptions of the ‘Greed versus Grievance theory’ and under the criteria commonly used to gauge individual participation in armed groups: the direct association between the activities of the group and the interests and motivations of participants, especially those related to funding.

This cluster provides ample evidence of the “extensive emotional and psychosocial stress” and trauma generated by armed confrontations in the population (UN, 2001, p. 207) , which tends to be neglected in armed conflict analysis. The majority of interviewees in this cluster declared joining an insurgency in attempts to address psychological needs such as familiar reencounters, revenge, the pursuit of status, or escaping from victimizing environments, and most likely did so in view of the control exerted by diverse armed groups in their area of residence. As we mentioned earlier, the insurgencies govern (or actively participate) in the social, political and economic activity of the locality, becoming –under a Tilleian view– the government and the channel through which addressing social, political or economic issues. At this point, our major conclusion is two-pronged:

First –assuming it is in fact a choice– the prevalent description of the situation gives the impression that joining an armed group is a bad (or suboptimal, or irrational –in economics jargon) decision inasmuch as the ‘life-opportunities market’ provides plenty of ‘more profitable and less risky’ alternatives¹⁶⁵.

When looked individually many cases seem rather foolish: joining insurgencies for a debt when insurgencies do not pay salaries? Joining insurgencies because one’s parents’ forbid attendance to parties and impose large amounts of house chores, when in insurgencies work load is greater and discipline is stringent to the point of punishing determined misconducts with death? Specific cases show little more than personal problematic situations, but taken at group level, they reveal a pattern: the consideration of the nearby insurgencies as an immediate solution. It is not that aggrieved individuals wait long periods or travel long distances in search of the appropriate armed group to remedy their tribulations; the testimonies of the GADH interviewees display the intention to achieve things, conditions, or positions through the better (or reasonably the only) channel available for them at that time and place: local insurgencies. We argue that in light of the offering of a stable and paid occupation, educational opportunities, and physical safety, it seems highly likely that they would have joined any nearby organization, namely, a political party, the army, a religious congregation, or a football team; especially if such organization has been present in the community for long time, displaying the (apparent) benefits of being part (read, access to goods and services relatively unavailable among the rest of the population), and has low barriers to entry.

As remarked by Appadurai (2004) the capacity to aspire “is not evenly distributed in any society”, for which, for unprivileged populations “their everyday life is dominated by ever-present forms of risk [and as a consequence they] have a more brittle horizon of aspirations” (pp. 68-69). Moreover, given that local milieus circumscribe people’s experiences, standards of behavior, opportunities and desires, it is possible to argue that the interviewees of our

¹⁶⁵ See Gutiérrez (2010), quoted in chapters 4 and 5.

cluster aspired –regardless of the type of grievance– to what was at hand to take, unable to reach beyond, and joining the FARC or the ELN has constituted the only available exit for those citizens located in impoverished and violence-afflicted rural areas in Colombia during the last thirty years under the limitations and influence of a heavily constraining environment. Additionally, following their statements, recruits of this cluster were seriously affected by informational asymmetries inasmuch as the insurgencies made false promises to them and their family members and close peers misrepresented and/or hid the real life conditions within the insurgency. All things considered, such ‘decision’ cannot be regarded as rational (if we conform to the tenets of neoclassical microeconomics), and given the environment and conditions in which the ‘decision’ was made, it is not tenable that recruits were truly ‘making choices’ at the moment of enrolment.

The second major prong of our conclusions emerges from the transformation of the motivations declared by the interviewees into groups that consider both material and immaterial needs as grievances, in contrast with the traditional consideration of ‘greed’ as synonym of ‘material ambitions’ and of ‘grievance’ as synonym of either ‘political’ or ‘non-material ambitions’. In spite of being also objectionable for oversimplification, our consideration of the reasons motivating participation in insurgencies as either material or psychological grievances at personal and collective levels allowed us to (a) break the traditional dichotomy between ‘greed’ and ‘grievance’ and show that material ambitions also stem from non-material grievances (e.g. possessing assets as display of status), non-material ambitions are connected to material grievances (e.g. access to education being conditional to income), and that more often than not material and psychological wants are indivisible; (b) analyze the motivations of recruits from a perspective in which gradual affinity and/or dependence to the group is built, rather than a sudden change of state (i.e. from uninvolved to involved); and (c) establish a clearer connection between the variable wants of civilians and those of armed groups, as opposed to approaches that consider both as identical and fixed.

Rather than analyzing if the individuals in this cluster resembled established fighter categories such as ‘ideologues, mercenaries, warriors, criminals, or barbarians’ (Barrett, 2011; Henriksen & Vinci, 2007), we wanted to examine the type of need (read, grievance) these people had before joining armed struggle, and to identify the mechanism (if any) through which such needs fitted the objectives or methods of insurgencies they joined. When external observers began calling the material goals of insurgent recruits ‘greed’ because of the illegal (and reprehensible) funding activities of insurgencies, and when they deprived insurgent activity from political character from the same reason, the debate on motivation ceased to delve into the underlying character of the personal and group motivations, and began establishing automatic associations between the goals and the means of either, especially with the support of studies correlating macroeconomic variables with microeconomic preferences that ignored the mechanism of articulation.

Many GADH interviewees declared joining insurgencies in pursuit of material motives –say, income– but intended to cover household expenses, to pay for the surgery of a family member, or to buy a motorcycle to work in deliveries, or what we called ‘survival material motivations’, and that differs from ‘greed’ in the sense of being attempts to supply basic needs rather than satisficing indulgence treats or gaining (or not losing) prestige or prominence, and that constitute grievances inasmuch they cause distress, which is a psychological notion. Without a comprehensive description of the context and a more detailed description of ‘the why’ behind a person’s actions, analysis and contention policy might go astray. For instance, given the evidence of the involvement of insurgent groups in different stages of drug production, and after assuming (and substantiating via econometric models) that members of insurgencies are –in average– ‘greedy’ individuals, counteracting policy has been habitually directed towards curtailing the sources of income of the armed groups (i.e. drug traffic) instead than remediating the source of economic grievances of the recruits (e.g. lack of employment and educational opportunities), as evidenced in the millions of dollars allocated over the course of two decades to –*inter alia*– anti-narcotic battalions, aerial fumigation of illicit crops, and improvement of the

penitentiary system, under the 'Plan Colombia' assistance program, instead than to addressing social problems such as unemployment, access to health, education and justice services.

While the means are identical (e.g. money) the underlying goals of two individuals might embody radical differences: paying for the surgery required by one's son or buying a new sports car. These differences are not perceptible from the distance of econometric models or similar aggregative methods, and while we accept that subjectivity in the matter is too high to study, or design and implement policy based on individual cases, alternative clustering and analysis frameworks are imperative. Our proposal, separating between individual and group, material and psychological, and survival or opulence needs has allowed us to (a) improve the analysis of motivations commonly limited to direct association between macro contexts and personal choices under the assumption that these are, in fact choices, which we challenge with our previous conclusions; and (b) pinpoint the linkage between people being pushed and ways in which armed groups pull towards involvement: personal aspirations.

Lastly, our major conclusion is that when explicitly moved by material ambitions this cluster of former combatants cannot be characterized under the trivial definition of 'greed'. A great deal of these FARC and ELN ex-combatants declared¹⁶⁶ joining such insurgencies expecting to secure monetary income and/or access to goods and services out of their reach at the moment of enrolment, more often than not enticed by promises made by members of those armed groups that displayed regular access to the very benefits the former were coveting, but in such cases, it was with the aim to satisfy –drawing from Stewart (1985)– basic needs. In view of the fact that access to the totality of basic needs of modern life (housing, food, health coverage, transportation, and education) is

¹⁶⁶ Again, we acknowledge the possibility that our interviewees might have rationalized their responses and/or hide real motivations –or what Humphreys and Weinstein (2008) call 'colored memories'– but then, all social studies based on surveys and interviews would be rendered meaningless as a result of potential altered memories, perceptions, or forged responses of subjects.

increasingly subjected to payment capacity –especially in countries with inadequate social protection schemes such as Colombia– countless citizens are obliged to do whatever necessary to procure means to access such goods and services, even more so if those citizens live in isolated regions, with poor economic opportunities, and the main (if not the only) mean to access the goods and services required for living is earning money. It is also possible that individuals crave money in order to be able to escape from psychologically-harming situations (e.g. sexual abuse, domestic violence, confinement).

All in all –and acknowledging that we cannot risk presenting generalizable conclusions in this regard– based in a cluster of FARC and ELN demobilized, we posit that joining insurgencies is not a truly free choice; it does not take place following the tenets of ‘rational choice’; it is not ‘greed’; and that the goals (or methods) of an armed group do not necessarily mirror those of the individuals involved, and vice versa. Additionally, that –if understood as avarice– greed is more visible in the middle and high tiers of conflict (e.g. landholding elites) than in the rebel side of it, since the involvement of the lower tier participants (rank and file soldiers and militias) is more related to survival.

While these conclusions might not sound groundbreaking, they emanate from what we consider our contribution to the literature on the matter: an alternative vision of the phenomenon, a more detailed analysis of the historical process that led to the emergence of insurgencies, in conjunction with an alternative analytical framework to examine personal information regarding involvement, in which rather than correlations or ‘average individuals’ we aim to outline trajectories of participation –or what Gutierrez (2010) called the intersection between story and history and between personal trajectories and big processes. With the same data cluster, it is likely that an econometric model would have resulted in a positive correlation between poverty or low educational attainment and enrolment into insurgencies, and nothing beyond.

Misleading aggregation of heterogeneous causes and drivers has put the (material and psychological) grievances of insurgents aside, while the analyses of the macro (context), meso (armed group), and micro (individual) factors that might influence participation in armed groups have tended to be limited to the enumeration of factors rather than to the establishment of interrelationships. We borrowed from those enumerations of factors to propose a non-segregated analytical framework, and to suggest the potential mechanisms linking all three levels in a portion of Colombian demobilized insurgents.

Data like the GADH interviews can open ways for richer explorations of the phenomenon, as well as for improved design and implementation of rebellion contention policies; and we don't mean better advertising campaigns to promote demobilization or repression schemes, but better understanding of the social, political and economic deprivations and aspirations of individuals, as well as guidelines to address personal problems through communal solutions. Besides, our contentions call for the abandonment of the precepts of the 'Greed and Grievance' (as dichotomy) as an analytical tool of the personal motivations to participate in armed groups, as well as the negative connotations of the mainstream analyses: a moral one in terms of the use of the word 'greed', and a normative one in terms of the expected behavior of individuals under given circumstances, mostly modelled through mathematical assumptions rather than from behavioral patterns, and always assuming economic interests as overriding motivation.

In this vein, our research can also open new avenues for research in, for instance (a) intergroup, interregional, or intertemporal comparisons based on detailed historical data, as well as intragroup and intraregional levels, given the specificities of armed group subdivisions and territorial diversity in terms of insurgent presence due to particular levels of synergy with civilian communities (i.e. predatory, parasitic, or symbiotic relations); (b) the exploration of cases that we categorized as unclassifiable on account of their singularity, those who

reported more than one motivation¹⁶⁷, and/or that present counterintuitive features (e.g. joining the same armed group that killed one's own parents); (c) the motivations of urban 'milicianos' and collaborators (e.g. university students) and their considerations to keep distance from armed confrontation while participating in the conflict; (d) comparisons between the motivations to join and stay of commanders, middle-rank officers and foot soldiers given the disparate duration of their participation, ranging from months to decades; (e) the reasons of family members and close peers to lie and distort the real life conditions within the insurgent groups to encourage one's enrolment; (f) the comparison of the motivations to not join or the circumstances by which individuals living under the same milieus managed to elude recruitment; and (g) the replication of this framework in samples constructed following formal sampling methods to be able to generalize their findings to wider segments of the population and/or to armed conflict situations elsewhere.

Acknowledging that our conclusions at best can provide limited clues (or vestiges) about what is a remarkably complex phenomenon, and that they are by no means generalizable –not even to Colombian combatants– we are confident that beyond validating or invalidating previous findings on the matter, our work helps in the opening of new ways to approach armed conflict and personal involvement (or recruitment), especially by positing that it is always about grievances (distress, misery or hardship), and rarely –at least in the case of rank and file soldiers– about 'greed', as synonym of avarice.

¹⁶⁷ We attempted to construct indicators and graphic summaries exploring the implications of declaring more than one motivation (which is closer to reality) but the results were amorphous and unreadable.

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