

PEACE COMMUNITIES

Ecological Dignity as Anticolonial Rupture

In October 2013 a group of rural communities from across Colombia gathered together in a small village within the hills of San José de Apartadó to participate in workshops about resisting the country's ongoing war. San José is located within Colombia's Urabá region, which is adjacent to the border with Panamá. A site of intense armed conflict between National Army soldiers, paramilitary death squads, and guerrilla insurgencies for decades, Urabá has been among Colombia's most war-torn areas. It is also where one of the country's most emblematic oppositions to war emerged: the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. Facing threats, assassinations, and forced displacement, campesinos (small-scale rural farmers)¹ in San José declared themselves a "peace community" in 1997. They vowed to refuse supporting armed groups with information, supplies, or food. They committed themselves to making decisions autonomously from the armed groups and to participating in work groups that would harvest crops and resettle abandoned villages. San José is one of a number of communities in Colombia that have resisted armed conflict by creating autonomous peace zones, while also participating in a solidarity network that brings such groups together. This network meets periodically in what they call the Campesino University of Resistance, in which campesino, indigenous, and black communities share knowledge about agroecology and human rights to inform their strategies of resistance to forced displacement.

The 2013 Campesino University gathering was preceded by days of hiking through San José's hills to confront paramilitaries in adjacent villages who had induced another round of forced displacements with threats and the kidnapping of a youth. Various indigenous and campesino communities from around the country, as well as journalists and international allies, including me, joined the march. We hiked through thick mud and across rivers to reach villages up to five hours apart. The paramilitaries fled into the hills and refused to face our caravan, but we nonetheless heard them trigger gunshots into the air in the distance. We encountered a few remaining families living in what were otherwise abandoned villages. They

thanked the Peace Community for its solidarity and requested more such visits in the future.

Back on Peace Community land, Campesino University workshops ensued. One topic of discussion was the “peace process” currently under way between the Colombian government and Latin America’s longest-standing guerrilla group, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia—Ejército del Pueblo (FARC-EP, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army). Some people in attendance expressed hope that a peace accord would help de-escalate attacks against rural communities and human rights defenders. Others were skeptical, pointing out that the National Army and paramilitary death squads continued to operate throughout the country. A Peace Community leader observed, “The people believe that in Colombia we are moving toward peace. But it is really to a peace of cemeteries,” in which killings continue unabated. This sarcastic comment provoked laughter among the group, implicitly mocking the dominant discourse pronouncing that “peace” was on its way.

The conversation shifted to a discussion about communities’ respective strategies amid this context. A Peace Community leader stated that they would continue their existing strategy that combines collective farming and solidarity work locally as well as collaborations with other communities. He proceeded to say, “We are an example of peace, demonstrating that peace is possible.” An international solidarity activist interjected with a skeptical tone, “But, forgive me. What peace can you really live in with all of these armed groups operating in the surrounding areas?” San José’s leader responded, “We are not going to wait for the armed groups to come to an agreement. We are going to be an example of peace whether they continue to attack us or not. To show that, yes, peace is possible. You have a problem if you wait for it from them. Day-to-day, we don’t need the armed actors to come to an agreement” (field notes 2013). This perspective mirrored what I heard repeatedly in interviews with Peace Community members: peace is not when the war ends, but when people withdraw their participation in war and instead work collectively to build community and solidarity.

This book is an attempt to theorize peace alongside the Peace Community. The debate between the community leader and international observer exemplifies the question at the core of this manuscript: What does it mean to seek peace outside of the dominant channels of state politics? Is grassroots peace possible when people continue to be surrounded and attacked by armed groups? Doesn’t peace require treaties between armed actors to end war? Indeed, we usually think of peace as a utopian “tranquility,” “no war,” or “harmony” without conflict. And an “eternal” or “perpetual” peace is supposedly tied to harmony within and between states established through peace accords (Kant 2012). Why, therefore, is the Peace Commu-

nity dismissive of the prospects of the peace process between the FARC and the Colombian government, two actors who have attacked them? How do racialized groups like campesinos of indigenous descent understand and attempt to create peace amid violence and exclusion? San José's analysis seems to parallel critiques that argue that anything called "peace"—in the highly unequal and exploitative societies we live in—seems more reflective of what we deem to be violence: the victory of one armed group over another (Foucault 2003; Dalby 2014); the repression of dissent against injustice (Ross 2011); or entrenched hierarchies of patriarchy, racism, and capitalism (Daley 2014; Darling 2014; Gelderloos 2007). Nevertheless, San José continues to articulate its resistance politics through the language of peace. What does peace mean to them? How do they create that peace in practice? And is peace really possible in today's global conjuncture permeated by military conflicts, genocide, sexual assault, and poverty?

PEACE IN AND AGAINST THE MODERN WORLD

Answering these questions about the possibility of peace requires a global perspective that accounts for the ways that the pursuit of peace is enmeshed in the dynamics of the modern world. Drawing from the theoretical framework of decoloniality, when I speak of the *modern world*, I refer to the sociopolitical "civilization" that emerged out of the European colonization of the Americas. It is best termed *modernity-coloniality* to emphasize the constitutive nature of colonialism in modernity (Quijano 2010; Mignolo 2010). This world-system celebrates equality, individualism, nation-state sovereignty, democracy, universality, and progress. But it has always been structured by unequal and exploitative core-periphery relationships inherent to capitalism, which I understand as a political economy in which the means of production are monopolized and harnessed for endless accumulation (Marx 1976; Wallerstein 2004; Rosenthal 2019). Capitalism and modernity at large are also structured by hierarchical dualisms of men over women, reason versus emotion, humans exploiting nature, white over black/indigenous, and civilization versus barbarism (Escobar 2018; Martínez Hincapié 2015). Modernity is thus both an era (Dussel 2000) and an "attitude" (Foucault 1984; Dietrich 2012) constituted by divisions rooted in exploitation and domination.

While formal colonialism by empires over other peoples is now the exception rather than the norm, the logic of colonial power endures, which Aníbal Quijano (2000) calls the "coloniality of power." It persists in the form of ongoing racial and gendered dehumanization and discrimination; exploitative labor relations tied to concentrations of control over land, natural resources, and political power by a relatively small number of state and transnational corporate actors; controls over knowledge that delegitimize

existing or imagined alternatives to capitalist markets or patriarchal gender norms; and militarized policing of societies to maintain these hierarchies (Quijano 2010; Mignolo 2010; Lugones 2010). Achieving anything worthy of being called peace often seems impossible, given how systematic racial and patriarchal violence has become in the modern-colonial world.

Nevertheless, this system of domination is not absolute. Racialized women and men have resisted coloniality throughout its more than five-hundred-year history. To be clear, this is not to brand subjugated peoples as “unmodern,” because it is precisely the knowledge, skills, migrations, and labor of colonized black slaves and indigenous peoples in the Americas—who mined silver and processed sugarcane—that was the basis for the original accumulation of wealth appropriated by European colonial powers to consolidate a modern-capitalist world-system (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012). The modern “civilized subject” was constituted in relation to its racialized “other” (Fanon 2008; Quijano 2000; Silva 2007; Maldonado-Torres 2010). Beyond simply experiencing subjugation, to be “anticolonial” or “decolonial” entails resistance to oppression. The concept of “anticolonial rupture” names ideas and practices that break free from individualism, patriarchy, racism, capitalist exploitation, and/or state domination. In other words, decolonial rupture is a question of political movements that liberate themselves from dehumanization and subjugation in the modern world.

In the context of the current alter-globalization movement, which insists that “another world is possible” (Santos 2006), scholars and social movements have increasingly affirmed that “other worlds” are indeed being created or already exist (Walsh 2010; Escobar 2018; Ceceña 2012; Blaney and Tickner 2017). Examples in Latin America include movements by precarious workers as well as indigenous and black communities who preserve or forge autonomous anti-statist forms of political organization, in addition to noncapitalist and reciprocal human–nature or labor relations (de la Cadena 2015; Escobar 2008; Mora 2017; Oslender 2016; Gonçalves 2006; Zibechi 2010, 2012). Indicative of what might constitute true peace, I conceptualize these practices and knowledges as *ecological dignity*: nonexploitative and dignified relations among all beings to ensure the sustainability of life (Courtheyn 2018a). My use of the term *dignity* is inspired by many Latin American communities—including San José de Apartadó—who use this concept in their struggles against dispossession and oppression (Santos 2014). This concept parallels what Mariana Mora (2017) identifies as the Zapatistas’ “*kuxlejal* (life-existence) politics” or what other scholars call “relational ontologies” (Blaser 2010; de la Cadena 2015; Escobar 2018), in which political and cultural ways of living in the world reflect interdependent relations between humans, nature, and the cosmos. I prefer the term *ecological dignity* because it specifically names the types of relations that

constitute these political ways of being as *dignified* interrelationality among all of an ecosystem's beings. As the world today faces socioecological crisis due to climate change and unabated violence against people of color and women, illuminating and advancing such alternatives are critical. Most decolonial scholarship highlights ethnic black or indigenous peoples, but nonethnic communities can also break with coloniality. My contention in this book is that campesinos in San José de Apartadó are yet another example of ecological dignity. Understanding the Peace Community's approach to peace offers a window into the practice of anticolonial rupture.

MODERNITY-COLONIALITY IN RURAL COLOMBIA

Analyzing the dynamics of a decolonial politics in a rural Colombian community requires a contextualization of the period of intensified political violence in which the Peace Community emerged. Colombia is an acute case of social antagonism in the periphery of the modern world-system. Particular actors advance the coloniality of power through violent appropriations and maintenance of control over land, labor, and the state. Meanwhile, other groups mobilize resistance to defend life and land. Colombian history is marred with cycles of violent repression of subaltern movements which resist capitalist exploitation by asserting political and economic self-determination (Fals Borda 2009; Hylton 2006; Murillo 2004; Ospina 1997; Roldán 2002). As a simultaneous effect and cause of this standoff, government army forces, right-wing paramilitary death squads, and left-wing guerrilla insurgencies² have engaged in armed conflict for much of the past half-century, resulting in at least 220,000 assassinations and an array of human rights violations (Grupo de Memoria Histórica 2013). As of December 2019 Colombia had the world's second-largest internally displaced population at almost 6 million people (International Displacement Monitoring Centre 2020).

Of particular concern for my story here is the period of intensified social conflict and political violence in the 1990s. This era saw the consolidation of a hegemonic economic and sociopolitical class in Colombia, which Nizih Richani (2002) calls the "narco-bourgeoisie." Emerging from economic and political actors tied to illicit narcotics, the narcobourgeoisie's origin does not perfectly coincide with Colombia's traditionally powerful families or the country's industrial bourgeoisie. Comprised of a variety of actors such as drug traffickers, large landowners and cattle ranchers, paramilitary groups, the military, and conservative political factions (Richani 2002), this socioeconomic class exhibits a capitalist logic of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2005). Consistent with extractivist accumulation strategies seen in many parts of the world during the neoliberal era, Colombia's narcobourgeoisie seeks ongoing wealth generation beyond nar-



I.1. San José de Apartadó within the Urabá region: San José is in the department of Antioquia on the border with Córdoba department. Map by author.

cotics production alone by appropriating more and more land suitable for agribusiness (especially oil palm and cattle ranching) or land that is coveted for its mineral reserves (such as gold and coal) (Richani 2007, 2012; Escobar 2008; Dest 2021). In particular they target lands in the so-called “frontier” (Ballvé 2020), which are frequently racialized as “no man’s land” (García 1996) and barbaric “savage territories” (Serje 2005). In reality, these are places already settled by indigenous- or African-descendant campesinos. Such areas are thus connected to markets and unwittingly prepared for extractivist production by entrepreneurs if campesinos can be dispos-

sessed of their land. This repeats a pattern in rural Colombia going back to the post-1850s boom of Colombia's agricultural export economy, when business entrepreneurs began appropriating campesinos' land and labor in frontier zones to produce coffee, sugarcane, bananas, and beef for the world market (LeGrand 1986). Since the 1930s Colombian state policy has consistently sided with large landowners over small-scale farmers, thus contributing to unequal distributions of land as well as patterns of campesino migrations into new frontier areas (LeGrand 1986; Fajardo Montaña 2002; Hylton 2006; Reyes Posada 2009). Amid the escalating armed conflict of the 1990s, the military and paramilitary wings of the narcobourgeoisie targeted areas with guerrilla presence, thus combining economic and political motives (Romero 2006; Richani 2012). The Colombian narcobourgeoisie epitomizes the coloniality of power because it is an imposition of patriarchal and capitalist logics of exploitation and domination. But this process does not occur without resistance. One of the places where the struggle between the narcobourgeoisie and campesinos has played out since the late 1990s is San José de Apartadó.

PEACE COMMUNITIES

San José is a *corregimiento* (rural district) with thirty-two *veredas*, roughly translated as villages or dispersed settlements and the smallest administrative unit in Colombia. This *corregimiento* is located in the municipality of Apartadó, which falls within the Colombian department of Antioquia. Apartadó is within the Urabá region, which comprises parts of the departments of Córdoba, Antioquia, and Chocó that are in close proximity to the Gulf of Urabá and adjacent to the border with Panamá. The region's strategic value increased with the advance of illicit and extractivist commodity chains tied to neoliberal globalization. Urabá serves as a drug and arms trafficking corridor to and from North America, while its plentiful rivers and fertile farmlands are harnessed to cultivate banana and oil palm as well as hydroelectric power (Aparicio 2012; Ballvé 2020; García de la Torre et al. 2011). San José de Apartadó is located within the hills of the Serranía de Abibe (Abibe Range) between the city of Montería to the east in Córdoba and the lowland banana-producing zone that includes the city of Apartadó to the west.

Small-scale farmers seeking land began migrating to the Abibe Range in the 1960s from the Upper Sinú River area in Córdoba and towns in Antioquia south of Urabá. These farmers identify as campesinos and are primarily the descendants of indigenous peoples. Some of them had survived the civil war between the Conservative and Liberal Parties known as *La Violencia* (The Violence, 1946–1957),³ which was particularly acute in zones, such as Dabeiba, of conflict between land entrepreneurs and cam-



I.2. Gulf of Urabá viewed from the Abibe Range, where San José is located.
Photo by author, Julia Drude, and Moira Birss.

pesinos. La Violencia contributed to another wave of campesino dispossession through the transition to capitalist agriculture (Fajardo Montaña 2002; Roldán 2002). By the mid-1990s migrants to San José de Apartadó had made it a productive and thriving area in which campesinos harvested a multitude of crops, including cacao, avocado, and maize. They had also organized an economic cooperative called Balsamar. State military forces under the command of the National Army's 17th Brigade were present in San José, but the district had also become a stronghold of the left-wing Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union) party and the FARC guerrilla group.

In 1996 the National Army, in conjunction with paramilitaries from the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), launched an offensive to take control of San José de Apartadó. This was part of military operations across the Urabá region led by 17th Brigade commander Rito Alejo del Río and the governor of Antioquia, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, who in 2002 would be elected president of Colombia in a triumph of national hegemony for the narcobourgeoisie (Romero 2006; Richani 2007). In military operations throughout San José's villages in 1996 and 1997, army soldiers "warned" the campesinos that *mochecabezas* (those who cut people's heads off, referring to paramilitary death squads) were in pursuit, recommending that campesinos leave. In waves of evictions caused by army and paramilitary operations over the course of those two



I.3. Peace Community billboard: “The Community freely: Participates in community work. Says no to injustice and impunity. Neither participates in the war directly or indirectly nor bears arms. Does not manipulate or pass information to any of the parties.” Photo by author, Julia Drude, and Moira Birss.

years, the area’s villages were abandoned. Among other assassinations, army soldiers and paramilitaries killed Bartolomé Cataño, a Patriotic Union member who had founded San José as a corregimiento and coordinated the economic cooperative. The majority of San José’s residents fled to cities and many never returned. Elsewhere in Urabá, such as parts of Chocó, agribusiness ventures in oil palm followed in the wake of the campesinos’ forced displacement. Indicative of the consolidation of the narcobourgeoisie in this period, such land grabbing projects were carried out by a coalition of drug traffickers, paramilitary death squads, sectors of the Colombian government and military, and national and international corporations pursuing profits in agribusiness and extractivism (Ballvé 2020; Grajales 2011; Richani 2005, 2007, 2012).

In San José de Apartadó five hundred campesinos taking refuge in the district’s town vowed to resist further displacement and to return to their villages. Building from existing practices of communal organization as well as strategic thinking with solidarity allies in Colombian human rights organizations and the Catholic Church, San José’s campesinos declared themselves a “peace community.” They committed to not bearing arms, neither passing information nor collaborating with any armed group in any way,



1.4. Father Javier Giraldo Moreno (center) narrating a massacre commemoration in Mulatos, San José de Apartadó. Author photo.

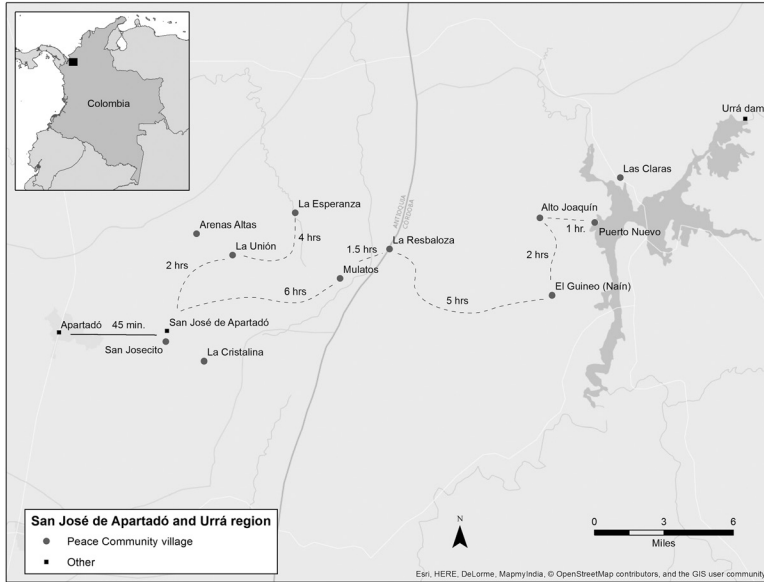
denouncing injustice and impunity, and working in collective groups. They began raising signs that displayed these commitments in order to mark Peace Community villages and farms as civilian zones. In so doing they rejected the presence of all armed groups in their spaces and affirmed their refusal to collaborate with *any* such group—including guerrillas as well as state and paramilitary forces—since colluding, fraternizing, or living with one would make them a target of the other.

Armed actors, especially those tied to the state, responded with vehement attacks against the Community.⁴ As of 2010 the number of assassinations in San José de Apartadó numbered 210. These are documented by Javier Giraldo Moreno (2010) in his book *Fusil o toga, toga y fusil* (Rifle or Robe, Robe and Rifle). Father Javier, as he is affectionately known, is a Jesuit priest and lawyer who has accompanied and advised the Peace Community since its founding.⁵ Assassinations in San José are traced all the way back to an army massacre of eight campesinos and the forced disappearance of three others in 1977. Indicative of the paramilitary's project to eradicate any dissent against the state—and in particular against the narcobourgeoisie—the number of killings intensified following the founding of the Peace Community in 1997. Of the documented 210 deaths from 1977 to 2010, the Community attributed 186 killings to the military and paramilitary and 24 to the FARC. By March 2019 the Peace Community affirmed a

total of 307 deaths to date (Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó 2019). This is an astounding number for a population which has oscillated around one thousand people since 1997. With massacres and threats, paramilitary, military, and guerrilla groups have thwarted various Peace Community attempts to resettle their villages and induced repeated displacements since 1997 from villages such as La Unión, La Esperanza, and Mulatos. Among the most notorious cases is the 2005 massacre in Mulatos and La Resbalosa, in which a joint army and paramilitary operation beheaded and cut up the bodies of eight people. They included three children and Community leader Luis Eduardo Guerra, who was also its interlocutor with the state at the time. Afterward the Community reaffirmed and broadened its *ruptura* (rupture) with the state. In 2003 the Community was a founding member of the Red de Comunidades en Ruptura y Resistencia (RECORRE, Network of Communities in Rupture and Resistance). Given state impunity with respect to human rights violations and the assassination of many people who had testified in previous investigations, San José de Apartadó was among four communities as part of RECORRE which declared their rupture with the state judicial system (Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó et al. 2003; Lindsay Poland 2018).

In this era of increasing political violence and threats of forced displacement, San José inspired other declarations of civilian neutrality to the war across Urabá in the late 1990s. These included the peace communities of San Francisco de Asís and Nuestra Señora del Carmen, as well as humanitarian zones, spaces where civilians could take refuge during combat, in Cacarica and Curvaradó (García de la Torre et al. 2011; *Vida, dignidad y territorio* 2003). Meanwhile, other initiatives associated with the peace communities movement organized themselves under different titles, such as “association,” “laboratory,” or “experience of peace.” Renowned grassroots peace initiatives across rural Colombia in recent decades include the municipal constituent assemblies of Micoahumado, Mogotes, and Tarso, as well as a plethora of autonomist campesino-indigenous-black communities, as in Santander and northern Cauca, among other places (Hernández Delgado 2004, 2012; Rojas 2007; Mitchell and Ramírez 2009; Lindsay Poland 2018). However, two decades later San José de Apartadó is the only organization to continue resisting under the name of “peace community.”

After two decades since its founding, the Peace Community had expanded across eleven villages. To this day they continue to assert their self-determination by putting up signs that mark their spaces. They created an organizational structure to make decisions independently of the armed groups: every Community member is part of a work group, with each having a coordinator; each village has weekly meetings and a coordinator who facilitates decisions about communal projects; an elected Internal Coun-



I.5. Walking the Peace Community: This map shows approximate walking times between Peace Community settlements and travel time by jeep between Apartadó and San Josecito during the dry season. Times can increase during or after heavy rains due to the difficulty of crossing rivers or mud patches. Map by author.

cil provides leadership in strategic decision making and its members serve as representatives who communicate with other actors; ultimate decision-making power resides in a community-wide assembly in which all members meet periodically. Furthermore, the Peace Community created an autonomous education system in which local and invited teachers educate children about community history and agroecology. They continue to struggle to maintain and remake their livelihood as campesinos by farming the land in groups. Through a combination of private and communally owned land, they cultivate organic cacao for national and international markets in addition to a variety of food crops such as corn, beans, and plantains. They have also initiated experiments in food sovereignty by creating agricultural centers and self-sufficient family farms. Community members participate in a weekly workday to build homes, repair trails, and harvest communal crops. They continue to denounce injustice, impunity, assassinations, and threats through press releases, commemoration pilgrimages to the sites of massacres, and monuments of stones that are painted with victims' names. They have built a solidarity network with other Colombian campesinos, human rights defenders, and peace activists from other countries. The latter include

international observers known as “protective accompaniers” who are invited to live in the community and report to the diplomatic corps and human rights community.⁶ Finally, they strategize as well as share seeds and knowledge with other rural racialized communities in a trans-ethnic Campesino University of Resistance. Despite recurrent threats, the Peace Community continues its unarmed resistance to displacement and its struggle for peace.

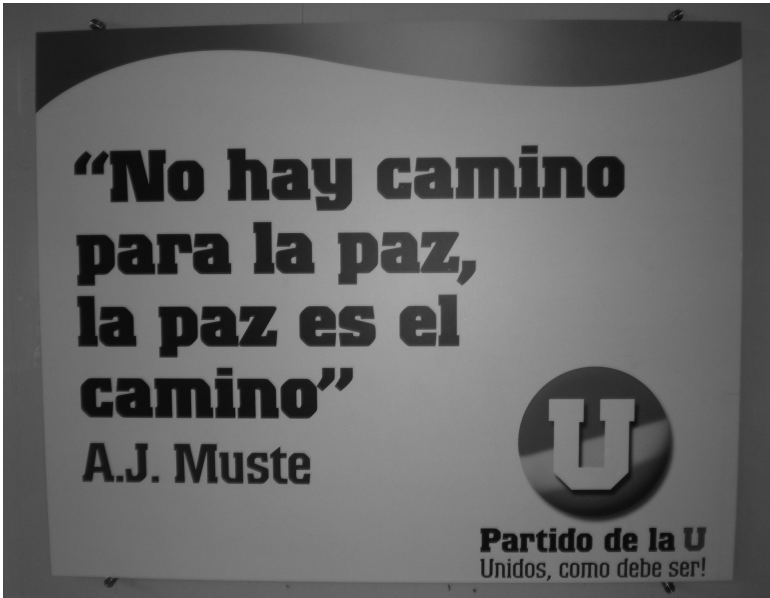
Together these actions nurture ecological dignity: just and sustainable relationships between humans and the land, the living and the dead, and among communities in resistance. I contend that the Peace Community thereby enacts a politics of decolonial rupture with the coloniality of power. By resisting the narcobourgeoisie land grab, they refuse to concede to the dictates of state domination and capitalist accumulation logics at the heart of modernity-coloniality. Meanwhile, their peace practice fosters communal and ecological sustainability through networks with racialized communities to counter dehumanization and ethnic divisions, thus building an alternative intercommunal structure of autonomy and solidarity.

This endeavor for dignity parallels other Latin American struggles, such as the Zapatistas, Landless Workers Movement (MST), and Piqueteros in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, respectively, who have framed themselves as “national liberation,” “landless,” or “unemployed worker” movements. San José’s particular form of resistance, articulated as a “peace community,” specifically tenders the question about how to create peace amid the systematic violence against nonwhites, women, the poor, and nature that constitutes today’s global socioecological crisis. Colombia is a productive place from which to theorize peace, with intensified debates about its meaning in relation to the country’s recent “peace process” between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP. In addition to the narcobourgeoisie land grab, the peace process is another contextual phenomenon central to my analysis of the Peace Community.

THE PEACE PROCESS

In 2012 Colombia inserted itself into the global peacebuilding spotlight when the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos (2010–2018) announced negotiations to end over fifty years of armed conflict with the FARC, Latin America’s largest and longest-standing guerrilla insurgency at the time. People met the news with a variety of reactions.

On the one hand, some Colombians viewed the announcement with skepticism, partially due to the failure of previous dialogues between the state and the FARC, the most recent being the 1999–2002 process under the Andrés Pastrana administration (Chernick 2009). Former president Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) became the most visible critic of the peace process. He insisted on the continuation of his administration’s strategy of either



I.6. Peace as political discourse. U Party billboard: “‘There is no way to peace, peace is the way’—A.J. Muste.” Author photo.

militarily annihilating the “terrorists”—his preferred term for both guerrillas and human rights defenders—or forcing them to surrender.

On the other hand, many Colombians and non-Colombians celebrated the news. This camp included those who had demanded a negotiated solution to the armed conflict since before the Pastrana negotiations (Isacson and Rojas Rodríguez 2009). They argued that a new peace process could finally lead to the end of a war between the FARC and the government spanning more than five decades (Rueda, Alvarado, and Gentili 2016). Although President Santos had been expected to continue the former administration’s hardline policy after he had served as Uribe’s minister of defense, Santos married his political rhetoric and program to peace (Gómez Correal 2016). His political party, commonly known as The U Party,⁷ erected billboards throughout the country with different peace quotes by figures such as Buddha and A. J. Muste alongside the party slogan “¡Unidos, como debe ser!” (United, as it should be!).

As the talks progressed, divisions persisted between a “pro-peace” movement fueled by human rights organizations across the country and what became known as the “No” movement led by Uribe’s far-right Democratic Center Party. Then in August 2016 the FARC and government negotiators announced that they had reached a peace accord. It included agreements on integral agrarian development, political participation for opposition parties,

illicit drugs, victims, and ending the armed conflict. While a slim majority of voters rejected the accord in a national plebiscite in October, an amended accord that integrated the critiques of the “No” movement was ultimately approved by the Colombian Congress in November. In June 2017, as one of the first tasks of its implementation, the FARC officially laid down its arms.

Many insisted on a subsequent accord with the smaller but still active Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN, National Liberation Army) guerrilla group. Additionally, despite the supposed demobilization of the paramilitary AUC in 2006, “new” paramilitary groups who subsequently rearmed (or in fact had never disarmed) continued to operate and target human rights defenders across the country (Human Rights Watch 2010; Programa Somos Defensores 2020). The government’s peace process with the AUC was fiercely critiqued for failing to dismantle paramilitarism or assure truth and reparations for victims, thus essentially legalizing the narcobourgeoisie’s appropriation of wealth and capital (Hristov 2009; Richani 2007). Many Colombian popular organizations argued that more profound socio-political transformations would be needed if there was going to be real and lasting peace.

In this context debates about peace began pulsating throughout Colombia, as different sectors manifested their particular understandings and projects. One vision affirmed the need to finally assure the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force by demobilizing the guerrillas and ending the “internal armed conflict.” Others argued that peace required the fulfillment of state-guaranteed rights to political participation and basic services like education, health care, and housing for excluded populations. Various actors also argued that peace would be created through reconciliation and national unity through a process of transitional justice, which would conduct highly selective trials on “exemplary” cases of human rights abuse. Many victims’ movements, however, were critical of the transitional justice model and affirmed the need for victimizers’ convictions and community-based memory work. Meanwhile certain government, corporate, and development sectors argued that peace would allow for the intensification of the country’s economic development model spearheaded by large-scale mining and agribusiness. Finally, amid their ongoing resistance to forced displacement and active combat, campesinos of indigenous and African descent insisted on their communities’ self-determination and dignity. In fact, while the “peace process” captured the national and international headlines, this latter group of communities had been resisting war and forging grassroots forms of peace for decades.

Interestingly, two of these major approaches to peace—formal peace treaties between states and armed groups versus peace as a lived politics of ecological dignity—intersect around one date: March 23. This was the

date by which the Colombian government and FARC negotiators were set to reach their final accord after over three years of talks. In September 2015 the state and FARC announced preliminary agreements on four of their major agenda topics. They announced they would have a final agreement six months later on March 23. Coincidentally, March 23 is also a significant date for peace in Colombia for another reason: this was the same day when San José's campesinos had founded the country's first peace community in 1997. March 23 thus represents two approaches to peace: a "peace process" between the state and guerrillas through a negotiated accord and implementation period each with a proposed completion date versus a peace community that has a beginning date and ongoing practice of peace. The former reflects peace as a finalized condition, while the latter insists on peace as a continual process.

While the FARC and government eventually reached an agreement, they failed to meet their March 23, 2016, deadline. This is illustrative of the fact that, as I argue, peace does not work with completion dates by which it will be "achieved." Conversely, in March 2016 the Peace Community celebrated its nineteen-year anniversary with a gathering of its members, an example of lived peace regardless of what state and armed actors do. They wrote in their subsequent press release, "Nineteen years living as a Peace Community has taught us that guns are not necessary to construct internal democracy and solidarity. Our project of life has been rooted in hope and not in tyranny, and therefore walking in dignity every day has permitted us to live these years without turning to subjugation. These 19 years are a light of hope before a world that is further and further from the minimal feeling of humanity that should emanate in society" (Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó 2016a). In other words, the Peace Community affirms that peace should not be relegated to armed actors' treaties but is built through everyday practices of solidarity. Their position is an invitation to theorize peace from multiple perspectives. Considering the ways that violence can persist despite formal peace accords, one of the goals of this book is to analyze the extent to which particular visions and projects of peace advance coloniality or ecological dignity.⁸

RADICAL PERFORMANCE GEOGRAPHIES OF PEACE IN COLOMBIA

People often assume that peace is created through military operations or state diplomacy. Colombia is a particularly interesting country in which to research peace, given its current multitude of competing visions and projects. During the "peace process" conjuncture, many proposals centered on assuring state legitimacy correlate with Johan Galtung's (1996) canonical peace studies concept of "negative peace" as the simple absence of direct violence. This contrasts with his more robust notion of "positive peace," which com-

bines the absence of direct, cultural, and structural violence with the simultaneous realization of social justice. Other praxes of peace, such as those of communities in resistance like San José de Apartadó, exceed that rubric and map onto alternative framings, such as Wolfgang Dietrich's (2012) notions of "energetic peace" as ecological harmony, or an array of normative "moral peaces" that emphasize rules of behavior to ensure hospitality or salvation in the afterlife. Drawing from the emergent geographies of peace literature (McConnell, Megoran, and Williams 2014), I argue that peace should not be reduced to a utopian future or seen as a condition that will be achieved once and for all. Rather, it is a question of ongoing (and potentially already-existing) *processes*, which are inherently spatial because they always take place in geographical spaces. Such socio-spatial processes are entangled in debates over how peace is understood by different actors and how it should be produced across space and time.

In this Introduction, without much initial thought, I instinctively included pictures of billboards as representations of the government's and Peace Community's competing visions of peace. Billboards are a form of territorially marking space, which in this case are used to advance particular political processes of peace through a governmental peace process or community autonomy. Peace imaginaries are therefore fundamentally questions of territory and politics. Within the dominant modern imaginary, demarcating geographical space to determine who has territorial control where—as in nation-state sovereignty—is implicitly seen as a precondition for peaceful relations among peoples. Meanwhile, peace is a discourse of power employed to generate support for one's cause, trumpeting the virtue of one's vision and position (Ross 2011; McConnell 2014), whether that be state sovereignty or a civilian safe zone. In other words, peace is a spatial discourse and practice and a performative act. Peace signs are a territorial performance in which the interaction between their creators and viewers produce signification.

Complementing Judith Butler's (2004a) approach to "performativity" in which people recurrently reenact—and in rarer instances potentially subvert—gender roles and identity positions, I use the term *performance* in the sense of staged and vernacular acts before a witness through which meaning is collectively created (Madison 2010, 2012). Following Kelly Oliver (2001), this "bearing witness" is not to dichotomously divide "performers" and "witnesses" into "subjects" and "objects"; rather, it is to signal their relational role in the coproduction of meaning. This is congruent with Butler's (2004a) recognition that gender (or peace politics) "is real only to the extent that it is performed" (161). Building from Dwight Conquergood's (1985) concept of "dialogical performance" between investigators and interlocutors in ethical collaborative research processes, performance is always a

dynamic and relational dialogue across people and beings. Communities of peace are relational and collective. They perform their opposition to war through continual and embodied practices. While both the formal “peace process” and the campesino “peace community” wield the term *peace*, these uses are better understood as “friction” (Tsing 2005), where the same word is interpreted quite differently and utilized toward differing ends.

Is the Peace Community’s performance of peace simply a reproduction of the Colombian nation-state’s territoriality that advances the coloniality of power, which seeks to dominate the population and the environment by exerting its control over a bounded area? To be sure, the Peace Community resists eviction from its land by attempting to block armed groups from entering its spaces. Nevertheless, I argue that a closer look at San José’s campesino peace centered around food sovereignty, commemoration of the dead, and solidarity networks reflects the “relational autonomy” (Ulloa 2012) that scholars have identified in many indigenous and black communities across Latin America, which seeks not to exploit nature or dominate populations but instead to cultivate reciprocal and dignified ecological reproduction among all beings (Zibechi 2012; de la Cadena 2015; Mora 2017; Escobar 2018). Ecological dignity is created through this dialogical performance between humans and the earth, social movements in solidarity with one another, and intellectuals with communities in resistance. San José de Apartadó’s set of spatial practices, places, and values creates a particular type of territory through which a political subject is produced. This territorial formation reveals that territory should be conceived of as more than mere sovereign control and domination over a space (Delaney 2005; Foucault 2007; Fernandes 2009; Sánchez Ayala 2015); rather, it entails the production of collective subjects (Gonçalves 2006; Reyes and Kaufman 2011; Colectivo de Sentipensamiento Afrodiaspórico 2015). In this case, instead of the nationalistic and capitalist subjects produced by today’s liberal nation-states, the Peace Community’s alter-territory nurtures and is nurtured by subjects committed to autonomy, solidarity, and dignity.

If the current modern-colonial world is structured by global crises, inequality, and dispossession, then peace as *living in community with dignity* requires a specific politics of rupture, whose network of alter-territories goes beyond hegemonic forms of politics limited to electoral representation and reforming the state. Challenging the coloniality of power involves radical forms of politics in which people liberate themselves from dehumanization and oppression (Fanon 1965, 2004; Rancière 2010). Scholars have called such processes of subjective transformation and the creation of dignified living conditions an “other politics” of emancipation (Grupo Acontecimiento 2012; Denis 2012; Ceceña 2012; Gutiérrez 2012). In using the term *radical*, I refer to political forms that go to the root of the problem to

put the entire (modern-colonial) system in question toward “anti-systemic” ruptures and alternative worlds (Escobar 2018; Madison 2010; Wallerstein 2004). San José is also useful for rethinking race beyond the multicultural perspective limited to ethnic identities and cultures, and instead from a structural perspective about hierarchies of (de)humanization, including the role of antiracist coalitions in emancipatory politics.

Peace Community members frequently say that “memory is the strength of our resistance” when asked about how they have survived against enormous odds or why they continue to commemorate the dead in a variety of forms. Following this line of thinking, memory is central to radical forms of peace, territory, and politics. Rather than a reactive act anchored in the past, I understand memory to be a spatial practice in the present, rooted in place and landscape, which is related to the past and future (Bal 1999; Halbwachs 1992; Mills 2010; Till 2005; Ricoeur 2004). Memory can be both a “strategic practice” where traumatic history is deployed for sociopolitical goals, as well as a “difficult return” of bringing into the present the presence of people and past events through naming and symbols (Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert 2000). Of course not all memory work is emancipatory. It can be mobilized for xenophobic or other dangerous ends, resulting in reactionary violence and genocide (Bal 1999; Benjamin 2007b). It can also function to silence ongoing structural violence when the past is memorialized in a way to claim that inequalities and exploitation have been overcome (Tyner, Alvarez, and Colucci 2012). In other words, mainstream peace and justice mantras of “never again” are insufficient as long as structural conditions of capitalist-racist-patriarchal violence persist (Depelchin 2011; Acevedo 2009; Mamdani 2004).

Anything worthy of being called peace therefore must be relational and radical. Inspired by the Peace Community’s array of practices, I call this *radical trans-relational peace*: ecological dignity nurtured through the dialogical performance of solidarity across communities. A radical trans-relational peace is constituted by a form of politics that is rooted in ecological dignity both *within* and *beyond* the people and beings in question. It is relational in three senses: First, radical peace rejects the modern division between “humanity” and “nature” through an alter-territoriality that seeks mutual life rather than the domination of “land.” These commitments are seen in San José’s rejection of extractivism and the Community’s work for sustainable agriculture. Second, through particular forms of memorialization, such as the Peace Community’s pilgrimages and stones to commemorate the dead, relational peace eschews both retaliatory killing that reproduces the cycle of violence and the separation between “the living” and “the dead” by nurturing the “agency of the dead” (Gómez Correal, forthcoming). Third, radical peace speaks to relational space among social movements. This refers to

communities who encounter and nurture one another in solidarity networks to resist modern-colonial patriarchy, racism, and capitalism, which is especially impactful when uniting campesino, indigenous, and black communities who suffer racialized violence but who can also be divided by the hegemonic ethnic lexicon. This peace is not produced by groups in isolation from one another, but through solidarity, understood here as political collaborations across difference that challenge oppression (hooks 1984; Scholz 2008). Ecological dignity is produced through the dialogical performance of radical peace, in which solidarity between people and land, the living and the dead, and among communities in resistance rupture with relations of violence toward just and sustainable life worlds.

This book is a radical performance geography of peace. It ethnographically traces the political imaginaries and territorial practices of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó in order to illuminate anticolonial politics and new ideas of peace. This exercise attempts to make theoretically explicit the arguments that San José's campesinos perform through their words and actions, and to explore the theoretical implications of the concepts they enunciate. While Community members name "the state" and "capitalism" as their antagonists, rather than colonialism directly, my contention is that their discourses and practices nonetheless reflect ruptures with coloniality.⁹ This is not to say that they are disconnected from global capitalist markets and the colonial matrix of power altogether. However, in the Community's political vision of peace and territorial practices, I find examples of them refusing to submit to the power relations of capitalism and coloniality rooted in exploitation, dehumanization, and dependency, while also forging alternatives to them through solidarity networks, collective work, and food sovereignty projects.

For me, *rupture* does not mean that "de-linking" from colonial violence comes from isolationist strategies (Mignolo 2010). Outright separation is almost impossible in today's globalized political economy. It is true that the most pressing concern of our times might be whether or not coloniality and capitalism can be eclipsed while people are still enmeshed within them (such as radical movements' engagement in state politics or international markets). But that is a broader theoretical question that cannot be answered by the Peace Community's experience alone and is thus beyond the scope of this project. My purpose here is to illuminate an already existing alternative to coloniality in an array of Peace Community conceptions and practices. In the process, along with other Latin American communities in resistance, they contribute to the articulation of new liberatory concepts while also reworking modern ones with decolonial meanings, such as dignity, autonomy, territory, and peace, with the last being of particular interest in this book. Ultimately my goal is to illuminate the role of political

resistance, solidarity, and memory performance in this radical community of peace.

BOOK OUTLINE

The book is organized into three parts, preceded by this Introduction and Chapter 1. The latter, “Radical Performance Geography: Embodying Peace Research as Solidarity,” details my methodological framework in and beyond the field. Rooted in my experience as an international accompanier in San José de Apartadó, I call it *radical performance geography*. I also conceptualize the importance of solidarity in my research as a dialogical performance for ecological dignity.

Part I, “What Is the Peace Community?” explores the historical trajectory and political significance of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community. Chapter 2, “Returns and Rupture: San José de Apartadó 1997–2016,” tells the story of the Peace Community’s emergence and evolution. It situates the armed conflict in San José within broader struggles over land, community autonomy, and political representation in Colombia. I contend that the Peace Community’s autonomous peace praxis constituted a political break with the dominant strategies of the Colombian Left rooted in electoral politics or armed struggle. Supplementing this focus on social movement strategy by placing these dynamics within the context of the global modern-colonial structure of race, Chapter 3, “De-indigenized but Not Defeated: Race, Resistance, and Trans-ethnic Solidarity,” interrogates the racial dynamics of land struggles and anti-campesino violence in Urabá and Colombia more broadly. Analyzing how San José de Apartadó’s campesinos and their indigenous and campesino counterparts in the Campesino University of Resistance understand the war, I explore the extent to which certain campesinos remain racialized despite lacking an explicit ethnic identity. I also illustrate how trans-ethnic solidarities undermine racial hierarchies meant to dominate but also divide the subaltern. To complement this section, I include an appendix at the end of the book which offers a timeline of San José de Apartadó’s history.

Part II, “What Is Peace?” offers an intervention in peace theory based on diverse understandings of peace in Colombia. Chapter 4, “‘Peace does not come from them’: Antagonisms in Colombia’s Peace Conjuncture,” examines contrasting notions of peace during the peace negotiation period, including voices from the Santos administration, the armed forces, and an array of social justice activists. Among the many divisions surrounding the “peace process,” I argue that Colombia’s current struggle for peace is undergirded by antagonistic territorialities that pit the modern-colonial political economy of extractivism against ecological dignity. Chapter 5, “The Power of Not Participating in War: Radical Trans-relational Peace,” turns to a

comprehensive presentation of Peace Community members' definitions of peace. I place their critiques of state-driven peace projects in relation to the logic of modernity-coloniality, while drawing from their conceptions of peace as the active decision to withdraw support for the war's armed groups and the construction of community to articulate my notion of a radical trans-relational peace.

Building from Part II's focus on Colombian social movements' *definitions* of peace, Part III, "What Is Politics?," moves to the Peace Community's *practice* of peace as a case of an "other politics" of emancipation. Chapter 6, "'Land is our mother': Alter-territorialities of Ecological Dignity," explores the Peace Community's production of an alter-territory through solidarity caravans, resistance networks, and food sovereignty initiatives in agricultural centers and self-sufficient family farms. Building from the growing literature that retheorizes territory beyond the nation-state given indigenous and African-descendant groups' demands for "territory" as they confront land grabbing in Latin America, the chapter offers a conceptual framework for analyzing diverse territorial formations. Chapter 7, "'Memory is the strength of our resistance': An 'Other Politics' through Commemoration," traces the relationship between the Peace Community's politics of peace and their forms of embodied and material commemoration through pilgrimages to massacre sites, painting stones with victims' names, and folk paintings of Community history. I illustrate how San José de Apartadó's massacre commemorations and painted stones reject vindictive violence and nurture a liberatory politics through internal and external solidarity.

I conclude the book with an Epilogue that provides an update on events in San José de Apartadó since the completion of the first draft of this manuscript in 2016, the same year the peace agreement was signed by the government and the FARC. It offers a final reflection on the Peace Community's ongoing significance in Colombia's postaccord context and for theorizing anticolonial peace.