

**The relationship between  
internally and externally  
generated violence in an  
Andean Mestizo Colombian  
community**

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.  
Department of Social Anthropology  
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1998

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is a study of the relationship between internally and externally generated violence in an Andean Mestizo Colombian community. It is based on fifteen-months of fieldwork in a highland peasant community in Sumapaz, a region of the Colombian Andes. The research proposes an explanation for the multiple expressions of violence reported at a local level. The explanation is centred around contrasting gender and family ideals that compete for pre-eminence in the community. A dominant patriarchal, hierarchical and individualistic ideal is in conflict with a fragmented mother-focused pattern associated with ideas of equality and peasant solidarity.

Part I of the thesis introduces the main theoretical problems, the diverse types of violence that affect the community, the people and the geographical setting. It consists of two chapters, the introductory and the historical one.

Part II of the thesis shows how the community is affected by internal violence. Chapter three describes the family structure: domestic violence unveils the fight for control of the household. Chapter four analyses the feuds in the village: several peasant families are involved in blood feuds and an analysis of their family histories reveals tensions between two opposing ideals about gender and family. Chapter five describes differences in funerary rituals: funerals of young male heroes are opposed to funerals of women who committed suicide.

Part III focuses on the external forces and their interaction with the community. Chapter six describes the drug dealers and their relation with the community: drug lords successfully reconstruct hierarchy in an egalitarian setting by re-distributing wealth to the peasants and by pouring money into the system of feasts and social celebrations. Chapter seven analyses the political role of the guerrillas and their egalitarian values. Chapter eight describes the limits of the influence of the nation state and the ambiguous way it is perceived by the community. Chapter nine analyses religion, particularly the religious struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism.

This research starts out from an analysis of the family unit. Then the community in which this family unit exists is explored, and, afterwards, it is situated in relation to the Nation State, the guerrillas, the drug lords and external forces that influence the community. It moves away from the micro level of the family unit



towards larger sets of social aggregation, opening concentric circles, ending up inserting the community in a globalised world.

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## **Aknowledgments**

This research was made possible by a studentship awarded by the London School of Economics and through my affiliation with the *Instituto Colombiano de Antropología*. I am grateful to both institutions for their financial and academic assistance. I also want to express my gratitude to the Royal Anthropological Institute and to the Department of Social Anthropology at LSE for the Radcliffe Brown and Malinowski Funds, respectively.

I am particularly grateful to Professor Maurice Bloch, my overall supervisor for this thesis, and to Professor Peter Loizos for his help and advice. I also want to thank Rocío Londoño who helped me in difficult moments and who welcomed me to her house, and Iván Gutierrez Restrepo and his family for their friendship.

Security constraints do not allowed me to reveal the identity of my various informants but I will like to thank them anyway. Especially those who I still consider my beloved friends. They trusted me and helped me and, in some particular cases, they also took an active interest in what I was doing. I will never forget their generosity and help.

Above all I will like to thank Nóra Kovács, my girlfriend, for her enormous support and help. She came to the field at an extremely difficult moment and spent ten months with me. I would like to dedicate this thesis to her as it would not have been without her help y patience.

**The relationship between internally and externally generated violence in an Andean Mestizo Colombian community**

**Chapter one: Introductory chapter**

**Introduction**

Social scientists have puzzled for decades over the presence of endemic violence in Colombia, a country where the nation state is unable to monopolise the use of violence or maintain control of the entire national territory. This research, based on fifteen-months of fieldwork in a highland peasant<sup>1</sup> community of the Colombian Andes, investigates multiple types of violence reported at a local level.

The community is affected by different expressions of internal violence. For example, several peasant families are involved in blood feuds expressing an aggressive ideal of masculinity. Female suicides illustrate an extreme form of resistance to female subordination. Domestic violence reveals the conflict over control of the household and proves the existence of tensions between spouses and between husbands and mothers-in-law. These tensions often become expressed in physical and verbal violence directed towards women or children.

In addition to this, diverse social actors, guerrillas, drug lords, and armed government forces fight for power and control over the community. Noneque is severely affected by this struggle and during my stay in the village several community members caught in the middle of the conflict were killed. The different manifestations of violence are inter-linked and their agents often have multiple social roles.

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<sup>1</sup> I will use Eric Wolf's definition of peasants as: *populations that are existentially involved in cultivation and make autonomous decisions regarding the process of cultivation. The major aim of the peasants is subsistence and social status gained within a narrow range of social relations* (Wolf, 1969: 127.)

Situations and processes have been deliberately separated for analytical purposes but they are in practice inter-related and feed on each other.

There are tensions between individualism and peasant solidarity, and between hierarchy and egalitarianism. This led me to ask whether the community is divided by antagonistic values. The analysis of the conflict-ridden family unit and its values and representations help us understand the internal violence which, in turn, provides a key to understand the relation between the external forces and the community. In this thesis I will explain how a cultural idiom of the family is transformed into wider political idioms.

The boundaries between internal or external forces in the community overlap. Some people in Nomeque have family links with the guerrillas, or form part of a political party, or have members in the public administration or even in the army. The guerrillas, the drug lords, and the army are all external in the sense that they all have to act according to national policies, for example, in relation to the guerrillas' national offensive, or to the outcome of peace talks between the government and the guerrillas. These national policies are also dependent on international conditions such as the end of the Cold War or USA policies against drug trafficking. People of the community cannot control these policies although at a local level they are implemented in a particular way. On the other hand, villagers are not only affected by these external conflicts but, sometimes, they even take part in them. As a consequence of this interaction there are connecting links between the internal and the external violence. I will discuss if, in Nomeque's context, this connection reproduces a vicious circle of violence.

Egalitarianism and hierarchy, solidarity and individualism, matrifocality and female subordination, exist in the same place at the same time and, sometimes, in the

same person. I found in the community a dominant set of values and practices expressing ideas of male superiority and hierarchy; however, I also discovered resistance to this dominant set, a resistance based on ideas of egalitarianism and solidarity. I shall look in particular at the way in which extreme ideas of masculinity are related to politics and power.

I use the term “*patronazgo*” or “*patrón system*” to refer to a pre-eminent set of values and practices which conform to a particular kind of patriarchy and which articulate the connection between the political domain and the idiom of masculinity. The concept is derived from the Spanish word “*patrón*”, which translates as landlord. The term is used in clear reference to the old *hacienda* system that was dominated by the powerful figure of the *patrón* (see Mintz and Wolf 1957: 380-412). In it the *patrón*, claiming dubious rights over the land, used the labour force of peasants to clear it. To do so, he used both force and seduction, and also violence and ambiguity. The relation peasants had with their *patrones* was one of obligation, because of the *patrón*'s superior power. However it was also a relation of veiled conflict. The organised peasants resisted the *hacienda* system and rebelled against their landowners. As a consequence of this resistance they finally managed to occupy and divide the land of the big haciendas. The breakdown of the hacienda system, which will be properly explained in the historical section of this introduction, did not erase the ideas and values related to it. In fact, we also see these same values reflected in the drug lords' attempt to become the new *patrones*, successfully reconstructing hierarchy. We shall see how the re-constitution of these hierarchical patron-client relations is rooted in traditional peasant values. Social stereotypes of male and female roles within the community will be analysed in direct relation to their concrete practices. As a system of values, the *patronazgo* ideal goes beyond the organisation

of the family to directly influence the organisation of the wider community. *Patron's* values imply the acceptance of a hierarchical order. This hierarchical ideal is rooted in the history of the region, particularly in the Spanish Colonial order and in the old hacienda hierarchical social system.

The concept of "*patronazgo*" defines a particular version of patriarchy and it is related to a specific type of family organisation. Ideally, this pattern is dominated by a central powerful male figure who exercises control over women (with the possibility of having more than one sexual partner); numerous offspring (legitimate and illegitimate); and, particularly, over subordinated males. This man owns and controls family property (particularly land) exercising his power over a specific territory (see Reinhardt, 1988: 8-9). However, in Nomeque, the attempts of men to perform this role and to impose their power are only partially successful.

Some colleagues suggested the use of the term "*Macho*" or "*machismo*" to refer to this dominant set of values and practices (see Lewis, 1970:30). These terms however, are rather vague and ambiguous for the purposes of this study. Both have been used excessively, by authors actively engaged in politically correct debates, to describe extreme models of male stereotypes mostly in Mediterranean or Latin American settings. As Evelyn Stevens noted more than twenty years ago, "*Machismo a term familiar to area specialists, has passed into the vocabulary of the general public, where it has suffered the same kind of semantic deformation as Weber's charisma*" (Stevens, 1973: 90, see also Melhuus and Stolen, 1996: 14-15). The use of these concepts of *macho* or *machismo* would imply focusing on the study of gender ideology and obscuring a more general comprehension of the problem which is made up of a complex of social and cultural elements that are bound together. *Machismo* isolates elements of sex and gender, whereas I am particularly interested in

the articulation of these elements with the political domain. The terms *cacique* or *caciquismo* are also limited. These terms, unlike *machismo*, are limited to the political domain (particularly to an anomalous expression of political representation) obscuring the importance of sexual and gender elements (see Cruz Artacho, 1994: 21; also Pitt Rivers, 1954: 12 and 75).

The concept of honour has been used to describe not only a set of values but also relating these values, “*at the level of behaviour*”, to wider aspects of Mediterranean societies (Peristiany and Pitt Rivers, 1992: 4). I also considered using the concept of honour instead of the concept of *patronazgo*. However, the idea of female sexual purity associated with the concept of honour in Mediterranean societies is not central in the life of the community analysed, not even in the cases of family feuds (see for a comparison Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968: 164-166). To use the concept of honour to describe the set of values of the community would be misleading without analysing the differences between the Mediterranean ethnographies and the community of Nomeque. In Mediterranean societies masculine honour is related to female sexual purity (Peristiany-Pitt Rivers, 1992: 6). Henrietta Moore referring to the concept of honour in the Muslim Arabic world says, “...*family honour depends most critically on the modest, chaste and discrete sexual conduct of daughters, sisters, and wives*” (Moore, 1988: 106-107). As we shall see, this is hardly the case in the community of Nomeque. However, as in the Mediterranean cases, we are dealing with a society in which there is a strong display and performance of an ideal of masculinity. The contrast between the display of masculinity of two antagonistic males often ends up in violence.

The dominant concept of *patronazgo* is in contrast to a fragmented and disorganised *alliance* of values and practices that, although they do not constitute a

whole system, are opposed to the dominant pattern. I will call these dispersed ideas and practices of resistance "*madrazgo*". The concept of *madrazgo* refers both to a set of values of resistance and to the family organisation of the households that live in poverty which is based on matrifocality.

I will not make use of the term "*matriarchy*" because it has been so abused. As several authors have pointed out, this abuse started probably with Engels' interpretation of Morgan's works (see Kuper, 1988: 72-73.) "*The element of Morgan's theory on which Engels seized was his 'rediscovery of the primitive matriarchal gens as the earlier stage of the patriarchal gens of civilised peoples'; a discovery which (so Engels claims in the preface of his first edition) 'has the same importance for anthropology as Darwin's theory of evolution has for biology and Marx's theory of surplus value for political economy'*" (Kuper, 1988: 73). On the other hand, the term *matriarchy* refers to a society dominated by women. *Madrazgo*, instead, is an alliance between frustrated men, and women who have been left in charge of their households.

As we have already seen, matrifocal families are quite common in Nomeque. The term matrifocality is used "*to describe situations where women play the dominant role psychologically or economically in households even where men reside with them*" (Chant, 1996:29). This feminine dominant role is in contrast with an aggressive masculinity shown by men who abandon the household and live outside. The values in the *madrazgo* pattern that are attached to matrifocality stress women's concern for their offspring and the administration of the household; they also stress egalitarianism among relatively poor families. Matrifocality is found at the base of the community particularly among its poorest members. I will discuss the presence of *madrazgo* values of resistance and solidarity in peasants' struggle for the land, in the



breakdown of the hacienda system, and the egalitarian division of the land in individual plots. How were values of egalitarianism and solidarity accepted in particular historical moments by individualistic and aggressive males? Matrifocal groups are located at the bottom of society, *madrazgo* values are present in the entire community. I will also discuss different theoretical approaches to matrifocality, particularly its relation to poverty and the unstable and conflictive character often attributed to it as an inherent quality of this family pattern (see Lewis, 1970: 72; also 1977: 30; Valentine, 1968: 138-139; also Barros, 1994: 1-26).

### **1. What violence and power mean in this context**

Research on violence and power has the difficult task of defining two remarkably ineffable concepts. Violence and power are constantly used in the social sciences to refer to a wide range of events and behaviours. However, as Henrietta Moore points out, “*in spite of a great mass of writing, research, and speculation, the concept of violence in the social sciences still seems remarkably undertheorized*” (Moore, 1994: 138). This statement is also valid for power.

The concepts of violence and power are constantly referred to throughout this work, in the description of the family, gender, sexual relations, and in the analysis of feuds and guerrilla warfare. However, it is far from my intention to describe every social relation as essentially violent or every individual action as related to violent social domination.

Richard Adams describes power as “*the ability of a person or social unit to influence the conduct or decision-making of another through the control over energetic forms in the latter’s environment (in the broadest sense of that term)*” (Adams, 1977: 2). In accepting this definition, I am stressing the importance power

has in influencing and altering the conduct of others. We shall see in the subsequent discussion in this section how in Nomeque power is disputed by several social actors who try to influence and control the community.

While bearing in mind the difficulties of arriving at a satisfactory cross-cultural definition of violence, pointed out by David Riches in his "Anthropology of violence" (Riches, 1986), I will accept a minimal cross-culturally valid definition of the term violence such as Marvin's which refers to "*any human action which involves the deliberate infliction of harm on others*" (Marvin, 1986:121). Or in the same vein, Riches's who defines violence as the "*contestable rendering of physical hurt*" (1991: 295). I will make use of these definitions because, on the one hand, I consider that they are wide enough to include borderline cases such as insults or harassment in the domestic sphere. On the other hand, because these definitions impose limits on what can be considered violent. Therefore, I will not use the concept of violence to describe every social event that implies physical contact or verbal communication<sup>2</sup>.

In order to understand cultural differences, it is interesting to discuss in this context what Riches calls the Anglo-Saxon meaning of the term violence, that is of violence being directly related with illegitimacy (1991: 297). In this instance violence would be an action against the law. It seems obvious that this association does not exist in the local meaning of the term (I will describe folk ideas of violence below.) In a society where the state does not effectively control the totality of the territory, and where its power is challenged by the action of multiple social actors, this restricted idea of violence is not useful.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Heelas takes the radical position of rejecting any cross-cultural definition of violence (Heelas, 1982: 49).

Thinking about law in relative terms throws a different light on arguments that claim that in Colombia there is a lack of state, a weak state or a *partial collapse of the state* (see Oquist, 1978: 183).<sup>3</sup> It seems more fruitful to treat the Colombian situation in terms of competing laws, norms and values including naturally conceived communal laws, and ideas in relation to which the law and jurisdiction of the nation state is only one set. What poses a challenging question to a social anthropologist is how legitimacy is perceived at the communal level, in this case in a rural mestizo community dominated by the most active Colombian guerrilla organisation (the FARC) which enjoys the substantial support of the local community; a community that, at the same time, is periodically invaded by the armed forces of the national state. Legitimacy does not equal a national system of law. Jack Alexander considers that "*legitimacy is a cultural phenomenon consisting of beliefs that justify the exercise of power*" (Alexander, 1984: 148). It is interesting to map out the limits of permissible, "*alternatively legal*" activities in the community where, as a result of consequent attacks, the government eventually decided not to re-establish the police station and sacrifice more of its officials for the sake of upholding the law. The case of the guerrillas is exactly the opposite, there are no written laws, no written documents at all on what the guerrillas' all encompassing control still allows locals to do. There are, however, a series of stories in circulation in the community, which offer precedents of improper behaviour for community members. All these stories reflect what would and what would not possibly fit into the ideal world outlined by the extreme left guerrilla movement and at least partially accepted by the villagers themselves. Most of these orally circulated examples reflect the conception of a natural law of jurisdiction. Constant references are made to it in phrases such as *la ley*

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<sup>3</sup> I am more than grateful to Nora Kovacs who helped me in the developon of this argument

*del monte*, the law of the jungle, and in comments such as *pedir permiso de los muchachos*, ask for the boys' (guerrillas') permission.

Why are the actions of drug lords or guerrillas perceived to be legitimate by all or at least a part of the community? It seems to me that the question can only be answered by studying how the values of the community fit with guerrillas' and drug lords' practices. This helps us to understand the circle of violence we find in the community.

Michel Taussig uses the concept *terror* to refer to a powerful discourse of domination that acts in people's imaginations and fears. *Terror* is effective in *cripling of people's capacity to resist* (Taussig, 1987: 128; and also 1992: 11). In Nomeque, *terror* is voluntarily cultivated by several actors who are involved in a policy of social domination. However, I was more than surprised to find out that, even under threatening conditions, most of the people in the community continued pursuing their own goals and did not hesitate to use violence to fulfil their own specific purposes. One of the reasons why discourses of terror are less effective in Nomeque than one would expect lies in the fact that power is not in the hands of one single agent. Instead of finding aggressive perpetrators of violence on the one hand, and passive victims on the other, power is fragmented among social forces and individuals who can all use violence with relative impunity.

Violence and power need to be discussed in relation to gender. As Henrietta Moore notes, "*The difficult thing to explain is not why gender relations are so violent, but why violence is so gendered, so sexualized*" (Moore, 1994: 155). Most of the main hypotheses shown by this work are based on the intimate connection

between assertive ideas of masculinity and politics.<sup>4</sup> I will examine how ideas of masculinity create a political system that involves violence.

## 2. About the social perception of violence

The people of the community, although accustomed to the constant presence of violence, denied, or minimised its existence. In particular contexts, violence forms part of the unspoken or the unseen. In Nomeque, a kind of silent discourse covered by suspicious doses of denial and optimism can be found in everyday life among its inhabitants<sup>5</sup> (see Greenberg, 1989: 147-159 and also Zur, 1993: 232).

In other contexts, particularly when a violent act happens, the discussion of violence abruptly emerges. Then people talk freely about the topic and discuss the violent events in detail. However, the word violence was hardly ever used in the community. Instead, I perceived constant references to the concept of *paz* (peace). "*Este es un pueblo pacífico*" (this is a peaceful village). "*Aquí no pasa nada*" (nothing happens here), are constant expressions particularly in conversation with outside visitors. In fact, this was the way people talked to me about violence at the beginning of my fieldwork. The following example illustrates this point better. Before staying in the town of Nomeque on a permanent basis I visited the region and contacted the people and the authorities in order to obtain some assurance that I would be relatively safe in the community. A sociologist from Bogotá National

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<sup>4</sup> "...sexuality is intimately connected with power in such a way that power and force are themselves sexualized, that is they are inscribed with gender difference and gender hierarchy" (Moore, 1994: 149).

<sup>5</sup> For explanations of violence that imply dismissing it see Chapter 13 of Peter Greenberg *Blood Ties* (Greenberg, 1989: 147-159).

University who was studying the Sumapaz region helped me in this task. She provided me with important contacts in the village.

During our second visit to Nomeque her mother, who was interested in visiting the place, came with us. She was a nice woman in her seventies from Bogota's upper- middle class. When we entered the poorly stocked library of the town she made some very direct and not very sensible questions to the librarian. She asked her if there were any guerrillas around and if she had ever seen a guerrilla member. The librarian answered immediately that there were no guerrillas in the village and that she had never ever seen any. She also said that this was a very peaceful village and that Nomeque had been very badly treated by the National press that exaggerated everything that happened there.

After some rapport was established between the people of the village and myself, people started to talk about violent issues quite openly. However, although this confidence made them talk, they did not talk in the same way in different contexts. The people of Nomeque want to believe that they live in a peaceful place. When nobody dies violently for a considerable period of time as, let us say, one month, people tend to talk about violence in terms of a remote past. *"No, aqui ya no hay violencia"* (no, we do not have violence here any more); *"Eso fue antes cuando estaba la policia"* (that happened before, when the police was here) or *"cuando habia un mercado grande"* (when there was a big market). This denial of violence comes to an end every time a violent death happens. Then, for the next few days, people will make constant comments on the detailed circumstances of the event. This period will end after a week or so and the denial of violence will start again.

The term violence also appeared when the people of Nomeque talked about the image of the village in the neighbouring area. They were particularly concerned

about the bad opinion of the people of Sutagao, the nearest city. *"Dicen que somos todos peleadores"* (They say we are all quarrelsome).

After the celebration of the *feria* (popular feast) I met the priest. He was always against *ferias* because at these celebrations people got drunk and often killed each other. This time, instead, he was very satisfied to be able to tell me that there had been no deaths in the village. However, at this same time, two people were murdered in Betania, a small village in the paramo (mountainous moor). The priest was very keen to explain to me, *"they were abigeos (cattle robbers) the amigos (friends, referring to the guerrillas) killed them but they were killed in Betania. People of Sutagao were commenting that it happened in Nomeque, they wanted to say something bad about our village again."*

## **2.1 Violence and memory**

There is another element present in the social perception of violence of those who have been directly affected by it. When I started asking questions about people's past I expected to find a traumatic memory in the discourses of the victims of violence. On the contrary, when it was possible to talk about these terrible events people did it naturally and with a sense of detachment from the situations experienced. They talked about their own experiences as if they were not their own, as if these experiences had not changed the course of their lives. Moreover, surveying the material collected, I suggest that their experiences are seen as part of the natural course of events.

Violence happened in the past but the victims do not perceive its effects in the

present. These perceptions are in dramatic contrast with the findings of other cross-cultural studies of violence (Zur, 1993: 228-231; Conadep, 1986: 20)<sup>6</sup>.

## 2.2 Violence and language

In Nomeque I found a marked contrast between the constant presence of physical aggression and the respectful language people use in everyday communication.

Accustomed to the rude and direct manners of the Argentinean Spanish I was surprised by the extremely respectful terms people used to refer to each other. *Como está su merced?* (I will suggest as a translation, *How is your honour?*) People considered it rude to ask for something directly and instead they always used circumlocutory ways. Instead of saying *Deme cuatro tomates* (Give me four tomatoes, a use of the imperative form quite common in Argentina) they would say, *Me regalaría cuatro tomates por favor?* (Can you please *donate* me four tomatoes?)

This does not mean that they want the tomatoes as a present; they are going to pay for them). It seems that this particular use of the language attempts to avoid conflict.

In fact, as we will see, the breakdown of this language of respect precedes physical aggression.<sup>7</sup> Insults are not used without the knowledge that they are breaking a respectful code of communication. The person who insults knows that his action might have violent consequences.

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<sup>6</sup> In a personal conversation Daniel Pecault compared Colombian cases with the traumatic experiences of the Argentinean violence of the seventies. In his opinion the difference in the perception of the victims of violence is very much related to the different composition of the social groups involved in violent events in Argentina and in Colombia. He found that in Argentina middle class urban population was predominantly affected by violence. He also pointed out the pre-eminence of Freudian-Lacanian discourses to explain and understand violence in the Argentinean context.

<sup>7</sup> Orlando Fals Borda describes the following observations made by Miguel Triana in 1921, *The (peasant) think that he is deceived, and he anticipates deceiving....He has kind manners, pleasant diminutives, respect, and opportune services for his patron; but a patron is sweetly deceived if he is counting on the sureness of such regard, because the peasant has love for no one* (from Triana, *La Civilizacion Chibcha*: 20-21, cited by Fals Borda, 1955: 201).



### 3. The structure of the research

This research begins with an analysis of the family unit. Then, the community in which this family unit exists is explored, and, afterwards, it is situated in relation to the National State, the guerrillas, drug lords and external forces that influence the community. I move away from the micro level of the family unit towards larger sets of social aggregation, opening concentric circles, ending up inserting the community in a globalised world.

In the introductory section, made up of two chapters (1-2), I also explore the geography and history of the Sumapaz region with particular emphasis on a description of the observed setting, the property and distribution of the land and the analysis and description of agrarian struggles.

In the second section of this research I will analyse *patronazgo* and *madrazgo* within the family. This section is composed of three chapters (3-4-5). The first chapter (Chapter three) concerns the analyses of *patronazgo* and *madrazgo* values and practices in the household. I develop the historical context in which the idea of *patronazgo* originated. I also describe how these values are presented and how they are reproduced by the community. Female-headed households are prevalent among the poorest families of the community, especially the ones who do not own or have very small plots of land. In that chapter I study the role of absent fathers and their conflict-ridden relations with their offspring. I also refer to the ideals and values related to *madrazgo* and to ideas of egalitarianism and solidarity.

In the next chapter (Chapter four) I refer to the conflict between *patronazgo* and *madrazgo* as expressed in feuds, and the relationship between conflict in the household and feuds in the community. I personally observed blood feuds and also

registered people's narratives about them. Blood feuds take place among families that have numerous sons. In blood feuds families keep killing members of the enemy family to the point where there are no more male members in either of them. Both the killing of a member of the family and the resulting vengeance reinforce families' social solidarity, an important issue in conflict ridden families (Durkheim, 1975: 628). This reinforcement of family ties alienates the family from the rest of the community. I also explore the intrinsic ambiguity of feuds in relation to egalitarianism and hierarchy:

*"...for feud constitutes not only a relationship between equals, but also - paradoxically- a means of affirming authority in the absence of an institutionalised power structure conceived to this end"* (Black-Michaud, 1975: 25).

In the last chapter of this section (Chapter five) I describe deaths and funerals in the community. The *patronazgo* ideal is particularly stressed in relation to death. If a young man dies, he receives special treatment from the community that recognises him as a martyr, a band of *Mariachis* (Mexican musicians) will play music at his funeral. In some particular societies the tragic death of young men seemed to be considered an "*altruistic gift*" offered to the community (Bloch and Parry, 1982: 15-19). On the other hand, it seems that women can only employ violence by exercising it against themselves (Fals Borda, 1955: 213; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 405). In the village, suicides are an extreme way by which women reject a particularly oppressive situation. In the funerals of women who have committed suicide the community expresses its rejection of their "*antisocial*" behaviour. In particular societies, "*the suicide acts for himself alone, and loses for others his regenerative power*" (Bloch and Parry, 1982).

I will use the third section of this work to analyse the way the values of *patronazgo* and *madrazgo* are valid outside the family. In this section I analyse the

action of the drug lords, the guerrillas and the nation state as external forces to the community but with relevant internal connections.

In the first chapter of this section (Chapter six) I will analyse the drug lords' ideal of *patronazgo*. This ideal, along with a successful attempt to reconstruct hierarchy, are both present in the drug lords' involvement in and commitment to the community. Their actions imply aesthetic and performative aspects of violence, which can be related to notions and constructions of the self, and with the acquisition of social power and prestige (see Krohn-Hansen, 1994: 367). The "*aesthetic*" of violence is an important element of a complex construction of individual personality. Expressions of violence and aggression are shown by individuals who want to obtain recognition from the community. This attitude can also be related to a specific construction of gender identity: males tend to fulfil a specific ideal of maleness. Drug lords are admired and respected in Nomeque as former peasants who, by means of violence, have fulfilled the ideal of maleness present in the community.

I will ponder on the role of the guerrillas in the community in the second chapter of this section (Chapter seven). The guerrillas have been constantly present in the region since the period of "*La Violencia*". They have personal relations within the village although most of their members who are actually acting in that region come from other areas of the country. This fact creates a certain ambiguity in the guerrillas' position within the community. They are partly insiders, and partly outsiders. The guerrillas can also be related to the *madrazgo* ideal of egalitarianism and social solidarity present in the fight for the land. An ideal of social solidarity is still present in the ideology of the guerrilla movement. To form part of this protective institution is an attraction to many young and poor peasants.

In the third chapter of this section (Chapter eight) I will describe and analyse the influence of the Colombian nation state in the community. It is misleading to talk about the Colombian national state, from the perspective of Nomeque, because local people do not see the state as a unified entity, and they do not imbue it with expectations about serving their needs as citizens. They do not speak of themselves as citizens, and they tend to speak of the Army, the Police, and the Education System as if they were three separate institutions without a basis in an overall state system. They speak of them as if these institutions act in an arbitrary and unaccountable way.

I will use the fourth chapter of this section (Chapter nine) to discuss religion in relation to power, violence, and the family structure of the community. The analysis of religion constitutes one of the most complex and difficult issues in this work. This research will discuss changes in the authority of the Catholic Church and its influence within the Communist Party. The activity and importance of the new "Evangelic" Churches and sects and their role in the formation of a different family pattern will be described. In my analysis of Protestant Churches I will discuss the construction of a new individualism (in this culture) and the breakdown of a network of male solidarity. I will discuss not only the teachings and influence of these churches, but also the autonomy of the converts, particularly their free reading and interpretation of the Scriptures. My data suggests that people of Nomeque perceived fundamentalist Evangelism in their own way. I will show the life story of a person who freely interpreted religion in an attempt to heal his own past and to stop the reproduction of the cultural ideology of violence. The order of his world had been broken into pieces by violence, and for him, Protestantism was used as a means to reconstruct it. Conversion also implies, for mature men, the assumption of paternal responsibilities as husbands and fathers accepting a new role in the family.

In the fourth and final section I set out the conclusions of the thesis. After talking about every manifestation of violence separately I will look at violence in a holistic way, exploring how it is connected to core values of the society. I will explain, in particular, the way internal violence feeds back to external violence; how external and internal violence may have different causes and may act in separate spheres but are, nonetheless, connected and feed on each other; how all these elements are interconnected creating a closed “circuit” of violence.

#### **4. The fieldwork**

The fifteen months of fieldwork were not peaceful, nor was it an easy task to obtain information in Nomeque. During the first days I spent in the town my perception of what was going on in the community was completely chaotic. I started my fieldwork assuming that the family unit was a nucleus in a confusing situation. This contributed to my understandings of the complexities of Nomeque society. It is not by chance that I have structured my thesis starting with the analysis of the family unit.

The use of participant observation of people’s every day life was essential for my work, especially when there was an eruption of violence in the community and differences between discourses and events were most evident. These violent events provided me with invaluable information. During, and immediately after, violent events people talked excitedly about what was or had been happening. They also did it when drunk or especially relaxed. At other times, words were carefully weighed and difficult topics avoided. Observation not only revealed to me the contradictions between discourse and action but also differences between diverse informants. These contradictions guided my research towards that which was unseen and unsaid. In a

few circumstances I was able to obtain tape-recorded interviews from informants with whom I had established closer links.

During my fieldwork, in spite of the difficulties, I gained access to the lives of both men and women. In fact, women were among my principal informants. However, at least for a man, not all the women were easily approachable and obviously it was more difficult to get into the female world than into the male one. I also had contact with people of all generations. Intergenerational relationships are also the object of tensions and conflict, the ambiguities and tensions perceived in these relations were particularly important regarding gender problems. The matrifocal family that consists of daughters and sons whose genitors have in effect abandoned them, is a particularly obvious site for such tensions and conflicts.

This work is centred on the analysis of the multiple and diverse dimensions of violence, its familial and gender components and the individual and social aspects of it. In it I try to analyse the multiple agents of violence, the individuals, the families, the guerrillas, the drug lords, and the Colombian nation state. The analysis of the differences and the interactive articulation between them will help to give an explanation of the persistent phenomenon of "endemic" violence in the region and its increase and reproduction (see Hobsbawn, 1982:272).

An analysis of violence and power in a Colombian peasant community sheds light on the relations that exist between local ideas and values in interaction with national and global trends and events. It focuses on the centrality of assertive ideas of masculinity in the production of the internal violence. It sees violence as a process through which internal and external forces are connected. The study will contribute to a social anthropology interested not only in the study of isolated micro-communities

but, also, in the study of the local in an era of globalisation showing its peculiarities in interaction with the rest of the world.

## 5. The fieldwork location

The town of Nomeque is located in the department of Cundinamarca whose capital, Bogotá, is also the capital of Colombia. About one hundred kilometres separate Nomeque from Bogotá, and this journey takes three hours by coach because of the mountains and the bad state of the road. The *alcaldía* (municipality) of Nomeque occupies an extended area of more than two hundred square kilometres with a population of approximately twelve thousand people including the rural and urban areas<sup>8</sup>. Three thousand people, approximately, populate the urban area of Nomeque. The *alcaldía* of Nomeque is sub- divided into local units of rural neighbourhoods referred to as *veredas* (Rappaport, 1994: 218). In every *vereda* there is an elementary school and a local basic organisation called "*junta veredal*" where the neighbours elect representatives who meet the authorities of the municipality to discuss local problems<sup>9</sup>.

When I visited the town of Nomeque for the first time I took one of the "taxis" that lined up on the main square of Sutagao, the nearest city. The private taxis, most of them spacious old US-made cars from the seventies, provide a shuttle service between Sutagao and Nomeque from 5AM to 10PM every day. These taxis never start a trip until the car is completely packed with passengers. I counted ten passengers and the driver when the trip started. I still remember the sober colours of

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<sup>8</sup> The national census of 1990 gave 14000 inhabitants to the *municipalidad* of Nomeque, although the people who participated in it stressed its inaccuracy, it is important to explain that the more inhabitants a county has the more money it receives from the central government.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on the origin of the term *vereda* and its limits see the work of Orlando Fals Borda (1955: 39-44).

the clothes the peasants wore in sharp contrast with the bright-coloured dresses of the people of the city. The passengers to Nomeque crowded the car covered with *ruanas*, a Colombian wool poncho, with hats on their heads, and wooden walking sticks, *zurrias*, in their hands.

### 5.1. The geographical setting

As the car was slowly leaving the town the landscape almost immediately and dramatically changed. The narrow paved road climbed up into the mountains and in a few minutes we passed from "*tierra templada*" (temperate land) to "*tierra fria*" (cold land)<sup>10</sup>. The number of curves on the road between Sutagao and Nomeque according to the enthusiastic calculations of local children is as high as 123. At first abundant, lustrous vegetation frames the road. As we moved up the mountain road, the banana trees and tropical bushes were gradually replaced by entire forests of the cold land *tomate de arbol* (a tree with an orange-coloured fruit; its name translates as 'tree tomato'), and later by neatly cultivated onion, green pea, and potato fields scattered by *fejjoa*, *curuba*, and *grenadillo* bushes. Everything is vivid green and, as it rains a great deal, it stays so all year round. Roadside shops followed one another after every kilometre and a half, many with an open-air bar and a *campo de tejo* (*tejo* field for the popular *tejo* game) attached to them. Clouds covered and uncovered the mountains on a constantly changing horizon and I understood for the first time why it was so easy for the guerrillas to appear and disappear here in seconds<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> As Gerardo and Alicia Reichel-Dolmatoff said, "Although we speak here of highlands, lowlands, and temperate zones, one must not think that these altitudinal divisions have a specific cultural significance in terms of homogeneous developments" (1961: xi.)

<sup>11</sup> ...in some areas one can descend in less than an hour from a high plain at 11,000 feet where only sheep can graze to a semitropical environment filled with lush fruits (Gudeman, 1991: 5).



The last statement deserves some explanation. The urban centre of Nomeque is situated in a narrow valley of the Western slopes of the easternmost chain of the Colombian Andes (*Cordillera Oriental*). Although the centre of Nomeque is located at about 2200 metres above sea level, the entire territory of the municipality covers an area of 200 square kilometres. Its topography is extremely varied, including some temperate lowland farms and also farms situated on the vast plateau of the *Paramo de Sumapaz* at an altitude of over three thousand metres above sea level. *Paramos* are special ecological formations; mountainous moors, more than three thousand metres above sea level covered by *frailejón*, a high mountain relative of the palm tree. The weather in the *paramo* is always chilly, thick clouds can cover it in seconds, and without knowing it well it is very easy to get lost in it.) The *Paramo of Sumapaz* is several kilometres wide, more than a hundred kilometres long, and reaches out towards the north as far as the outskirts of the capital, Bogotá, located at three thousand metres above sea level in the *Cordillera Oriental*. Except for a mule-path from colonial times there is no paved or stone-covered road that would connect the eastern and the western slopes of the *Cordillera Oriental* in the area. Exercising control over the extended plateau of the *paramo* is vital from a strategic point of view since it also means quick access to and surveillance over the adjacent territories. As a matter of fact, the guerrilla organisation active in the region gained much advantage from the control they exercised over the *paramo*. On one occasion during my fieldwork they went as far as a raid on a police station in a Bogotá suburb.

When the taxi arrived at the small town I was struck by the sharp contrast between the desolate state of the town and the lush, plentiful vegetation of the green fields surrounding it. Nomeque showed signs of the systematic elimination of trees and bushes from the urban centre. With an average temperature of seventeen degrees no

wonder I felt so cold on my arrival and decided to put my sweater on. In Nomeque, most men, and especially peasants, continue to wear the traditional *ruana*, Texan style leather boots, and a Panama hat. Students and teachers, however, dress in a more urban fashion. Women, instead, are rarely seen using traditional elements of clothing. Only elderly women can be seen covered by *ruanas* and with a brown bowler hat on their heads.

When I took my first walk around in Nomeque I saw the site from where some months ago the police station had operated. The building was completely destroyed and in the ruins, bullet holes evidenced the intense armed fight that had taken place. Someone, probably a child, had painted a red-green image of Father Christmas on one of the half-demolished walls. The police station was abandoned after consequent guerrilla attacks had razed it to the ground. The demolished site said much about the ineffectiveness of the Colombian State. I soon learned that the police were replaced by a strong though periodic military presence in the municipality of Nomeque.

## **5.2. The town and its institutions**

The main square is centred around the Catholic Church of *Nuestra Senora de la Encarnación*. The high church tower with the two white angels blowing their trumpets can be seen from everywhere in town. Two Protestant churches provide regular religious services in former shops rented for this purpose.

The Catholic parish administers the town's cemetery. It is situated on a hill, one kilometre away from the village. The wealthiest and most influential families of the past had abandoned the town, having move to the neighbouring city or to Bogotá, and left behind the unattended tombs and mausoleums of their ancestors. Recent

tombs were constructed haphazardly, reflecting a society where social hierarchy was challenged by the agrarian movement and was replaced by an order lacking in a systematic and dominant pattern.

Nomeque has its own mayor (a member of the Liberal party at the time of the fieldwork), and a local council composed of members of the Liberal, Communist and Conservative parties. The Liberals and the Communists are the major political forces in town and they govern Nomeque alternately. The members of the Conservative Party form an important minority. They affect the balance of power by voting in favour of one or the other main parties. There is a judge in Nomeque who exercises jurisdiction over petty crimes only. The judge is a female lawyer from Bogotá. She maintains a low profile without active involvement in the political life of Nomeque because, as she says, *she knows the risks of being in politics*. There is an elementary health centre with a general practitioner aided by several nurses and an ambulance car. An agricultural advice centre (UMATA) directed by a veterinarian and dependent on the municipality helps and advises the peasants in crop production and in cattle raising. The local branch of the UMATA organises vaccination campaigns against the fairly widespread foot and mouth disease. Immediately after my arrival I contacted the director who helped me enormously with my work. He accepted me on his team and this allowed me to travel around the countryside in the company of technicians and visit peasants on their own farms and in their own houses. This way I managed to visit even some isolated *fincas* (small farms) up in the *paramo* and make contact with peasants in a relatively spontaneous way. I participated actively in two campaigns of vaccination against foot and mouth disease. These were extremely demanding campaigns where we had to walk for ten days from very early in the morning until sunset, moving from one area of Nomeques' countryside to an other and from one

farm to the next. During these campaigns I made notes about the size and the level of production of the farms, and also on the economic conditions of the households in general.

The *Caja Agraria*, a national bank that gives subsidised loans to peasants, also has a branch in Nomeque. Once a flourishing institution, during my stay in the town it seemed to be in decay, closed most of the week. The former branch director of the *Caja Agraria* told me that with the fortified and more pervasive presence of the guerrillas in the municipality the bank as well as locals feared an attack. The personnel, the types of operations the branch performed and also the office hours were gradually reduced. There were rumours that sooner or later the local branch would be closed and its functions would be taken over by the branch in the nearby city.

The market is held every Saturday morning. Until ten years ago the market was located on the plaza, the main square of the village, but then it was moved to a covered area about three hundred meters away from the plaza. Nomeque's market used to be a very important regional market. Nowadays, peasants prefer to sell their crops in the nearby city or even in Bogotá. Saturday continues to be the day when peasants from the *veredas* come to the village, meet each other and drink enormous amounts of alcohol together.

### **5.3 Town structure and buildings in Nomeque**

When one starts out for a walk from the main square one would at first see two-floor buildings that frame the square. The ground floor of these buildings would normally house bars and shops with wide entrances and large windows, while the upper floors accommodate the relatively well-off owners of the centrally located buildings. The

facades of the main square buildings as well as the facades in the central streets of Nomeque are joined. Since there are no gardens in front of or by the side of houses, the facades form a unified wall, a large surface that continues in the concrete that covers the sidewalks and the streets.

Most houses, however, do have gardens, generally a strip of land behind the building that stretches out to one of the rivers. Houses in the town are generally built along the banks of the two mountain streams that rush through the town. The streams also provide houses with a natural sewage system. The only part of town divided into proper blocks is located around the building of the large and solidly constructed Catholic Church. The rest of Nomeque, as seen from the streets, extends in long strips along the river shores<sup>12</sup> or along roads. Some isolated neighbourhoods of the urban area of the municipality of Nomeque show resemblance with lineal villages. A good example for this is provided by the *Barrio Simón Bolívar*, the poorest and most recently established neighbourhood in Nomeque<sup>13</sup>, which stretches out along the road towards the *vereda* "El Retiro".

Houses in Nomeque are constructed like houses in the hot lowlands with few concessions to the cool climate; thus they are very cold and very difficult to heat. The main walls of the houses are constructed of brick with square rectangular facades and a gable roof of iron slopes. If their owners are wealthy enough they cover the bricks with lime. These houses have four sides and, as in the lowlands, all the rooms (except

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<sup>12</sup> "The tendency of *colono* families to stake claims along the transport routes gave rise to the particular settlement pattern that rural sociologists call the line village. Common in Colombian frontier areas both on the coasts and in the interior, these settlements consisted of many separate homesteads strung out along a river or dirt road stretching back into the forest in long, narrow strips" (Legrand, 1986: 28).

<sup>13</sup> The poorest slums are named after independence hero, Simon Bolivar, in Bogota and in some other towns and cities of Colombia.

for the shops) open onto a courtyard or patio (see in contrast Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 40-41). The bathrooms are usually placed outside the house. As a consequence of the cold weather and frequent rains, a plastic sloping roof often covers the courtyards. In the countryside and also in the poorest areas of the village, there are houses of adobe with only one or two rooms and with a lavatory outside. Most villagers prefer the advice of practical builders to the work of architects. Except for some solid old buildings most of the houses look temporary and provisional.

As Gudeman points out, houses in the Colombian countryside take many and diverse forms<sup>14</sup> (Gudeman, 1991:39). Houses in Nomeque are not only spaces to live in but also economic units. Stephen Gudeman distinguishes two basic economic units in the Colombian countryside, the house and the corporation (Gudeman, 1991: 9-10). In Gudeman's opinion, houses are related to economic conceptions of subsistence and self-sufficiency. Corporations instead are oriented towards profit and market economy. Houses have a base or foundation, which is its wealth and the house tries to both maintain and augment it (Gudeman, 1991: 40.) Next to it people raise hens and pigs and grow subsistence crops. Women work inside of the house, in what Gudeman describes as *domestic* work, a man works outside in what he calls *material* work (Gudeman, 1991: 43).

Kristina Bohman in her study on class and gender in a Colombian urban setting relates the house to gender and class segregation:

*“It is in relation to houses and work carried out in houses that the sexual segregation of La Rosa is most clearly manifested in daily life. The expression of la casa, (the house) is also used to sum up the fundamental division between the sexes in the saying: “The woman*

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<sup>14</sup> Some are constructed of sticks and thatch, others of adobe, wattle and daub (*bajareque*), *tapia*, or brick and cement. Shapes also vary; simple ones with a room or two may have a veranda on one or all sides, while more elaborate houses, with four sides and an internal patio, recall the Roman villa (Gudeman, 1991:39.)

*belongs to la casa (the house), the man belongs to la calle (the street)". Here, "the street" stands for the exposed outside in general, not only the actual streets of the city, where women should never move around unaccompanied, but also public life at large, which is seen as male domain" (Bohman, 1984: 138 see also Babb, 1989: 139).*

I will describe the different gender roles related to the house. In Nomeque, I observed that women have more liberty of movement than described by Bohman, and that their control over the house provides women with a remarkable space of autonomy.

## 6. Colombian Identity

It is important to remark that nobody in Nomeque identifies himself or is identified as Indian. Moreover, everyone in Nomeque speaks Spanish as her native language. Indian languages disappeared from the region during Colonial times. In this respect Orlando Fals Borda says:

*While sixteenth-century missionaries were desperately and slowly learning Chibcha in order to teach the Gospel in the native tongue, the Indians quite easily learned Spanish. They learned it without the aid of schools—the few schools were attended only by the sons of the caciques. By 1598, the Indians were using the new tongue in the market places, and when the Jesuits started their missions, they found that the people understood when they were addressed in Spanish. This meant that the Chibcha of only the second generation after the conquest were already speaking the conqueror's language, in spite of the lack of formal opportunities to learn it. It seems that these Indians were self-motivated in this connection. Their attitude was in marked contrast to that of other Indian groups, for example, the Maya, who showed extreme cultural tenacity (Fals Borda, 1955: 175).*

The Spanish of the *Altiplano Cundiboyacense* (the plateau of Cundinamarca and Boyacá) has very few dialectical variations and I did not experience difficulties in adapting to the particularities and in understanding their meaning in specific contexts.

The people in the village identified themselves as Colombians. Being Colombian, for them, also meant being creole or mestizo (see Ortiz, 1973: 35)<sup>15</sup>. "*Estamos todos mezclados, así es Colombia*" (we are all mixed, Colombia is like that). This idea seems to celebrate the mixture and equality of different cultural or ethnic groups. However, some traditional families in the community have Indian features, carry Indian surnames and have obvious historical connections with pre-Columbian inhabitants. Those families, however, are neither perceived as Indians by the community nor treated in any distinctive way. The members of these families deny any link with the Indians; they consider it a shame to mention any possible connection between them and the Indians, which they associate with backwardness, illiteracy, and barbarism.

I find it relevant to remark that there is no symbolic dualistic division of the community in two ethnic groups as it is the case in several Andean ethnographies. Debora Poole, in her analysis of *Chumbivilcano* culture in Southern Peru assesses that, in the South of Peru as well as in most of the Andes, ethnic identities emerge from a series of symbolic oppositions (Poole, 1994: 125). In a community of people identified as *Colombians*, I did not find any violence directly related to ethnic differences. This fact is in extreme contrast with other Andean ethnographies but it shows the peculiarities of Colombian complex society. In Nomeque every man is equally capable of asserting himself through violence and becoming respectable by the community.

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion on the social position and class of the mestizos Stavenhagen points out that, *...stratification systems in Latin America are multiple and often contradictory. In these stratifications we find different cultural types, physical types, and socio-economic categories all ordered hierarchically. Specific cultural and racial types which abound in Latin America (such as the ladino, the cholo, the caboclo, the Indian, etc.) do not constitute social classes in the sense that we have dealt with the concept of class in this book. Nor do they always represent precise elements*



## 7. The social structure and the ownership of land

The land in Nomeque, as the main consequence of a successful agrarian reform that is going to be explained in the next chapter, is divided into small farms. The traditional landowner class abandoned the whole region to the peasants. This fact is in great contrast with other Andean cases; for example, Christiane Paponet- Cantat (1994: 214- 215) reported the survival of the *gamonales* as a social group in the South of Peru and its transformation from landowners into political brokers. Instead, we are in Nomeque in the presence of a community formed by mestizo peasants who successfully divided the land between themselves. In a community with no clear ethnic boundaries, the ownership of land is a key element to be accounted for in the analysis of its social structure.

### 7.1 The distribution of land

The whole region of Sumapaz is an area where *minifundio* prevails. *Minifundios* are *pathologically small farms* (Fals Borda, 1955: 70). In Nomeque, they are the consequence of the agrarian rebellion plus a subsequent process of inheritance and subdivision of the land. The size of an average farm in Nomeque is from 1 to 5 hectares.

Taking into account the data obtained in Nomeque's local council<sup>16</sup>, 7% of the farms have less than one hectare and they occupy only 0. 9% of the total land; 66% of the farms have between one to five hectares of land and they occupy the 23. 2% of the total land; 15.5 % of the farms have between five to ten hectares of land and they occupy 20. 3% of the whole land; 6% of the farms have from ten to twenty hectares

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*in a social stratification system when we consider that they constitute local, relative, and subjective categories which vary greatly in content from place to place (Stavenhagen, 1975:187.)*

of land and they occupy 21.7% of the land; and only 5.5% of the farms have more than twenty hectares accounting for 34% of the total land. I compared this data with my own observations in the field, particularly during the cattle vaccination campaign where I visited more than 200 farms in different *veredas*, and I found the data accurate.

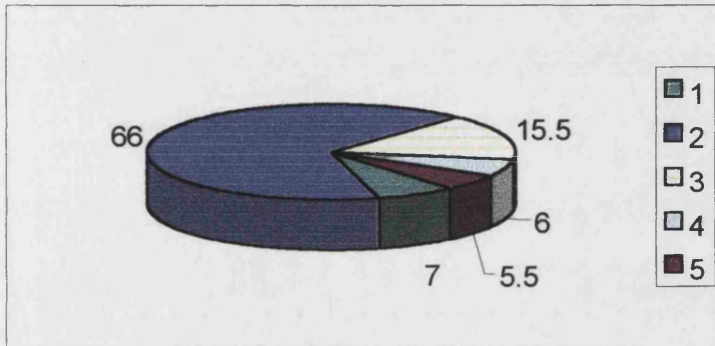


Chart 1: Size of the farms per number of owners. 1: Less than one hectare; 2: from one to five hectares; 3: from five to ten hectares; 4: from ten to twenty hectares; 5: more than twenty hectares.

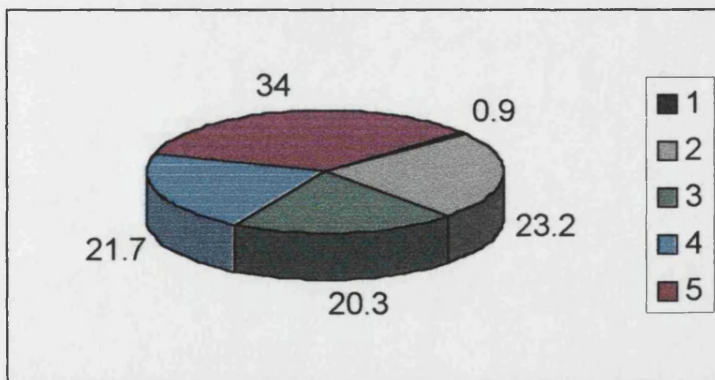


Chart two: Amount of land occupied by the different categories. 1: 0.9 per cent of the total land (properties of less than one hectare); 2: 23.2 per cent of the total land (properties that have from one to five hectares); 3: 20.3 per cent of the total land (properties that have from five to ten hectares); 4: 21.7 per cent of the total land (properties that have from ten to twenty hectares); 5: 34 per cent of the total land (properties that have more than twenty hectares).

<sup>16</sup> The data was obtained from the local council's tax office.

The distribution of land is quite balanced, particularly if we take into account its agricultural uses<sup>17</sup>. In fact, the size of the properties increases as one goes further and further above sea level and agricultural production becomes more and more difficult. Most of the largest farms are placed in the *paramo*, where only cattle can be raised. There, farms have an average size that goes from fifty to one hundred hectares.

## 7.2 The production and the market

Although farms have, in extreme cases, less than three hectares they are efficiently worked and in the temperate zones they produce from two to three harvests every year. Given the difficulties of a mountainous terrain and the small plots of land that most of the peasants have, tractors are a rarity and most of the land is ploughed by oxen.

Potatoes, kidney beans, onions, arracacha (*Arracacia xanthorrhiza*), coriander, *moras* (blackberries), and green peas are the major crops. In the more temperate lowlands coffee trees can still be seen. Cattle are raised not only to produce meat but also for the milk that is sold in the nearest town. In the region there is no production of drugs although drug lords are owners of land in the community.

All these crops are produced for the market. Peasants sell their crops in the market of Nomeque, in the nearest town and even in Corabastos, the big market of Bogotá. Peasant economy is almost completely monetized. Only small animals like hens or guinea pigs are raised with the main purpose of feeding the peasant families. In some cases, wage labour provides the household with extra income. As Carmen

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<sup>17</sup> I found interesting a comparison with Gudeman and Rivera's study in Cumbal in 1986 where 75% of the total area was in the hands of owners of more than 50 ha (Gudeman and Rivera, 1990: 21).

Diana Deere states, *it is increasingly recognised that Latin American peasant households often rely on a broad range of economic activities to generate income* (Deere, 1990: 10).

### 7.3 The social structure

Most of the land is divided in very small plots although wealthier owners generally have more than one plot dispersed in different *veredas*. After the agrarian rebellion and the subsequent division of the land, a very slow process of concentration of land re-started. The guerrillas, protecting the poor peasants and limiting the power of the drug lords are slowing down this process of concentration of the land.

The *Narcos* (drug lords) economically and socially dominate the group of wealthier peasants through their possession of large areas of land and their conspicuous consumption and redistribution of wealth. All the wealthier land-owners are of peasant origin and live in the rural area of Nomeque. They express their social position by actively participating in the organisation of the popular communal feasts and other social activities. The richest peasants raise not only cattle but also horses. They participate actively in Nomeque's annual fair showing their animals. Drug lords often pay very high prices for good horses. Peasants share a common interest in horses and land with drug lords and have important social and economic links with them.

The great majority of the peasants in Nomeque, as we have just seen, are poorer and own small farms that they work themselves. The peasant's wife often lives in the village and tends a small shop at the entrance of the house. Nomeque is full of tiny little shops, most of them with very few commodities to offer, which are generally managed by women. The woman spends her day inside the house taking

care of the children. If someone enters the shop she or one of her sons or daughters gets up to offer the occasional customer something from the scarce stock. Shops in these cases are a way of generating pocket money using the marginal labour of an already occupied person. In other cases an old relative, incapable of hard work, will keep the shop. Families that live under such economic conditions are not wealthy enough to save money but they can live in Nomeque satisfying all their elementary needs (food, clothes, transport, etc.).

At the lower end of the social scale there are the people who have no land and who rent a shop and live from its earnings. In many cases, female-headed households are (not without relevant exceptions) included in this category. The head of the house are mothers who have to take care of several children, often from different partners, and who survive only from the household economy or from sporadic jobs. They raise some pigs and chicken in their backyards, this way providing their families with extra food and also with some extra money. They may also have one or two dairy cows that they pasture along the roads or on rented plots.

At the bottom of society, the poorest people are a small minority of unskilled landless workers who depend on their badly paid jobs to survive. They are wage-workers who often migrate from one place to another harvesting different crops. Some wage-workers work in the better-stored shops earning very little money. This group is composed mostly by recent migrants who abandoned other regions, many of them because of violence. Most of these people are just now settling in Nomeque.

## **8. Education and Social mobility**

Education is not a key element in defining social boundaries among peasants.

Jerónimo Pardales, Nomeque's richest landowner, is an old, almost illiterate peasant.

He lives a very simple life in the village, dresses in the typical *ruana* (Colombian poncho) and hat. He is extremely respected and his family has great influence in Nomeque. However, the municipality and the schools offer desirable jobs. Some peasant families manage to keep their land and survive with the help of a teaching position. These positions does not represent an improvement in the social status of the teachers' families. Moreover, drug lords and other wealthy peasants often use derogatory terms when talking about teachers and none of them have close relatives with those jobs. This is in contrast with Christiane Paponnet- Cantat's study in Southern Peru where, five of the seven teachers came from the ranks of the local landholding elite (Paponnet- Cantat, 1994: 214).

High school teachers generally come from other regions of the country. They often regard the wealthiest peasants and the Narcos as very uncultured, although they are very careful in making these comments in public. Teachers, although more influential in the past, are still respected among peasants and considered good candidates for marriage.

Politics can be a way of increasing social mobility. However, most of the families successfully involved in politics are also owners of considerable tracts of land. All of them have some of their members working in the municipality. Less attractive and lower paid municipal jobs are generally occupied by less wealthy people. Most of Nomeque's teachers live in the nearest town as do wealthy shopkeepers and many of the municipality's employees. As a consequence of the influence of the Communist Party many former Nomeque citizens obtained scholarships to study at universities in Eastern European countries. The vast majority of them do not settle in Nomeque after their studies. They prefer to establish

themselves in Bogotá or in other big cities. Many Communist families have relatives who studied as far away as Moscow or Bucharest.

## **9. On peasant economics and politics**

This section will discuss the role of peasantry in relation to economics and politics. It will start with an analysis of the concept of peasant in relation to its applicability to the community of Nomeque. Further on, it will discuss the future of peasantry immersed in a capitalistic globalised world. Then, it will categorise Nomeque as a *sui generis open* peasant community with a partial connection to the market (Wolf, 1967: 506). Rebellion and resistance, which are present in the history and the everyday life of the people of Nomeque, are going to be discussed in this section in relation to the market and the national state.

### **9.1 On the concept of *peasant***

Can the concept of peasant be used to understand Colombian social reality? As a category, it has been used with many diverse meanings in different historical, geographical, and cultural contexts. There are great differences between tenants and owners, between rich and poor peasants. There are also differences between those persons who are responsible for all agricultural operations, and wage labourers who do their work under the supervision of others in return for money. It is not easy to set up a clear distinction between landless labourers and tenants or between peasants and middle size landowners.

Eric Wolf in “Peasant wars of the twentieth century” defines peasants as “populations that are existentially involved in cultivation and make autonomous decisions regarding the process of cultivation” (Wolf, 1969: 127). The category is

defined to include tenants and sharecroppers as well as owner-operators, as long as they are in a position to make the relevant decisions of how the crops are grown.

Wolf distinguished peasants from farmers: “The major aim of the peasants is subsistence and social status gained within a narrow range of social relations” (Wolf, 1969: 127). However, this distinction is blurred in the field. In Stephen Gudeman’s studies of Colombian peasants the perception of the household as the centre of the subsistence economy coexists simultaneously with an important relation to the market (Gudeman, 1990: 143). In Nomeque, as will be explained in section 8.2 of this chapter, the peasant economy is mostly market oriented but, nonetheless, the house is perceived at the centre of their economy.

I found out that the people of Nomeque were in their great majority either peasants or recognised themselves as such. This self-identification as peasants, which connects Nomeque’s community with their historical agrarian upheaval against the landlords, is an essential element to take into account in order to categorise them as peasants. In this respect, I agree with Peter Gose who states that being a peasant is not just a matter of occupational fact, but also a matter of cultural value (Gose, 1996: 3). However, I would treat “peasant consciousness as problematic rather than predictable” accepting Steve Stern’s methodological suggestion (Stern, 1987: 15).

## **9.2 The future of peasantry**

One of the issues that have been at the centre of the debates in the field of peasant studies is the future of peasantry in capitalist social formations (Deere, 1990: 1). Is the peasant necessary fate to lose his land and to become proletarianised? To answer this question we have to take into account that this debate started more than eighty years ago. Eighty years of social history have shown a complexity and a dynamic of the



peasant situation in which we can clearly see the resistance and persistence of peasantry. This persistence is well perceived in the particular history of Nomeque. In it, I found four different moments of the situation of peasantry that I will show in extension in the historical chapter:

- 1) The *resguardo* of Nomeque, where peasants had communal rights over the land (this period finished with the organisation of the Colombian republic);
- 2) The *hacienda* period with the concentration of the land in the hands of few landowners;
- 3) The agrarian rebellion against the landowners class and the subsequent division of the land;
- 4) A slow process of re- concentration of the land delayed in its speed by the guerrillas.

During the thirties, when the big landowners took over most of the land, a Leninist theoretician would have had more than one reason to predict a complete proletarianization of the peasants of Nomeque. Paradoxically, what happened was exactly the opposite, the peasants rebelled against the landlords and divided the land among themselves. Peasantry has survived in Nomeque and is doing so even with the reconversion of the land into a commodity, with a new process of land concentration or, in some cases, with peasant households surviving with the help of wage labour.

It is clear to me, after analysing the agrarian history of the region (see chapter two), that we cannot easily predict the future of peasantry without being too adventurous or too naive. To suggest an explanation of the persistence of peasantry in the area I will analyse the cultural background that gives support to the peasant interest in keeping their land. In particular, the permanence of ideas related to the land and the *hacienda* system, and that makes every peasant dream to become a big

landowner. These ideas are in apparent contrast to ideas of social redemption and peasant solidarity which are particularly relevant during peasant uprisings.

### 9.3 The categorisation of Nomeque's peasants

Eric Wolf in "*Types of Latin American Peasantry*", defines two basic types of peasant segments in the Andean area (Wolf, 1967:505). *The first type comprises certain groups in the highlands of Latin America; the second covers peasant groups found in humid low highlands and tropical lowlands* (Wolf, 1967: 505-506). He calls the first type a *corporate community* with a high degree of persistence. In this type members of the community are co-owners of a landholding corporation, *a co-ownership which implied systematic participation in communal political and religious affairs* (Wolf, 1967: 507). The corporate community is poor because it is marginally located and uses traditional technology. Land, in this community, is not a complete commodity (Wolf, 1967: 508). The system of power of the corporate community, which embraces male members, makes power a matter of communal decision. *This system of power is often tied into a religious system or into a series of interlocking religious systems. The political- religious system as a whole tends to define the boundaries of the community and act as a rallying point and symbol of collective unity* (Wolf, 1967:509). In this system individual conspicuous consumption is incidental to communal expenditure. *Thus the community at one and the same time levels differences of wealth which might intensify class divisions within the community to the detriment of the corporate structure and symbolically reasserts the strength and integrity of its structure before the eyes of its members* (Wolf, 1967: 509).

The second type described by Eric Wolf comprises peasants who regularly sell a cash crop making up between 50 and 70 per cent of their total production (Wolf, 1967: 509). Wolf locates this type of peasant on humid low highlands and tropical lowlands. *The typical structure which serves to integrate this type of peasant segment with other segments and with the larger socio-cultural whole we shall call here the open community* (Wolf, 1967: 514). The *open community* stresses continuous interaction with the outside world. This community appeared as a response for an increase in the international demand for cash crops. *On the whole, production for the market has been in an ascendant phase, though often threatened by intermittent periods of decline and depression* (Wolf, 1967: 513).

These two types should be interpreted only as provisional models for the construction of a typology (Wolf, 1967: 506). Can these types be used to understand Nomeque's particular case? The community of Nomeque covers an area that goes from the humid low highlands to the upper highlands. Nomeque is not a corporate community, its *resguardo* was abolished at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Afterwards, the big *haciendas* were dedicated to cattle rising in the highland and to coffee production in the low highlands, in both cases in direct relation to the market. After the agrarian rebellion peasants have increasingly profited from the proximity to Bogotá selling their crops to feed that market. Other than what happens in corporate communities, Nomeque individual conspicuous consumption is not incidental to communal expenditure; it is directly related to the construction of hierarchy.

I am tempted to define Nomeque as an *open community* pointing out, however, some specific particularities. The relation to the market and the constitution of the land as a commodity is higher in the humid low highlands of Nomeque where the drug lords have bought important amounts of land. Instead in the upper highlands,

dominated by the presence of the guerrillas, the process of re- concentration of the land is somehow slowed down and the relation to the market is more distant.

Wolf assesses that the corporate community opposes a defensive resistance to external forces that threaten their social organisation. Land is not sold to outsiders. On the contrary, *open* communities are involved in the dynamics of national and international markets and are also severely affected by them. In Nomeque land is a complete commodity in the low highlands, while, the more we go up the mountain the more we found elements of resistance to the market forces and to the state.

#### 9.4 Rebellion and resistance

Peasant contribution to rebellion and revolution are themes that have a constant space in classical studies on peasantry (Smith, 1989: 11). During the sixties, the Vietnam War stimulated the study of peasant insurrections against the national state (Scott, 1985: xv). Peasants were *visible* only when their actions were a threat to the ruling order. However, peasant communities have reacted against the changes imposed by capitalism and state policies in very diverse ways. Not all rebellion is in itself directed to the control of the state. As Wolf argues, *...we clearly need more studies of the various forms of action short of rebellion: riots, bandrity, religious conversion, emigration, and simple stoicism may be the reaction to the same influences which lead to rebellion* (Wolf, 1969:6).

An important element of this classic discussion on rebellion and resistance is the aim of peasants who participate actively in these movements. The question is, do they have a limited aim or are they imbedded in a revolutionary ideology? Or, to put it in another way, are they only interested in their land and their village or are they interested in a national or international movement of social revolution?

The material presented in this ethnography shows the practices and values of peasants after a successful agrarian rebellion. Instead of being immersed in a revolution or, at least, maintaining the network of solidarity created by their struggle, peasants are actually involved in a process of creation or reconstruction of hierarchy. This fact shows the attention we must pay to peasant individual motivations in processes of social change. In this respect, I agree with Popkin who assesses that, *far more attention must be paid to motivations for personal gain among the peasantry* (Popkin, 1979: 17). Popkin goes even further considering that the peasant community reinforces differences and hierarchy, *I shall argue that village procedures reinforce, not level, differences and that both village procedures and the relations between peasants and lords are sources of stratification within the peasantry* (Popkin, 1979: 17). I will show how drug lords use popular feasts to, through conspicuous consumption, establish or reinforce social differences. Peasants in Nomeque do not have a clear idea of social revolution, although, some peasant leaders have a Communist formation. For Wolf the transcendental ideological issues appear only in a very prosaic guise in peasant minds.

*Peasants often harbour a deep sense of injustice, but this sense of injustice must be given shape and expression in organization before it can become active in the political scene; and it is obvious that not every callow agitator will find a welcome hearing in village circles traditionally suspicious of outsiders, especially when they come from the city* (Wolf, 1969: 8).

In Anton Blok's historical study of the origin of the Sicilian Mafia, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village -1860- 1960- a study of violent peasant entrepreneurs*, violence is the consequence of the incapability of the state and the Sicilian landlords to ensure

order and to control the peasants. This weakness created a social vacuum which was filled by a social group of peasant origin, the *mafiosi*, who acted as brokers controlling the gap between the peasants and the landowners by violence (Blok, 1975: 33). In Nomeque, drug lords, who are in fact of peasant origin and can also be considered violent peasant entrepreneurs, are, through conspicuous consumption, constructing social stratification and hierarchy. They are not controlling a social space between the peasants and the landowners rather, they want to occupy the social space left vacant by the traditional landowner class. The other important external force, the guerrillas, are connected and related to the community, acting in a very conservative way, protecting the poor peasants from the risks of the national state and the market economy. Do peasants resist these forces?

The concept of resistance was used to refer to a constant opposition and subversion of the peasants to the ideology and the ruling order of the dominant classes. James Scott wants to understand, *the everyday forms of peasant resistance-the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them* (Scott, 1985: 29).

Unfortunately, James Scott's concept ends up explaining practically every peasant action that is not an open rebellion, in terms of resistance (Scott, 1985: 304). I think that the concept of resistance is useful if applicable only in a limited way and without analytically separating it from rebellion. *What everyday forms of resistance share with the more dramatic public confrontations is of course that they are intended to mitigate or deny claims made by superordinate classes or to advance claims vis-à-vis those superordinate classes. Such claims have ordinarily to do with the material nexus of class struggle -the appropriation of land, labor, taxes, rent, and so forth* (Scott, 1985: 32- 33).

In the case of Nomeque we have to take into account that a successful agrarian rebellion divided the land among peasants and that after this, the class of the landowners abandoned the region. In this particular situation, peasant resistance is particularly relevant against the national state. Peasants resist the police, the juridical order and also the payment of their debts. They do it with the help and support of another social actor we have to take into account, the guerrillas. Peasants have a complex relation with the guerrillas. On the one hand, peasants want to use the guerrillas to fulfil personal aims. On the other hand, guerrillas want to involve peasants in their struggle against the government. This central tension is solved differently in every particular case and often in a dramatic way.

Gavin Smith in *Livelihood and Resistance, Peasants and the Politics of Land in Peru* wants to study how rebellion and resistance are interlinked with development policies (Smith, 1989: 11). This interesting connection is briefly referred to in the historical chapter of this thesis where agrarian upheavals are shown in connection to state social policies interested in solving the agrarian question. In the religious chapter, instead, I looked into the influence of Protestant churches in relation to the transformation of the aggressive male ideal. In this case another external influence, the Protestant churches, modify peasant ideas directly related to the construction of masculinity which is connected, as it will be shown, with politics and power. Protestantism is interpreted by members of the community in their own way translating peasant ideas of the world. Local Catholicism and Communism express local ideas of social redemption in which residual traces of Andean millennialism could be found. Michael Brown and Eduardo Fernandez talk about the utopian space present in Latin American myths (Brown and Fernandez, 1995: 4). However, this is

an analysis of a mestizo peasant *open* community and, as a consequence, local myths and traditions are transformed and mixed up by diverse influences.

The agrarian rebellion left Nomeque without the former dominant class but not without the dominant ideology. In contrast with James Scott stress in values of resistance I will show how the community reproduces and assumes ideas of hierarchy present in the ideological discourse of the former landowners. These set of ideas, which I called *patronazgo*, make the peasants reconstruct hierarchy in an egalitarian setting. This assumption, central to my thesis, does not deny the presence of forms of resistance to the set of ideas and practices I call *patronazgo*.

## 10. On this research

In Colombia most of the ethnographic research made in the country study communities with either Indian or black identities (Rappaport, 1990; Wade, 1989). Mestizos compose the overwhelming majority of the Colombian peasantry but they are far from being proportionally represented in anthropological studies. One of the principal aims of this fieldwork was to fill this gap and find an explanation to Colombian violence studying a community representative of the vast majority of its population.

This research observes violence inside a mestizo setting in an area where ethnic differences are not stressed. This fact makes this work not only special among Colombian studies but also in contrast with most of the ethnographies on violence in the Andean region. These ethnographies have been centred either in the observation of Indian communities or in the contrast between Indians and mestizo identities. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, for example, studies Indian- Ladino relations as an expression of an ideology of ethnic superiority that reinforces the class superiority of the Ladinos



(Stavenhagen, 1975: 34). These studies stressed the importance of ethnic conflicts and violence (Greenberg, 1989: 199; Poole, 1994: 100; Gose, 1994: 165). Moreover, many of them have explained violence in direct relation to ethnicity. This ethnography, instead, provides a case where the ethnic element is, somehow, isolated. I will show how an aggressive masculinity is used to create hierarchy and social differentiation in a community with no notable ethnic boundaries.

The phenomenon of aggressive masculinity observed in Nomeque is comparable to similar phenomena registered on ethnographies on mestizo communities in Peru and Mexico. Similarities are particularly striking on the studies on the Peruvian coercive local power known as *gamonalismo* (Poole, 1994: 5). However, looking at ethnographies on *gamonales*, I found not only similarities but also striking differences. On the one hand, as I already stated, *gamonal* identity is created always in contrast to the Indian one from a series of symbolic oppositions (Poole, 1994: 125). Peter Gose, in his study on *Gamonalismo* in Huaquirca, Peru, assesses that a discourse that asserts violent racial difference has been consolidated in local relations of property, tribute, employment and political power (Gose, 1994: 192). On the other hand, I found in Nomeque after the end of the agrarian rebellion a process of reconstruction of hierarchy that is in sharp contrast and shows complete different results to the one observed by Deborah Poole in Chumbivilcas, Peru (Poole, 1994: 98).

In the Peruvian case the old class of *gamonales* manages to subsist, even after the division of the land. To survive, the *gamonales* manipulate positions in the local government and stress ethnic differences with the Indians. *Gamonales*, are mestizos who, *set about to fashion new modes of consolidating power and asserting their claims to superiority over the Indians* (Poole, 1994: 102). In Nomeque, as I will

show in the thesis, the class of the landowners abandoned the town and the new hierarchy under construction has a peasant background and comes from the same community. *Narcos* (drug lords), through performative violence, try to position themselves at the top of the community. *Gamonales* instead, try to retain their hold on political and social power through certain forms of performative and masculine violence (Poole, 1994: 18). It is important to point out that the drug lords are very positively perceived by most of the peasant community, instead, they are rejected by the traditional upper class. In Bogotá, the term *Narco* is used in a derogatory way by the Colombian traditional upper class to describe everything they consider *nouveau rich* and tasteless.

One of the cases where the contrast between the *gamonales* and the *Narcos* position in the community is more striking is in the *abigeato* (cattle rustling). In Chumbivilcas, as described by Debora Poole, *abigeato* is another way the *gamonales* find to redistribute the wealth of the community. In fact, they perceive it as a compensation for the loss of their land as a consequence of the agrarian reform. They are involved in cattle rustling with the complicity of the police and the legal authorities. In this way, the *gamonales* use the power of the state on their behalf. In Nomeque, instead, the police and legal authorities are outsiders who are not members of the community. Moreover, the guerrillas drove the police out of the locality. The police in Nomeque was, as the one in Chumbivilcas, involved in cattle-rustling, but the peasants who helped them received the rejection of the community and were, when caught, as it is shown in chapter seven of this thesis, severely punished by the guerrillas.

In Nomeque, drug lords, redistribute their illegally obtained wealth among the peasants creating links of hierarchical solidarity. *Narcos*, because they are placed at

the borders of legality, look at the education system with disdain. They are not particularly interested in placing their relatives as school teachers, positions that, in the community, are occupied by less wealthy peasants. The *gamonales*, instead, are particularly interested in placing their relatives in school positions. All these examples suggest that hierarchy in Nomeque is constructed through a constant negotiation with the peasants and at the margins of the state or even against it.

The contrast between mestizos and Indians is also essential in several Mexican ethnographies (Greenberg, 1989: 198; Schryer, 1990: 19). *In Huejutla, like other ethnically diverse regions of Mexico, people's position in the economic structure is strongly correlated with membership in the two major ethnic groups* (Schryer, 1990: 58). James Greenberg describes the community of Juquila, a peasant village of Oaxaca, Mexico, divided between Chatino Indians and Mestizos. Both are Catholic but they understand Catholicism in a different ways. The mestizos have an individualistic and hierarchical ideology. The Chatino folk Catholicism instead, *promotes values of equality, reciprocity, and cooperation* (Greenberg, 1989: 199)... *The differences between Indian and Mestizo moral universe are profound, entailing antithetical sets of beliefs and norms and radically different notions of good and evil* (Greenberg, 1989: 199). In Nomeque as I already stated, there is no division of the town in two opposite communities with contrasting values. The dominant ideology, which I call *patronazgo*, is hierarchical and individualistic. Values of equality, reciprocity, and social co-operation are marginal in the community. *Madrazgo*, as it will be shown in the third chapter, is a loosely related alliance of dispersed values of resistance. In respect to religious differences, I found in Nomeque a completely different ideal of masculinity and paternity related to the influence of Protestant

churches in the area. However, as it will be shown in the religious chapter, the influence of these churches is still marginal.

Octavio Paz in his *Labyrinth of solitude* assesses some sharp observations on the values and behaviours of the Mexican people. I found particularly interesting for a comparison with this Colombian ethnography, the description of the unfertile force of the *macho*. In his opinion, the principal characteristic of the Mexican *macho* is the force that is manifested as capacity to hurt, kill, rape or insult (Paz, 1981: 90). For this reason, Paz finds the complete lack of interest of the macho for his offspring natural (Paz, 1981: 90). Another attractive point of contact is his analysis of the myth of Malinche (the lover of Hernán Cortes, the conqueror of Mexico) as the symbolic mother of the Mexicans (Paz, 1981: 90). In the second chapter of this thesis I will describe the myth of Zoratama that describes the meeting of the Spanish aggressive male conqueror with the passive Indian female.

I am following Anton Blok's description of the Italian *mafiosi* as violent entrepreneurs of peasant origin to describe the origin of the *Narcos* in the community (Blok, 1975: 33). I found interesting for a comparison with Nomeque's case Blok's analysis of the *mafiosi* as entrepreneurs occupying a social vacuum. However, I found it disappointing that his work does not make any mention of the particular ideas of masculinity that give support to the construction of a mafia member. In fact becoming a member of the mafia was and still is a male's affair. Instead, in this thesis I am showing how idioms of aggressive masculinity are essential in the political construction of power.

Several studies on sex and gender on the Andean Region are centred exclusively in the analysis of gender differences or even in its relation to domestic violence but without relating these issues to the political domain (Wade, 1994: 134;

Greenberg, 1989: 109; Harvey, 1994: 66). In this way different types of violence have different and sometimes even contrasting explanations. Domestic violence is explained in a different domain than political violence: each explanation has its own separate logic. On the contrary, this research uses a combined analysis of diverse types of violence.

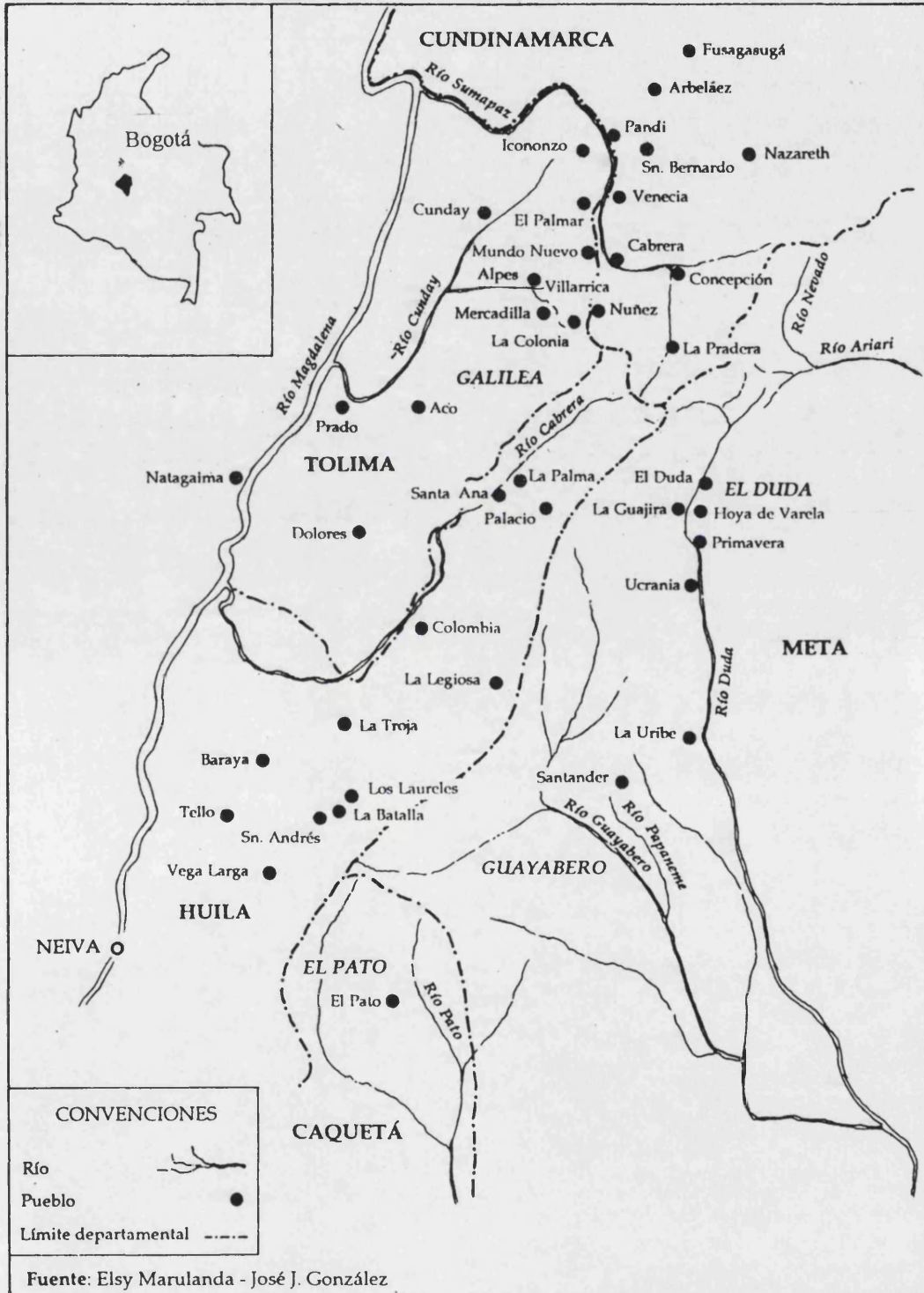
For example, Peter Wade in "Man the hunter" analyses gender and violence in music and drinking contexts in Colombia. His analysis accurately shows the complexities existent in the construction of ideas of masculinity and femininity and their connection to domestic violence (Wade, 1994: 134). However, there is no mention in the article of any relation of these ideas to political violence.

James Greenberg relates a mestizo ideology of individualism to an aggressive masculinity he calls *machismo*. *To be a man, one must drink, have passed at least one night in jail, and have been shot once* (Greenberg, 1989: 109). Unfortunately, he only devotes half a page to the description of the phenomenon. On the other hand, Greenberg defines a Mexican *cacique* just as a *political boss* (Greenberg, 1989: 5). However, there are elements in his ethnography that suggest that the figure of the *cacique* is imbedded in ideas of patriarchy and aggressive masculinity. Emiliano, a local *cacique* once told him, *I'm the father of the pueblo. If you need anything, just come to me* (Greenberg, 1989: 14). Schryer considers that, *the use of the term cacique in twentieth- century Mexico, which in most cases refers to non- Indians who combine economic and political power (including the use of armed force) has pejorative connotations. The corresponding system of caciquismo, however, has strong elements of paternalistic control, which gives it at least some degree of legitimacy among a segment of the rural population subject to the authority of such strongmen* (Schryer, 1990: 37n). The main difference Shryer's *caciques* have with

Nomeque's drug lords resides in their relation to the state. *Caciques*, through coercion and paternalistic control, obtain a legitimacy that allows them to connect the peasant community with the regional and national state. Narcos, instead, are at the margins of the state and, in this particular respect, closer to bandits. Schryer, although describing *caciquismo* as paternalistic does not go further in connecting idioms of masculinity to violence.

Domestic and political violence, that are usually analysed separately and with no relation between them, appear in this work together; aggressive idioms of masculinity are present in the political struggle for power. Moreover, in this thesis, different types of violence are shown connected and feeding on each other.

**THE SUMAPAZ REGION**



Source: Elsy Marulanda- Jose J. Gonzalez (Marulanda, 1991: 37).





The view of the urban centre of Nomeque as seen from the cemetery.



The main square of Nomeque during a village festivity.





A view of the *Paramo* of the *Sumapaz* region in the municipality of Nomeque. Note the *frailejon* stems, essential components of the *paramo* flora.



A small, isolated farm in a highland *vereda* of the municipality of Nomeque.





The cemetery of Nomeque.

## Chapter two: Land and History

### Introduction

The focus of this chapter centres on events and issues that have a direct bearing on the understanding of Nomeque and does not include the general history of Colombia or the Sumapaz region. This chapter is separated in two sections. The first section describes the main historical facts that affect the region of Sumapaz and the community of Nomeque. The second section lends special attention to people's own history as present in their narratives and myths.

As this is a peasant population, particular attention has been given to the land conflict, which is a struggle for the control of their own labour and can also be perceived as a conflict between a hierarchical order and an egalitarian one. The Indians' communal rights over the land during Colonial rule, the elimination of those rights and the constitution of a hierarchical order around the large *hacienda* after independence, and the breakdown of this order by the peasant struggle for the land, were important stages of this continuing conflict. The fight for the land finally brought about the end of the *hacienda* system and this precipitated a breakdown of the values of hierarchy and authority directly related with the old order. However, those values persist in the community although they are expressed in different ways today.

The area of Sumapaz has been a constant object of political and social conflicts (Legrand, 1986: 110). The region has a long tradition of social struggle for the land. As Stephen Gudeman notes, "*the struggle to gain control of land and command over labour through its possession has been a leitmotif in Colombian history*" (Gudeman, 1991: 19). The Sumapaz has been at the centre of Colombian

political turmoil since the early thirties, when the agrarian rebellion of the peasants against the large landowners started. Peasants, challenging the power of landowners, invaded the *haciendas* and divided the land among themselves (E. Marulanda, 1991: 74). Then, from the late forties up to the early sixties the region of Sumapaz was immersed in a Civil War called "*La Violencia*" which was marked by endless cycles of retaliation and revenge (Uribe, 1991: 1-7). In the countryside, people became used to witnessing or committing acts of rape and murder. After "*La Violencia*" (1948-1963) the agrarian rebellion in the area ended successfully with the division of the land into small individual plots.

### **1. The pre-Columbian period**

Except for a small area at the south west of the country that was part of the Inca's empire the actual territory of Colombia was neither occupied by a large state unit, nor were there any large settlements or cities present during pre-Columbian times<sup>18</sup>.

Independent cultures occupied small areas of the Colombian territory with sporadic contacts of trade and war with their neighbours. During pre-Columbian times

Nomeque was a Muisca settlement located at a crossroads, at the borders of their territory and was a defensive outpost and a commercial centre (R. Velandia, 1982:

1896). The Muisca were a linguistic Chibcha group who inhabited the Plateau of

Cundinamarca and Bogotá. The Muisca did not develop a centralised state but,

nevertheless, had a complex political structure. Nomeque's importance can be seen in

the archaeological discoveries around the area that confirm the intense trading activity

of the pre-Columbian population. The village profited from its situation in a strategic

position between different climatic areas. The relations of the Muiscas of Nomeque with their neighbours, Sutagaos and Panches, were not only commercial but constant raids and sporadic warfare took place between these different Indian groups before the arrival of the Spanish.

## 2. The Colonial Period

Spanish soldiers arrived in Nomeque during the sixteenth century and officially founded the already existing village in 1536 (Velandia, 1982: 1896). In the early seventeenth century Spanish missionaries called *curas doctrineros* (priests of the doctrine) constructed a chapel and converted the Indians to Catholicism. During the Colonial period in Nomeque the Indians managed to preserve their property and social organisation. Nomeque was founded as a *Pueblo de Indios*. These *Pueblos* were Indian villages where Indians from different areas were resettled and, somehow, protected from the *encomiendas* system. "Blancos" (whites) did not populate Nomeque during colonial times. The decrease of the Indian populations, as a consequence of diseases and of the rigour of the *encomienda* regime, resulted in the resettlement of complete populations (Gonzalez, 1980: 91). The *encomienda* system was formally abolished by King Philip V in 1720 (Krohn-Hansen, 1990: 34-35). The *encomenderos* tried to take advantage of their position in order to control the property of the land (Krohn-Hansen 1990: 35). In 1776, Indians from the then extinct Indian villages of Pandi, Tibacuy, and Fusagasugá, were resettled in the village of Nomeque (Velandia, 1982: 1896).

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on the development of Indian cultures in Colombia before the arrival of the Spaniards see the article "sociedades complejas precolombinas, variación y trayectorias de cambio" by the archeologist Robert Drennan (1992:31).

The area of Nomeque was a protected indigenous "*resguardo*"<sup>19</sup> (Indian reservation). In the *Resguardo* system, the Indians exercised communal rights over the land (Ortiz, 1973: 85-91; Rappaport 1990: 5-6). The community was organised in a "*Cabildo*" (an Indian council) presided by a chief and three captains (Velandia, 1982: 1896). Most of the surnames of the different chiefs and captains, registered in history, are still present in Nomeque's actual community.

## 2.1 The problem of miscegenation

During the first stage of the conquest Spanish men outnumbered women ten to one (Folbre, 1994: 214). This scarcity of Spanish women was replaced by the use of Indian women as sexual partners. However, only in very few cases did Spanish men marry Indian women and incorporate them into their social status. Usually Indian women had an undefined social position as they were concubines and servants to the Spanish at the same time. Their mestizo offspring were seldom recognised and occupied an ambiguous status in the highly stratified colonial society. As Kristina Bonham notes, "*the Europeans introduced, from the beginning, a distinction between women who were placed within the legitimate sphere defined by marriage and those who were utilised for sexual pleasure alone. Originally the demarcation line between the two categories closely followed those of ethnicity and class*" (Bonham, 1984: 62). In places like Mexico or Peru where former empires existed before the arrival of the Spaniards, these societies already had large numbers of enslaved women used as concubines. In other instances the Spaniards greatly modified those societies by cohabiting with Indian women. As Nancy Folbre states, "*the deterioration of*

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<sup>19</sup> *Resguardos* are political and territorial units where land is owned communally. Individuals only enjoy usufructs rights to parcels, they cannot sell their land to outsiders (Rappaport 1990: 5-6.)

women's position was even more abrupt among tribes that had not been subject to Inca, Mayan, or Aztec rule" (Folbre, 1994: 214). However as Silverblatt suggests, even in more hierarchical societies like the Inca's empire the conquest brought severe inequalities for women (Silverblatt, 1980: 1987).

As Smith notes, in the colonial society "*a hierarchical order is established by European domination of a native or imported slave population and then maintained- at least partially- through the dissemination of an ideology of relative worthiness*" (Smith, 1984: 16). According to Virginia Gutierrez de Pineda as a consequence of the Spanish conquest, a new patriarchal familial pattern was imposed in the Andean region of Colombia which Pineda calls the new-Hispanic familial pattern that adapted to the area and, little by little, became dominant over a contrasting pre-Columbian Andean matriarchal pattern (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968: 132). However she still observes traces of the ancient matriarchal pattern in the region. We are dealing not only "*with Catholic forms imbued with meanings that predate the Spanish conquest*" (Smith, 1984: 20; see also Ossio, 1984: 118-146) but also with the marginal survival of pre-Columbian forms.

### **3. The Republican period**

After independence the ownership of the land in the village changed dramatically. In 1839 the "*resguardo*" was eliminated as a consequence of the Colombian nation state policy against communal rights over the land. Liberal ideas influenced Colombian nineteenth century politics. Free trade and the elimination of commercial barriers were central policies of the nation state and communal land was perceived as an obstacle to

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the free circulation of goods as well as the creation of wealth. Leon Zamosc notes the resguardo-encomienda system was in crisis long before the Republican period,

*“With the rapid decline of the Indian population, the periodic “reducciones” carried out by the crown led to a continuous transfer of resguardo lands to the landowners. By the eighteenth century, the “resguardos” could no longer provide significant agricultural surpluses and had ceased to be a dependable source of draft labour. Consequently, during the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada (1718-1810) the remaining “encomiendas” were abrogated and the “concierto” system was abolished. In the meantime, miscegenation had given rise to a growing population of mestizos who, given their mixed ethnic definition, did not qualify for land in the indian “resguardos”. These mestizos were incorporated into the “haciendas” as “agregados”, a vague category that included different types of tenants, sharecroppers, and peons tied by bondage debts” (Zamosc, 1986:9).*

The “Resguardo” of Nomeque was divided by the Colombian authorities among the Indians into 237 private lots (Marulanda, 1991: 47) and the owners were authorised to sell their property. The Republican period coincided with the expansion of the hacienda system that became dominant (Gonzalez, 1980: 92). By the end of the nineteenth century most of the land passed into the hands of large landowners. As Charles Bergquist notes: *“The immediate historical origins of the struggle for land lay in the massive alienation of territory in the public domain that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries”* (Bergquist, 1992: 5). As Peter Gose assesses: *“To speak of class in a rural Andean setting inevitably conjures up images of the hacienda ...”*(Gose, 1996:xi).

In the region, the *hacienda de Sumapaz*, with what was at best a questionable legal right to 9,300 hectares, appropriated 290.000 hectares of public land over the years (Legrand, 1986:113). As a consequence of this process of land acquisition two main haciendas were created in Nomeque: “*Juan Viejo*”, also called “*La Constancia*” property of the Leon Gomez family, and “*El Retiro*” property first of the Leon



Gomez family and, later, of the Cubillos (Rocío Londoño, 1994: 58-59). Both families are remembered in the area for the despotic and paternalistic manners of their *patrones*. The existence of the same surnames in the area also highlights the illegitimate liaisons they had with women of the community. Virginia Gutierrez de Pineda points out that the male single *hacendado* established marital relations with subordinate women in the periods of direct administration of the hacienda (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968: 147). The *hacienda* type is a hierarchical social order sustained by cultural idioms that perpetuate social differences (Mintz and Wolf, 1957, 380- 412; also Smith, 1984: 16).

#### **4. The guerra de los mil días (one thousand day war)**

Two parties monopolised power in Colombia after the independence, the Conservatives with centralised tendencies, and the Liberals with federalist tendencies. The Liberals were in favour of free trading and of the separation of the Catholic Church from the state. The Conservatives were in favour of protectionism and of a closer relation between the Church and the state (Zamosc, 1986: 10-15).

At the end of the nineteenth century in Colombia the conflict between Conservatives and Liberals generated the "*guerra de los mil días*"<sup>20</sup> (the one thousand day war that prolonged from 1899 to 1903). The main areas where this civil war was fought were the Andean regions of the centre of the country and the coffee production areas. The region of Sumapaz was one of the foci of the Liberal uprising against the government (Bergquist, 1981: 158). The violent one thousand-day war

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<sup>20</sup> For Paul Oquist (1980) Colombia during the 19th century presents a weak state with a strong structure of social domination. The partial collapse of the Colombian state occurred due to a severe conflict between two partisan elites into which the dominant class in Colombian society was divided. That conflict reached such an intensity that the functioning of the state was affected.

between the Conservative and the Liberal parties ended with the triumph of the Conservatives<sup>21</sup>. As a consequence of the civil war there was an increase in regional migration which substantially changed the composition of Nomeque's population. Mestizo settlers came from Liberal villages from which they had been evicted by the violent repression of the governmental troops and settled in Nomeque and the surrounding region. With the *hacienda* structure and the arrival of new comers the village became a Mestizo population, losing its former Indian identity almost completely.

### **5. The fight for the land**

The boundaries of the large haciendas were often vague and shifting and the landowners were always trying to extend their property to virgin or sometimes already occupied land. During the twenties and thirties a huge peasant movement took place in Cundinamarca, especially in Sumapaz and Tequendama (Henderson, 1985: 78). The *haciendas* increasingly had conflicts with their own tenants and also with settlers who occupied plots of land in virgin areas claimed by the haciendas (E. Marulanda, 1991: 35-71). The peasants organised themselves to fight for the ownership of the land with the help of urban left wing political organisations. In the case of Sumapaz its proximity to Bogotá helped the connection between urban political organisations and rural peasants. Socialist and Communist ideas mixed with Christian values of solidarity and fraternity. These values can be traced in the peasant's petitions to the authorities and in the writings of their principal leaders (Gilard, 1993: 177- 188). At that time the *hacienda* "El Remanso," was owned by the

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<sup>21</sup> David Bushnell, following the classical text of Jesus Maria Henao and Gerardo Arrubla, considers that more than one hundred thousand people died in the conflict (Bushnell, 1992: 14).

Cubillos family. It consisted of more than five thousand hectares that extended from the village to the cool highlands of the Páramo of Sumapaz. By mid- 1933 former tenants and settlers decided to occupy the *hacienda*. The squatters declared the virgin, uncultivated areas of the *hacienda* to be "*baldíos*" (without an owner except the state). The settlers invaded the *hacienda*, and rebelling against the landlords, cut down trees and sold the timber in Fusagasugá (Marulanda, 1991: 96).

Part of the land struggle took place in the tribunals (Gilard, 1993: 178-198). The peasants recognised that the land they occupied formed part of the old Indian Resguardo of Nomeque but they argued that those lots were vacant and therefore had returned to being the property of Nomeque municipality. This argument was presented in the tribunal in agreement with art. 706 of the Colombian Civil Code (Marulanda, 1991: 97). According to law 56 of 1905, the land that was not registered as losing state ownership, as applies to the land in question, would have to be considered property of the State. They also argued that they occupied the land without recognising the ownership of a third person and by the right of *usucapion* the possession of the land, for a period of time, gave them the dominion over the area of their work. Elsy Marulanda (1991: 226) synthesises the forms of action used by the peasants in five stages:

1. The peasants entered the *haciendas* as tenants recognising the rights of their lords.
2. With their lords' consent they built houses, cleared the land, and produced crops.
3. They paid their rent principally with their work.
4. Influenced by Agrarian organisations they complained about the rent and occupied virgin parts of the *haciendas*, meanwhile the owners with the help of the local authorities sent them away.

5. They returned to the *hacienda* and legally asked for the property of the land they had occupied as tenants at first and as de facto squatters afterwards.

*“The largest squatter organisation of the period was not, however, a peasant league, but a “colony”, the Colonia Agricola de Sumapaz founded by Erasmo Valencia, Juan de la Cruz Varela, and other peasant leaders of that region around 1930. The most important and least known of the squatter associations, the Sumapaz Colony gave expression to the colonos’ vision of their cause on a heretofore unprecedented scale. In many ways this colony prefigured the “Independent Peasant Republics” that emerged in Sumapaz and other parts of central Colombia during La Violencia some twenty years later” (Legrand, 1986: 129.)*

### **5.1 Solidarity and individualism**

The fight against the landowners created solidarity and a sense of equality among peasants. But, the private ownership of the land gave way to conflicts and tensions among the settlers.

*“Thus, in rapidly developing areas, competition over land generated many controversies. These tensions were symptomatic of incipient socio-economic differentiation within the colono group itself. They were also indicative of a strongly individualistic, competitive streak within colono society. To an un-determinable degree, such endemic frictions probably reduced the settlers’ capacity to organise in their own defence when their claims to the land were challenged by outsiders in later years” (Legrand, 1986:28).*

The land was not equally divided among the peasants. As we will see, every peasant family fought not only against the landowners but also against their neighbours for the possession and delimitation of the land. Tension between solidarity and individualism has persisted and can still be seen in the animosity between many families who are involved in blood feuds.

## 6. “*La Violencia*”

With the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in Bogotá, on 9 April 1948, Colombia entered a turbulent period called *La Violencia* (The Violence, 1948-65). Gaitan was a charismatic figure of the Liberal Party with a radical populist left wing discourse<sup>22</sup> (see Hobsbawm, 1983: 263-273.) During the thirties, Gaitan had been connected to the Sumapaz area when he created an agrarian party called UNIR that favoured peasants’ land claims against Liberal landowners (see Sanchez, 1992: 78). Gaitan left UNIR at the end of the thirties and became the official leader of the Liberal party in 1946. After beating the other Liberal candidates, Gaitan was going to be his party’s candidate in the upcoming presidential elections and his almost certain chances of winning threatened the established order. After Gaitan's murder crowds of people rioted for several days in Bogotá and in the rest of the country. The mob seriously damaged the centre of the city and many people died during the incident. In the countryside, Conservatives and Liberals fought each other in a dirty war. Gangs of one faction attacked the members and property of the other. As Gonzalo Sanchez notes:

*“During the two weeks following Gaitan’s assassination, countless Colombian towns and rural districts lived under a formidable inversion of the institutional order. The police were “at the service of the Revolution” as they put it in the provinces; prisoners imprisoned or executed their guards; those individuals previously persecuted now exercised power in many localities; judges incited subversion; pulpits were silenced and priests either imprisoned, held incommunicado, or killed (principally in Tolima and Cundinamarca); peasants invaded haciendas, expropriated cattle, and gave orders to landowners (especially in the Sumapaz region and in Southern Tolima); foreign companies, such as the oil refineries of Barrancabermeja, were sized by their workers; and so on” (Sanchez, 1992: 83).*

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<sup>22</sup> In Colombia the middle classes were unable to create a third political alternative. Reformist or even radical opposition arose from fractions within the Liberal party.

Although the crowds controlled most of Bogotá for days, and many cities and towns, there was neither a revolution as such nor a centralised organisation of the movement. Instead they were, “*a constellation of alternative local power centres with no connections between them*” (Sanchez, 1992: 83). Sumapaz was one of these centres of alternative power and, as such, it was going to be attacked by government troops (Henderson, 1985:147).

Catherine Legrand notes the relation between the principal areas where the violence erupted with the areas affected by land conflict:

*“...with the exception of the Caribbean coast, the areas of concentrated land disputes in the 1930s became foci of violence in the 1950s. In those zones, left wing political groups established a particularly strong base among the peasantry. The Sumapaz, Southern Tolima, and the eastern cordillera of Huila emerged as Communist strongholds, called Independent Republics”* (Legrand: 1986, 163; also Oquist, 1978: 15).

Later on, the Conservative Government of Laureano Gomez sent a special police called *Chulavita* (because most of its members came from a village of Boyacá, a Conservative region) to the countryside to re- establish "public order". The *Chulavita* police often got involved in the conflict, taking the Conservatives' side and were accused of acting with cruelty and brutality. Then, the agrarian struggle was mainly continued with indiscriminate violence. In Medófilo Medina's opinion for many big landowners *La Violencia* was seen as an opportunity to recover their land, “*This was true in the southern and eastern parts of Tolima and in the Sumapaz region in Cundinamarca. The manifestations were different in each region, but the logic was that the same Violence was a factor in capitalistic accumulation*” (Medina, 1992:160).

In the Sumapaz region<sup>23</sup> the conflict that started between Conservatives and Liberals was transformed later into a conflict between "*libres y comunes*," Liberals and Communists. A guerrilla movement was organised against governmental repression. The movement relied on the support of peasant agrarian organisations in Sumapaz. The region was never fully pacified by the diverse governments and three "wars" took place in it: 1948-53; 1954-57; 1958-65 (Pizarro Leongomez, 1991: 110).

The peasants organised themselves in some isolated areas by creating what they called "*Repúblicas Independientes*" (Independent Republics) where they elected their own authorities and challenged the might of the nation state. The national government was particularly concerned to eliminate these "*Repúblicas Independientes*" (Independent Republics) and re-establish its authority.

*"The violence itself induced important migrations of peasants out of the most conflictive regions. While some sought refuge in the towns and cities, others moved toward the remaining areas of public lands. In this way, the populations of Sumapaz and of Southern Tolima were swollen by an influx of rural people of various political persuasions who sought security within the Communist-controlled zones"* (Legrand, 1986: 164).

In Alfredo Molano's opinion the guerrillas became a peripheral local power in these zones.

*"In the so-called Independent Republics of the 1960s, the colonists were on the brink of ruin because of the poor market conditions and the absence of government aid. They did not lose their land, however, because the guerrillas helped them, and to an extent, this help prevented large landowners from acquiring and concentrating the land into large tracts"* (Molano, 1992: 205).

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<sup>23</sup> Eduardo Pizarro Leongomez says, citing a work of Jacques April Gniset, that in the area of Sumapaz and the east of Tolima more than 100, 000 people migrated escaping the violence (Pizarro Leongomez, 1991: 130.)

## 7. The Peasant Movement

In the region of Sumapaz the peasant movement was led by the charismatic Juan de la Cruz Varela and by the Gonzalez brothers (see Gilard, 1993: 178-189). At the beginning of "La Violencia" period the peasant movement was allied with the Liberal party resistance against the conservatives. Later on, when the Liberals decided to defend the interest of the big landowners the agrarian movement joined the Communist party. The National government, particularly during the military government of General Rojas Pinilla,<sup>24</sup>(in an attempt to re-establish the authority of the state a military coup took place) was interested in the pacification of the region. In spite of its efforts, it never obtained complete control of the situation. Gonzalo Sanchez considers Rojas Pinilla's offensive in Sumapaz as one of his great political mistakes (cf. Henderson, 1985: 191).

*"A decisive component of any effort to evaluate the Rojas regime is the landowner-military offensive against Sumapaz. It was this action more than any other that made the Rojas era one not of transition or truce but rather a further chapter in the Violence"* (Sanchez, 1992: 112).

Since 1948, the Communist guerrillas have been a constant presence in the area and many families in the village have links with them. The hacienda regime never recovered and since then the area is still organised into "*minifundios*" (small farms)<sup>25</sup>. However, the agrarian movement lost its political impetus once it had obtained the

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<sup>24</sup> *The dominant classes perceived that the struggle was beginning to go far beyond bipartisan conflict, threatening to spread into far more dangerous class antagonisms. To prevent this, it was necessary to stop the fighting, and a military coup seemed to be the only realistic option when the authority of the state was collapsing. Thus, in 1953 the army took power with the open support of both traditional parties, opening a new phase in the Violence that would last until 1957. During this period, the military government headed by Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, granted a general amnesty and achieved an almost complete demobilization of the armed peasants (Zamosc, 1986: 14-15.)*

<sup>25</sup> *La disolución del sistema de hacienda, a través del mecanismo de la parcelación y como efecto inmediato de la Violencia, fue el resultado característico de esa amplia zona que bajo el nombre de*



land it sought. The last struggle of the movement was for the provision of electricity in the rural areas around the village. When this service was obtained, some ten years ago, the Agrarian Trade Union became a shadow of its former self<sup>26</sup>.

### **8. The *Frente Nacional***

The dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla was short-lived. In 1957 the political leaders of both the Conservative and the Liberal party arrived at an agreement that ended the animosity between the two factions (Maullin, 1971: 39). Both parties would alternate the presidency every four years. The Liberals would replace the Conservatives and vice-versa. This consensus was called "*Frente Nacional*" and was criticised by the rest of the political forces that named it "*democracia restringida*" (restricted democracy). The agreement allowed the two parties to alternate in power for the next 16 years until 1974. However, as Daniel Pecault points out, the National Front division of power between the two main political parties still organises Colombian political life (Pecault, 1992: 237).

### **9. The guerrillas and the drug lords**

*"Significantly, the areas in which rural guerrillas have found a solid base of support in the Colombian country side in the past fifteen years are all pioneer ones..."*(Legrand, 1986: 164).

The guerrillas' activities in the village have increased since 1991 when the government of President Cesar Gaviria attacked the principal guerrillas' camp in La Uribe, in the "Llanos Orientales" (Eastern plains) on the other side of the Paramo del

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*Sumapaz se extiende desde el sur de Cundinamarca al oriente del Tolima* (Sanchez, 1989: 17, cited by Pizarro Leongomez, 1991: 179.)

Sumapaz. The government attack dispersed the guerrillas into different fronts around the region. As a consequence, the guerrillas increased their presence in the community, attacking Nomeque's police station on three occasions from 1992 to 1993.

The guerrillas have been accused of involvement in drug trafficking and production. In fact, in some areas of recent colonisation the guerrillas have protected the peasants who produced *coca* (Jaramillo, Mora and Cubides, 1986: 170-190).

The drug lords entered the community at the beginning of the eighties. In the valley, the drug dealers made an alliance with the military and the police. The alliance of these social organisations creating paramilitary structures is not rare in Colombia (The Economist, 1997: 69-70). However, *The army fiercely denies allegations of collusion with the paramilitaries* (The Economist, 1997:69). Paramilitary organisations were very active in the nearest town where they massacred a Communist family with links in Nomeque. The drug lords then arrived at some kind of agreement with the guerrilla movement, whereby they were obliged to pay the *revolutionary tax*.

## 10. People's own history and myths

This section describes people's own myths and their own perception of history. The main historical events are expressed in their own narratives. The origin of violence and conflict in the community is sometimes interpreted in diverse and contradictory ways. The myth of Zoratama, told and represented during the main patriotic feast and celebrations, reveals the gender ideas present in the community and their perception

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<sup>26</sup> For a description of Colombian agrarian trade unionism see *The politics and ideology of the Colombian peasant movement, the case of the ANUC* (Rivera Cusicanqui, 1987.)

of the origin of patriarchal values. It also shows the conflicting nature of being mestizo and resistance to the imposition of *patronazgo* values.

### 10.1 The legend of Zoratama

The conquest of the region by the Spanish is reflected in the local legend of Zoratama. The legend is well known by every inhabitant of the community and can be related to the critical process of miscegenation and the problem of possession and dispossession of the land. Another central element of the myth is the patriarchal ideology it sustains which is directly related to a politic of conquest. I used different sources in the description of this story combining oral narratives with the detailed version of Roberto Velandia (1978: 1897).

Lázaro Fonte, a young captain born in Cadiz, arrived in the region with the expedition of Gonzalo Jimenez de Quesada, the Spanish conqueror who founded Bogotá. Fonte had a love relation with the Indian "princess" Zoratama from the area around the Guatavita lake near Bogotá. Someone, perhaps an envious companion, denounced Lázaro Fonte to his superior accusing him of keeping emeralds to himself and Fonte was judged and condemned to death. But, because of the special favour of his leader, Jimenez de Quesada, Lázaro Fonte's sentence was commuted and instead he was sent into exile to Nomeque. Twenty-four horsemen escorted him to Nomeque where he was deprived of his weapons and horse and was left alone. The people of the village were scared by the arrival of the horsemen and ran into the forest.

Meanwhile, Zoratama followed her lover on foot and arrived in Nomeque in search of Lázaro Fonte who was wandering alone in great despair. Zoratama dressed up as a princess of Muequeta and went to search for the Indian Chief of Nomeque (Velandia, 1978: 1897). Using her diplomacy, she managed to convince him that Lázaro Fonte

was a great knight who was sent into exile because of his love for her and because of his defence and protection of the Indians. The Indian chief, convinced by her words, gave the couple his hospitality and Zoratama and Lázaro Fonte lived in the village for some months. One day, the Indians told him that strange people were arriving from the eastern plains. These strange people were the Spanish and it was the expedition of Nicolás de Federman who was arriving from the east with the intention of competing with Quesada for rights over the recently conquered territories. Lázaro Fonte immediately wrote a message and Zoratama took it to Quesada informing him of this important news. The next day ten horsemen carried both Quesada's pardon and Lázaro Fonte's weapons.

Fonte and Zoratama settled down in a "*encomienda*" (a piece of land with Indians at its service) in the Sabana of Bogotá and had a child. Unfortunately, Fonte was not able to stay in the same place for a long period of time, he decided to go to the Amazonas searching "*El Dorado*" in an unfortunate expedition where he tragically died. Meanwhile Zoratama was waiting for him in their "*encomienda*." When the news that Fonte had died reached Zoratama she was deprived of their land. She was last seen wandering around the Sabana of Bogotá with her baby on her back and finally committed suicide by throwing herself with the son of her unfortunate love into the waters of the Guatavita lake.

We can see in the story that Lázaro Fonte is both European and male. He is the active, aggressive and patriarchal conqueror. Zoratama is the passive female Indian conquered by his power and enchantment. Fonte rides a horse and carries weapons as a symbol of his power. He is dispossessed of both when he loses his position and status. Zoratama, on foot and with loyalty as her main virtue helps him to regain his status. When Lázaro Fonte leaves his home in search for *El Dorado*

Zoratama passively waits. When the news of Lázaro Fonte's death arrived she is then deprived of the land. The lesson of the conquest is simple: she was nothing without Fonte's might and that is why, desperate, she killed her child and committed suicide. However, there is an extreme sense of injustice in the way people recount Zoratama's tragic end. As a woman and poor Indian she was too weak to defend herself but she did not lose her dignity. She decided to kill her child because he was neither Indian nor white. When dispossessed of her land, Zoratama realised that there was no place for him in the future society. The myth of Zoratama expresses the current interpretation and persistence of patriarchal values and also its articulation to a politics of aggressive conquest. It is important to stress that this myth is reinterpreted by a mestizo population that shares with Zoratama an ambiguous position in society. In this work we shall see that the conflicting elements exposed in this narrative are still present and active in the community today. I found particularly enlightening a comparison with the Mexican myth of Malinche, as referred to by Marit Melhuus (1996: 234). Malinche was the Indian lover of Hernán Cortes who betrayed her people in favour of the Spaniards. Marit Melhuus said about her,

*“Although Malinche is ‘Mexican’ (and I choose to place the adjective in quotation marks, as no Mexicans existed at the time of the conquest and her ‘nationality’ is obviously an invention), her story has come to represent the quintessence of Latin American mestizo origins. Couched in terms of violence, rape, suffering and deception, this origin is expressed through gender and race, articulating specific relations of power and dominance. It is the Spanish male – the pale-faced conquistador- who overpowers the foreign land and its people. He is the victor. His victim is the Indian woman, native of the land, who is raped by a stranger and subsequently gives birth to illegitimate children. Thus the territorial conquest is rephrased in terms of a sexual conquest. The rape of the woman is metaphorically equated with the rape of the land” (Melhuus, 1996: 237)*

## 10.2 Their own history

The "*guerra de los mil dias*" is still remembered as a bloody conflict. A peasant told me that:

*"When I was young my father told me to go with him through the Paramo to Bethlehem to buy some potatoes. When we passed by a place where my father asked me to make a wooden cross and to say a Padrenuestro. It was a place where a big matanza (slaughter) of peasants took place during the guerra de los mil dias."*

Father Santana, who was in charge of the parish of Nomeque from the fifties until the eighties, remembered the way the agrarian movement started in the *hacienda "El*

*Remanso"*:

*"When the Leon Gomez- Cubillos were the owners of Nomeque (the village was surrounded by their haciendas) they didn't do anything for the village, not even build a school. They preferred to keep the people ignorant, to control them better. At six o'clock they used to close the bridge and nobody could enter or leave the village until the morning. In 1930 in Fusagasuga on the farm "El Chocho" whose owners were the Caballero, the tenants rebelled against their lords. Jorge Eliecer Gaitan helped to organise them and founded the Unirismo, an Agrarian movement. Later Gaitan returned to Liberalism leaving the agrarians alone. After the rebellion of "El Chocho" the tenants of "El Remanso" decided also to rebel. The lords called the army but finally they were obliged to sell their land to the peasants. The rebels refused to pay any money for the land. Then there was a bad priest in the village, he was in the parish before me, and he was a bad priest who wanted to make money. With that purpose he bought the farm of "El Remanso" from the Cubillos with all the juridical cases against the peasants but instead of making things easier for the people selling the land on reasonable prices he put the prices up. Finally, the hacienda was legally divided and people obtained the property of the land. The house of the hacienda was given to the Jesuits who started rural education and created an agricultural trade union and a Co-operative. The ninth of April (of 1948 when the Violencia period started after the murder of Jorge Eliecer Gaitan in Bogota) the house was robbed by the mob and all this work finished. Then the Communists created the Peasant's Trade Union that, at least formally, still persists."*

Don José Darío Pedraza, a peasant from the *vereda* Alta Gracia who owns eight *fanegadas* (six hectares approximately) and his father forty *fanegadas*, told me about the way his family entered into the conflict with the landlords. His grandfather came from Une, a village on the other side of the *paramo*, and won the land "a punta de machete" (with the blade of his machete) fighting against the Cubillos- Leon Gomez (the *haciendas* used the effort of their tenants to clean the land and moved them further up the mountain). The machete is both a symbol of the clearing of the land, of the struggle against nature, of the fight for the property, and of the struggle against other men.

*"My grandfather was a peasant obliged to work for the Cubillos. They told him that if he cleared a piece of land of the forest he could cultivate it dividing the crop with them. But, each time my grandfather slashed and burned a piece of land the Cubillos came and appropriated it. They were pushing the "colonos" up to the mountains using their work to clean the land. Finally the colonos decided to rebel against their lords."*

Don Niño, an old man who had his farm in the *vereda* of *El Retiro* told us that his grandparents were tenants of the Cubillos. The owners gave them twelve *fanegadas* to work (approx. eight hectares). The people had to work for the Cubillos clearing and cultivating an area and when that was done to continue clearing the forest up to the mountain. They repeated it several times until but then they got tired. Then the peasants started to meet in small groups and to create *colonias* and to name leaders to represent their rights.

*"It was a long struggle but finally the Cubillos got tired and decided to sell the land. The land was all owned by these rich people who earned some million hectares (sic), here, in San Pedro, Batan, as far as Sutagao. Now we are not slaves anymore. We have to pay taxes anyway and every day taxes are more expensive. We used to live here attached to the land, there were no schools, we used to go to Sutagao without shoes walking with a bag full of curubas, guatilas and plantains but we were happy. I can hardly*

*read and multiply but my grandsons go to the Normal school and they will become more educated. Then we fought again for electrification but the government gave it to us quite fast. Life in the country side is quite tough but still very beautiful”.*

Presentación Choachi, a member of the Conservative Party, whose family is an old and respected one in the village remembers the political struggle and has her own interpretation of it. She remembers "*La Violencia*" (the Violence) from approximately 1955. She said that in the village the Liberals were more cruel than the Conservatives. Then the police participated in the "*desmanes*" (incidents) (she was probably making reference to the "*policía chulavita*" who helped the Conservative government). Then the people started to be scared by the "*chusma*" (disrespectful way by which the guerrillas were called, the unknown mob who entered the villages, pillaging and destroying everything). Their parents scared them talking about the communists that at that time started to appear and who were fighting against "order".

Don Barboza, an old Liberal peasant, had a different story: *Laureano Gomez* (the Colombian president at the beginning of La Violencia) *because of personal ambition started the violence, he and his Minister of War. The Conservatives were very aggressive, they have killed many Liberals. Nowadays they have become more civilised.*

One of the Choachi sisters told me that thirty years ago *la gente mas culta* (the most cultured people) started to move, especially to Bogota but also to other cities.

*“Then, the peasants started to live in the urban part of town. Before there was no violence in the village, except on Saturday, the market day, when the peasants could fight using sticks and zurrias. The women helped their husbands hiding stones beneath their skirts and throwing stones to their occasional enemies. Then, ten years ago, there was a new exodus of people that in this case went to the nearest town. But the most cultured people left the village thirty*



*years ago. Nowadays even the teachers live in the nearby city. In the village almost everyone is a peasant”.*

An old Conservative woman who was living in Bogotá visited some relatives in Nomeque and the conversation centred on the guerrillas. She told me that there always had been guerrillas in Nomeque. She could remember all the people led by Juan de la Cruz Varela who put down their weapons and accepted the peace agreement made with the national government.

*“And in the end it didn't help at all. Well, thank God that the terrible things that happen in Urabá do not happen here (Urabá is a banana producing region where massive killings take place). There, in Urabá, many horrendous things are happening, a lot of atrocities are committed. It doesn't happen here, maybe because we are more accepting of their domination, we are more submissive. Nobody fights the guerrillas and that's the reason why they don't act as they do in Urabá”.*

## **11. Summary**

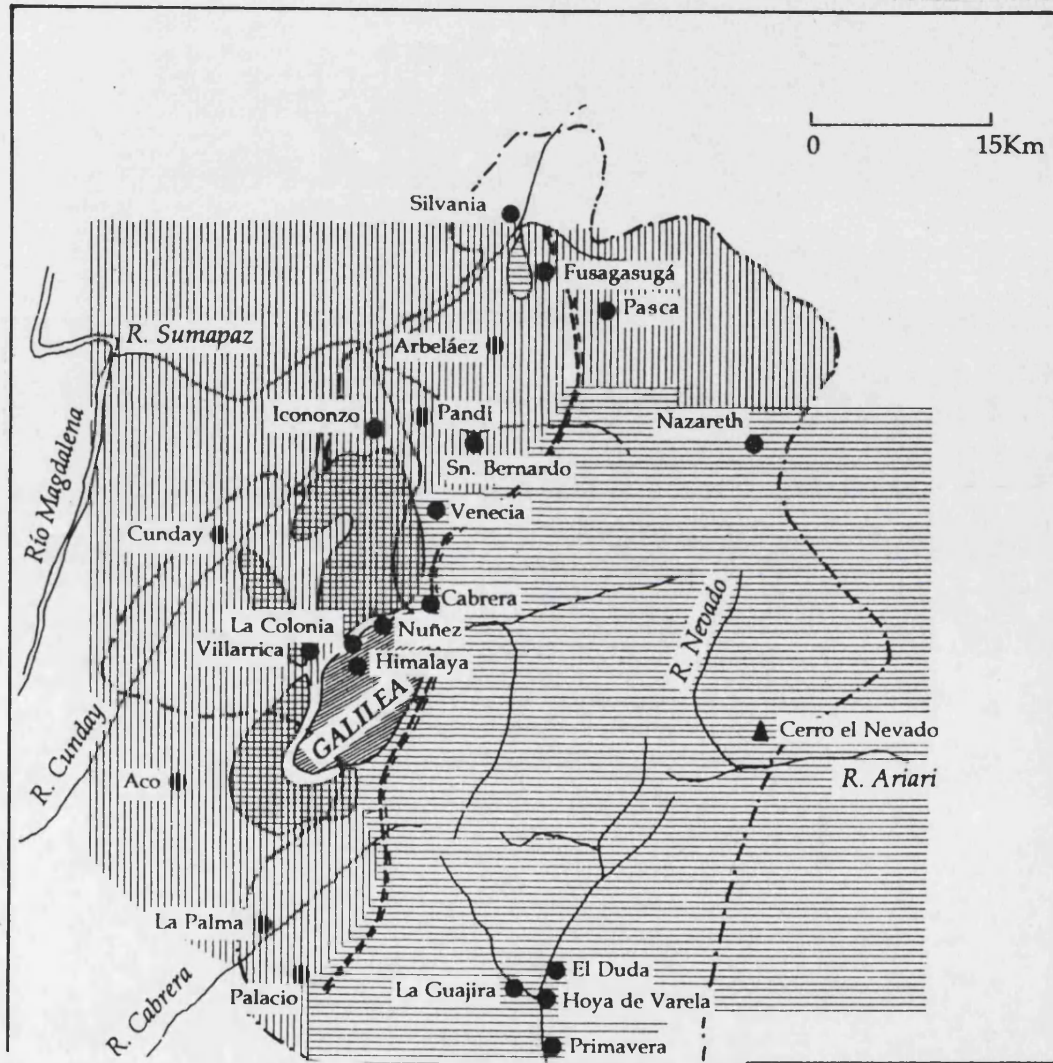
In Nomeque, there is a continuing conflict between hierarchy and egalitarianism. When the Spaniards arrived in the region it was occupied by different Indian groups that were trading and fighting each other. The Conquerors imposed a regime of hierarchy and submission the values of which, especially in relation to gender, are reflected in the Legend of Zoratama in which the Indian woman with a subordinated role decides to kill herself and her son. The social space of the Mestizo in colonial society is dramatised in this legend. The myth expresses patriarchal values that are in connection with a politics of conquest and as such they are still present in the community.

Nomeque was a *Resguardo* and kept its community rights over the land during the colonial period. During the republican period, the *Resguardo* was eliminated and large *haciendas* were created in Sumapaz. The landowners'

hierarchical order was abolished after a long period of violent confrontation and was replaced with a more egalitarian one in which, as we will see later on, conflicts are solved among particular people with practically no intervention from the State.

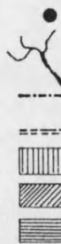
Changes in land property affected social relations, the breakdown of the hacienda system included the breakdown of notions of order and hierarchy. The peasants fought together in solidarity but ideas of egalitarianism and social solidarity have always been contested by the existence of strong peasant individualism. As a consequence of the agrarian rebellion, the land was divided in small individual plots by the peasants. This division was due to circumstances more than to a planned and organised distribution of land. Therefore, the division of land produced conflicts not only with the large landholders but also within the peasantry. These differences among peasants were expressed in feuds and also in local political conflicts. During the period called "*La Violencia*", in the middle of an intense fight for the land, the guerrillas were perceived differently by different actors. Each of them expressed their own point of view of what happened from their social and political position in the community.

### AGRARIAN COLONISATION AND HACIENDAS 1920- 1955



#### KEY

- Town ●
- River —
- Border of the Sumapaz region - - - - -
- Area of agrarian colonisation ▨
- Area of hacienda ▩
- Area of organised colonisation ▧
- Area of spontaneous colonisation ▪



**Chapter three: *Patrones*, masculinity, the family, and politics: The conflict between *madrazgo* and *patronazgo***

**Introduction**

In this chapter I will define and describe the terms *patronazgo* and *madrazgo*. When I talk about these sets of values and practices it is important to take into account that they are composed of different elements all loosely related to each other. I will describe these different elements and explain how they relate to each other.

An extensive group of scholars have described Colombian society as patriarchal (Reinhardt, 1988: 8-9; Bohman, 1984: 137; Gutierrez de Pineda 1968: 132; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 146). Prior to my arrival in the field I took this central idea for granted. After a period in the community I was surprised to find a less clear, and more dynamic and contrasting situation than the clear-cut pattern initially imagined. To define Nomeque only as a patriarchal society would be unsatisfactory, leaving me with the uncomfortable sensation that my definition was incomplete, like a jigsaw with missing pieces. To do so would hide the articulation of politics with gender and the organisation of the family. It would also hide ideas and behaviour opposed to an authoritarian and hierarchical organisation of the family with its obvious influences on the structure of the whole society.

Two contrasting sets of values and practices, one dominant, which I call *patronazgo* and the other marginal and fragmented which I call *madrazgo*, compete in the same arena. *Patronazgo* and *madrazgo* are ideal models that can be used as resources by individuals in particular circumstances. Ideas of masculinity are an

important component of these sets but, as we shall see, both sets coincide in the same idea of maleness, the difference is that, in the *patronazgo* case, people are able to link masculinity with politics. According to this ideology, the only real man is the successful one, that is a man who is able to become a politically dominant person. The model is, therefore, not about gender as such. Rather, it is about the fulfilment of masculinity and about how ideas of masculinity create a political system that deals with violence. That is why in this chapter I am not going to discuss gender in its general sense or feminine gender representations. I will only mention them in order to clarify the cycle of violence that affects the community.

To explain accurately the role of *patronazgo*, the dominant set of values and practices and of its contesting and fragmented *alliance* of opposition, *madrazgo*, I will describe the family structure and the gender constructions observed in the community. I relate *patronazgo* with the traditional hierarchical social organisation of the *hacienda* system and especially with the figure of the "*patron*" (landowner). In this social organisation, women assume a subordinated role and men's individualism is stressed. However, in the household, instead of only finding an ideology of submission to the male's dominance.<sup>28</sup> I also found a contrasting set of values of equality and solidarity that I will call *madrazgo*.

*Madrazgo* is related, as I have already stated, with poverty, matrifocality, egalitarianism, and social solidarity. Female-headed households are prevalent among the poorest families of Nomeque, especially the ones who own none or very small lots of land (cf. Lewis, 1970: 72). In contrast, father-headed households often coincide with wealthier families, although I have found some cases in which matrifocality is

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. the stress on feminine spiritual superiority described with the term *marianismo* by Stevens (1973: 91).

present in families with a successful social climbing strategy. Nonetheless I believe that there is a relation between women-headed households, egalitarianism and poverty. Verena Stolcke notes, "*women do not often choose such households for everybody is aware that it is very difficult, at least materially, to get along without a male provider in the family*" (Stolcke, 1984: 292). Without completely disagreeing with her I will show special cases where matrifocality did appear to have been chosen. In Nomeque, I found more options and ambiguities than in the case described by Stockle, where, in her opinion, "*Both women and men are forced to live within an institution that is strained by deep conflicts and contradictions, and are unable to escape from it*" (Stolcke, 1984: 292).

Egalitarian ideals were present during the peasant struggle for the land and are still present in the Communist discourse of the guerrillas and in common ideas of social solidarity among peasants mainly, but not only, in the poorest strata of the population.

The Catholic Church promoted a stronger paternal involvement in the family unit with little success. However, as we will see in the chapter on religion, some Protestant churches have been more successful in involving the father in the family. Drug lords also attempt to both reconstruct hierarchy in an egalitarian setting and re-establish a patriarchal control over the household with the almost complete subordination of women. Meanwhile men in poor families have an impossible task: to become patriarchs with no access to wealth or political power. They are more aggressive because they have no access to the fulfilment of the masculinity ideal of the community.

In this chapter I also describe domestic violence in the community. I discuss the cultural perception of this violence and its role in the construction of male and

female identities. Finally I also analyse the relation between the family structure and internal violence and the role of drinking and aggression in male social relations.

### 1. *Patronazgo*

As I outlined in the Introduction to this work, it is possible to observe in the community analysed a dominant set of patriarchal values and practices that I will call "*patronazgo*". The concept derives from the word "*patrón*" which can be translated as landlord using the main Spanish meaning of the term. The term is not directly related to patron-client relations although patron-client relations were common in the relationship between peasants and landlords before the agrarian rebellion. These patron-client relations are also present, as we shall see, in the hierarchical relationships drug lords try to construct in the community. As we have already seen, Virginia Gutierrez de Pineda considers these aforementioned patriarchal values as essentially a Spanish introduction to Colombian society as a consequence of the Conquest. Not without any effort, and never in a homogeneous way, were these values assimilated by the society (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968: 132). However, Gutierrez de Pineda does not point out the relationship between patriarchy and politics. In this respect the conquest is not only about patriarchy but also about patriarchy and conquest.

*Patronazgo* is composed of a series of loosely related phenomena. The pattern is a combination of both ideology and behaviour. One of its main elements is a powerful image of male authority. This idea is related to the notion of a powerful man which is exercised in everyday practices. On the other hand, those practices make up a behavioural element: male members of the community try to enact principles of paternal authority. They try, with different levels of success, to become patriarchs and

to exercise a dominion over the household and the land. The different elements that comprise the set of values and practices I call *patronazgo* are:

- 1) The patriarchal values imposed by the Spanish conquest.
- 2) The myth of Zoratama that expresses the current interpretation and persistence of patriarchal values in the community, and its relation to a politics of conquest.
- 3) The *hacienda* system and the figure of the *patrón* or landowner.
- 4) The drug lords' values and practices related to the acquisition of land, horses, and women as a current re-interpretation of *hacienda* values.
- 5) The extreme ideal of masculinity that is put into practice by aggressive peasants who want to be respected by the community.

Values of social differentiation, individualism, hierarchy and male superiority are attached to the pattern. *Patronazgo* familial organisation is dominated by a central powerful male figure who exercises control over women, numerous offspring, and also over subordinated men (see also Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 146). The *patronazgo* pattern is assumed by those groups of the community which pursue social differentiation and hierarchy. As the Reichel-Dolmatoffs note: "*Quite often a man would support several concubines simultaneously or change concubines frequently*" (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 146).

For Nola Reinhardt, patriarchy is a "*systematic pattern of age- and gender-based inequalities in access to resources, to income, and to household decision-making power, with the male head of the household as the ultimate authority*" (Reinhardt, 1988: 8-9). This chapter demonstrates that the aforementioned systematic and unequal pattern is, at least in Nomeque, less systematic and unequal than we might expect. The complete imposition of paternal authority is also rarer than in Nola



Reinhardt's study of El Palmar in the Cauca Valley of Colombia. In fact, families who were successfully led by a prominent male figure could only be found among the richest people of Nomeque. But I found a patriarchal discourse and practice among almost all members of the community. This social difference registered in the field coincides with Oscar Lewis' opinion who, in his study on Mexico, shows that *machismo* is more widespread in the cities than in rural areas, among middle classes than among the poorest ones (see Lewis, 1977: 30). As it has been already discussed, the attitudes and values Lewis calls *machismo* are included in the performative aspects of the term *patronazgo*. As I have already asserted in the Introduction, the term *machismo* isolates elements of sex and gender. However, I am more interested in how sex and gender are connected to politics and power.

*Patronazgo's* representations and practices are imbedded in a patriarchal ideal. This ideal has its roots in the past, in the hierarchical organisation of society existent before the breakdown of the *hacienda* order during the period called "*La Violencia*". The "*patrón*" (male landowner), provides this society with an impressive ideal of paternity. This paternalistic figure was at the same time feared and protective, ruling his family as well as his farm, and almost in the same authoritarian way. The division of the land in small plots, and the end of the *hacienda* system did not eliminate the desire founded in every male peasant to become a big and respected landowner.

The Catholic Church considers a father-headed household as the ideal type all the families must try to emulate. In spite of Father Melquiades' efforts this is not the case for many families in Nomeque. Instead, as we shall see in the religious chapter, Protestant families have successfully incorporated a paternal figure in the family.

However the Protestant male head of a family is of a different kind from that envisaged by the Catholic Church (see chapter 9).

## **2. *Madrazgo*, a fragmented set of ideologies and practices**

*Madrazgo* is a kind of analytical shorthand for what is not at all a unitary system. It refers to a set of values of resistance, to a familial ideology, to a family organisation based on matrifocality, and to series of related practices. Even though we are dealing with a region where a successful egalitarian revolt took place, egalitarianism, for men, is fed by the humiliation of being powerless. It is for this reason that egalitarianism becomes totally compatible with the aggressive idea of masculinity contained in *patronazgo*. The inability to become a little *hacendado* means that men also give up being fathers. Frustrated poor men are in an impossible position and therefore they become peripheral and wanderers. The poor female-headed households are created because the man goes away and women are left in charge due to the instability and unreliability of the men. Men in matrifocal households are there as sons but not as dominant husbands. *Madrazgo* therefore becomes an alliance between a domain dominated by women and frustrated men. They come from the same background but women are carrying with them something different: a non-competitive egalitarian set of practices. In this place of coincidences Communist and Catholic values give ideological support to these more egalitarian strategies. These ideologies have intrinsic ideas of solidarity and fraternity that positively feed back with the community and are picked-up by it. This convergence also lends legitimacy to another type of violence: the guerrillas. Thus *madrazgo* rather than being a unitary system is an alliance of a series of marginal and loosely related phenomena. *Madrazgo* is composed of disorganised idioms of resistance and expresses values of solidarity and

egalitarianism among the poor. More than an ideology it can be defined as an *anti*-ideology of resistance. Matrifocality is particularly important among the poorest (Stolcke, 1984: 292; Valentine 1968: 138- 139). Lewis' classic study among poor families in Mexico City during the fifties and sixties acknowledges the incidence of poverty in the constitution of matrifocality (Lewis, 1977: 30). Oscar Lewis in his essay on the culture of poverty assesses that one of the major family traits of the culture of poverty is:

*“A trend toward female-or mother-centred families and consequently a much greater knowledge of maternal relatives, a strong predisposition to authoritarianism, lack of privacy, verbal emphasis upon family solidarity, which is only rarely achieved because of sibling rivalry, and competition for limited goods and material affection”* (Lewis, 1970: 72).

### 3. Matrifocality in Nomeque

Matrifocality is a common pattern in the town of Nomeque, a pattern also registered in several Colombian ethnographies (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 153; Whiteford, 1976: 38-39). I am not implying that matrifocality cannot coexist with *patronazgo* values but, in the town of Nomeque, it is related, through poverty to *madrazgo* values of resistance (I will extend this discussion in point 12.3 of this chapter).

One third of the families, especially the poorer ones, include brothers and sisters living with the mother. In a poor neighbourhood in the urban part of Nomeque I observed forty per cent of the households as female-headed in the whole town. In the countryside the proportion of female-headed households was notably reduced. In their study of Aritama the Reichel-Dolmatoffs found that thirty two per cent of the households were female-headed in the village (Reichel Dolmatoff, 1961: 153).

Michael Whiteford notes that female-headed households account for twelve per cent

of the households in Tulcan, an urban setting near Popayan composed of rural migrants (Whiteford, 1976: 72).

In some cases, brothers and sisters successfully maintain strong links among themselves. When brothers and sisters are mature and have their own offspring, a strong economic relationship often continues between them. In the particular cases in which social revenge is present, solidarity between brothers and sisters may be reinforced. The control mothers exercise over their offspring after they get married and leave the household is a key element to be taken into account in defining who has power in the family. Some men, as we will see in more detail, accept a limited paternal involvement in the household that also implies accepting their subordination to a powerful mother or wife.

After the agrarian reform in the region, there was an egalitarian process of distribution of the land. The process of division and sub-division of the land reproduced poor matrifocal or *de facto* matrifocal households with families owning small plots of land. The people of Nomeque participated in the agrarian rebellion with a common sense of social solidarity. Every peasant, woman or man, was an equal member of the same community. This collective feeling of social solidarity is still present in particular circumstances in spite of the divisions and conflicts inside the community. These conflicts are directly related to the division of the land in individual plots and the process of social differentiation that started immediately after the triumph of the agrarian reform. On the one hand values attached to egalitarian ideas and solidarity bonded the community together and produced the successful break down of a hierarchical society. On the other hand persisting values of individualism and competition among men tend to reconstruct hierarchy.

#### 4. The family in the analysed community

In Nomeque, there is a strong contrast between households with no presence of the father, generally placed at the bottom of the social structure, and households with a strong paternal figure, generally placed at the top of the social structure. Female-headed households where there is practically no presence of a paternal figure, account for approximately from forty percent in urban areas to a quarter of the cases in the rural areas of the community under study. In many other cases, fathers are absent most of the time. The cases where women are heads of household on a temporary basis for migration reasons are defined by Hetler and Youssef (1983: 216-43) as *de facto* female headed households. Many of the remaining households in the community analysed have a father who, although present, only exercises a distant authority. In fact the father, in those cases, has few concerns for his offspring. He is only obliged to provide his family with "*el mercado*," the normal shopping, the maintenance of the basic supplies that a household needs (see Reichel Dolmatoff, 1961: 186-187 and also Babb, 1989: 137-38). Still, fathers rarely do so completely or constantly. In this context, only mothers take effective care of the children.

Up to a certain point, the wealthier and especially the more formally educated a family is, the more concern a father has for his family. Religion also has something to say on this issue. Protestant families, as we shall see in detail in the chapter on religion, have a more involved paternal figure in their households (see also Brusco, 1995).

Peter Wade in his article "*Man the Hunter*" describes the gender identities and relations existing in the Atlantic and Pacific coastal areas of Colombia (Wade, 1994: 115-137). He finds in those regions two contrasting discourses of masculinity. On the one hand the "*hombre parrandero*" (the man who is constantly partying and drinking

with his friends), and, on the other hand, the responsible father and husband. In Wade's opinion a successful man has to balance these two contrasting ideals, successfully securing his wife's submission to his interest (see Moore, 1994:152). This submission does not exist without conflict.

In a very different cultural region I find a similar dichotomy among men's ideals and practices. However, as I have already assessed, I found that in Nomeque differences in men's strategies are related to wealth, formal education and religion.

There is a conflict between the "*hombre parrandero*" and his wife, but I find in this relationship not only a fight for the submission of the woman but also a remarkable assertion of independence and autonomy expressed by the woman. Conflicting male attitudes towards women in cases of female-headed households are overwhelmingly the rule in any cross-cultural analysis (Lewis, 1970: 72; Ortiz, 1973: 60; Reinhardt, 1988: 181; Chant, 1996: 228). For Sylvia Chant this conflict usually starts before the woman is abandoned (see Chant, 1996: 228). This extreme contrast is registered in almost every ethnography in which matrifocality is present and can be defined as a conflict existent inside the family. The conflict between absent fathers and husbands on the one hand, and wives and children on the other hand, made some authors talk about an intrinsic instability of the matrifocal pattern (Lewis, 1970: 72). Absent fathers are, nonetheless, fighting for power in the household. For example, Karina's father had abandoned his family, and went to live in a different town with another partner. He was obliged to leave after an argument in which his eldest son forced him to stop beating his wife. Karina's father often said to his daughter that he would assume responsibility for his family only if his wife would accept him again.

## 5. On partnership

*Unión libre* (free union), a non- officially legalised partnership, is very common in Nomeque. State, as well as church, wedding ceremonies are quite rare in the town. Couples live together *amañados* (bonded together) for long periods of time without getting officially married. Contrary to the opinion that sees free union as a direct consequence of urban life (see Whiteford, 1976: 70-72), *unión libre* is very frequent in the country- side around Nomeque.

In his already cited article, Peter Wade also describes the flexible marital arrangements he has found in the Atlantic and Pacific regions of Colombia (Wade, 1994: 115-137). Wade describes “*these flexible changeable arrangements*” as normal for these particular areas with a large number of people of African origin. He distinguishes these areas from the “*Andean interior where Catholic marriage is much more frequent, female-headed households more rare, monogamy is the norm, and men are more permanently attached to a single domestic unit based on the marital tie*” (Wade, 1994:116). There is, as Wade points out, a difference between coastal family structures and Andean ones. Virginia Gutierrez de Pineda made a geographical study of the percentage of *uniones libres* per region that, in general, coincided with what Wade said (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968: apendix). However, in this study made in 1951 it is also possible to see that in the Paramo of Sumapaz, *uniones libres* provide from twenty to forty per cent of the marriages and in some areas from forty to sixty percent. I perceive that in the village of Nomeque, a setting organised after a peasant rebellion, *unión libre* is more the norm than the exception and, as we have already seen, not all the families are composed of a father and mother. Wade points out that female- headed households and “*irresponsible fathers*” are considered “*abnormal*” by the dominant Mestizo majority. Instead, I will assess the importance

and social acceptance of such family patterns in this, already described, Andean Mestizo setting. On the other hand, Virginia Gutierrez de Pineda considers that the rejection of the Catholic priest is part of the Mestizo identity, differentiating it from the respectful attitudes of the white and the Indian (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1963: 340-343).

The frequency of Catholic marriage is, in this setting, almost as low as at the Pacific Coast. Father Melquiades, the Catholic Priest in charge of the parish, told me that, despite his efforts, religious weddings were very infrequent in the region. In fact, during 1995, he only celebrated fifteen weddings, as opposed to two hundred and fifty baptisms (Nomeque parish controls a whole region of some twelve thousand people). *"Most of the people prefer the "unión libre" and only after living together for a long time do they decide to marry."* During 1995, five of the fifteen weddings were the legalisation of long, non- officially legalised partnerships. The other ten weddings were celebrated between young couples. *"Sometimes a pregnant girl fifteen or sixteen years of age arrives at the parish with her twenty year old partner and they try to solve all their problems with a wedding. I tell them first to have the child and then if things go well between them, to think of a wedding."*

In Wade's view *"unión libre"* is not considered very desirable by women. A young girl told me that *unión libre* is basically unfavourable for them and beneficial for men. That is because a man can leave whenever he wants to. He can also leave the woman alone with the children; as a young woman told me, *"Now people prefer union libre but what I would like is to form a family, to marry, to have a home for my children."*

Being a legal wife has its advantages. While watching a *telenovela* (soap opera) in which a husband after eighteen years of marriage started a relationship with



another woman (the very attractive actress Amparo Grisales) Sandra Riquelme told me; *“The wife always has pre-eminence, whatever happens the husband will return to her.”* In this context, men's adulterous conduct is often tolerated if it does not jeopardise the marriage<sup>29</sup>. Being officially married by the church implies for the husband, at least theoretically, moral duties. The Reichel Dolmatoffs assessed in their study of Aritama that, *“In Catholic marriage local standards demand that each man support his legitimate wife, educate their children, and work sufficiently to maintain the family at least on a subsistence level”* (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 159). However, marriage also means for women subordination to their husbands. Claudia Garcia, a young girl in her early twenties did not want to get married or even be in *unión libre* with a man of Nomeque. She said that married life in the village was awful. She thinks *macho* husbands live outside the home getting drunk and going with other women, while they try to oblige their partners to stay at home and care for their children. Claudia had other plans; she was thinking of going to Bogotá to join the armed forces. *“Even if life in the Army is tough it is better than here where I have no future”*. In the opinion of the Reichel-Dolmatoffs, men have no advantage in getting married. They provide this assertion with an economic explanation:

*“On establishing themselves in a conjugal union they make a single investment by working sufficiently to buy or build a house and to plant a field. By selling a crop or part of a field they can raise enough capital for a second concubinage or free union, and by hired labour or the sale of livestock they might raise the necessary capital for still another. Catholic marriage would be a disadvantage under these circumstances”* (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 161).

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<sup>29</sup> I found a good description of the importance of *telenovelas* (soap operas) in Colombia in the work of Karina Bohman (1984: 320).

In Nomeque, most of the men and many of the women have two or more consecutive partners during their lives. It is not rare to hear that a powerful man has a partner and children and when his partner gets old he starts an extramarital relation with a younger woman. If he is rich and powerful enough he manages to keep both homes. If not, he leaves his old home and constructs a new one with his new lover. I found that sexual relations between a mature man and young inexperienced women are not only very common but also desired and, up to a certain point, socially accepted. Schoolgirls can go out with married men in their forties. A powerful mature man is always preferred over a young inexperienced man.

There are tensions in young men who think that it is very difficult to find a female partner. In fact, not all the social groups have the same chances of obtaining partners. It is quite difficult for a poor peasant of the highlands to find a good female partner. Manuel Morales an eighteen year old peasant who was going to town to "echar trago", (to drink), commented:

*"People marry here before they are twenty. But, it is very difficult to find a woman in this area. In my vereda not many women are available and in the village there are few and they are already the girlfriends of others. No one wants to embarrarse (to get covered by mud, to live in the Paramo) these days, they don't want to come to live in these places. Many women emigrate to Bogota and there they ruin their lives."*

On another occasion Emir Morales, a cousin of Manuel, watched a young and beautiful girl who was serving us beers in a bar and said: *"She is not for us the people of ruana and poncho, she is of another quality. It is good to know our own place."* Curiously enough, Emir was reproducing, in the gender battleground, a class distinction also present in nineteenth century politics. As Orlando Fals Borda points

out, *“There were two classes: los de ruana, that is, those wearing ruanas, and los de casaca, that is, those wearing coats”* (Fals Borda, 1955: 159). The scarcity of available women is an important focus of tension that pushes the competition among young, and not so young, men.

## 6. Kinship ties and endogamy

*“...colonos sought to create a social life by living in close proximity to other settler families. Once a nucleus of colonos established themselves in an especially fertile region, others usually joined them, settling nearby. They formed small groups of families related by blood, marriage, and godparenthood. In the more isolated areas up to ten or twenty families usually congregated in one place”* (Legrand, 1986:28)

I have already explained the role of the father and the mother in the family unit. In this context, relations among brothers and sisters, especially in female-headed-households, are very strong. However, brothers amongst themselves tend to have very ambiguous and, sometimes, tense relationships. If there are brothers from different fathers, or, in some cases, from different mothers, living in the same house, fights are frequent between them (Ortiz, 1973: 61). In any case siblings have to compete for scarce resources including affection (see Lewis, 1970: 72).

Brothers and sisters discuss inheritance, sometimes angrily. The existence of recognised sons and daughters from different relationships does not help an easy division of the property. The Rocas, two sons from the same mother but from different fathers, had to divide a small farm of only one and a half *fanegadas* (a little more than one hectare). The farm was bought by the mother and the father of the Rocas' youngest son. By law, the eldest son had sole rights over a fraction of it. The youngest son, instead, had rights over some three- quarters of it. At the time of the

fieldwork the Rocas brothers were in angry dispute over that small piece of land. However, at least during the fieldwork, the conflict did not evolve into a violent dispute. In another case we are going to see, in the chapter on the guerrillas, a dispute of two brothers over property erupt into a feud in which one of them makes use of the army and the other of the guerrillas' help in order to win the dispute.

We have seen that brothers and sisters have strong but sometimes ambiguous and also violent relations. There are still strong ties with first cousins from both sides, particularly in isolated areas. These relations are less strong than among brothers but still very important. Weddings between cousins are not uncommon, particularly in some isolated areas far away from the village (see Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 144). I observed some families, who lived close to each other, in which marriages between cousins were quite common. However, it was not possible to find any obvious rule of exchange related to these marriages. The families that practise these marriages can also practise exogamous weddings. Marriages between cousins are not condemned. However, in many of the families in which I found this pattern, the members tended to deny the existence of such couples. A female member of one of these families felt very offended when I put to her, in a very inadequate way, a question referring to these issues. In another case, however, I was told by a member of a family in which a successful couple of cousins existed (in *unión libre*) that marrying cousins was considered a good thing. The reason given was that the couple had known each other for a long time and so they would have a better understanding between them. When differences arose between the couple, their families could mediate easily between husband and wife. On the contrary, on another occasion I was told that marriages between cousins were not good. This is because cousins tended to treat their affines too informally, without any respect for their authority. As Mariano Morillo told me:

*“Marriages among cousins are not so good because the respect for the in-laws disappears. The house is almost the same one, there is too much confidence, and the respect is lost.”*

The Morillo family of *"la Cajita"*, living in a far away *"vereda"* up in the mountains, were among the families who had more than one marriage between cousins. The Morillo arrived in town every Saturday carrying their goods to sell in the market. They fought among themselves using a *"zurria"* (a kind of whip) on several occasions and sometimes more than one of them got injured. Pablo Lanza, the veterinary and a former mayor of the town, once asked a group of Morillos if they still continued giving *zurriadas* among them (*zurriadas* are beatings with a stick that has a whip and that is also used to push horses or donkeys). Manuel Morillo answered Pablo Lanza that their old custom of whipping each other was more common when they used to arrive in the village with their own mules. Since a dirt road was constructed some years ago, the Morillos only needed to use mules from their *vereda* to the beginning of the road.

Pablo Lanza told me that, on one occasion, he put eleven Morillo in jail because they were beating each other, *“They used to do it very often for the money or just for any reason but afterwards they were again friends.”* Once, when I was asking about these issues, Doña Luz, one of my informants, smiled and told me that they were only violent among themselves. The Morillos were always very close to each other and protected themselves from outsiders. This explanation was only partly true. The Morillos had, at the time of my fieldwork, bad relations with the Higuera. Manuel Morillo was a young man considered by most of the village to be a trouble-maker. He was shot and seriously injured by a Higuera who hurriedly left the region after the incident. The mother of Manuel Morillo thought he was almost dead when

they were carrying him to a hospital in the nearest town. Manuel survived and by the time I was in the field he was recovering in a hospital in Bogotá. Manuel's brother told me that Rogelio Higuera and Manuel had been close friends before the incident occurred when Rogelio got drunk and angry with the owner of a bar. He had taken his gun out and started to shoot and when Manuel tried to stop him he got shot.

Rogelio Higuera left the village along with some of his relatives. The Morillo family only received some 200.000 pesos as compensation (some two hundred and twenty dollars). Manuel's brother told me, "*Since then we have never seen him again (Rogelio) but el mundo es un talego*" (the world is a small bag). Endogamy in the analysed community appeared as a solution to isolation and also as a way for the family group to obtain local control over a particular territory. However, it was not common in the community and had never become a complex system of exchange.

### **7. The too discreet enchantment of *compadrazgo***

Several authors have extensively stressed the significance of *compadrazgo* in the construction of kinship networks of reciprocity in the Andean region. In the Colombian case the Reichel- Dolmatoffs, Stephen Gudeman, and Sutti Ortiz among others, have asserted its importance in the analysis of the *compadrazgo* institution (Reichel Dolmatoff, 1961: 171-172 Gudeman, 1972: 45-71, also Ortiz, 1973: 98-99).

The Reichel Dolmatoffs note that:

*"Ideally, a strong spiritual bond is established between the child (ahijado, ahijada), the ritual coparent (padrino, madrina), and the biological parents (compadre, comadre), a bond which is supposed to find its expression in spiritual guidance of the child, mutual assistance between all partners concerned, and a strict pattern of respect-behavior"* (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 171).

Contrary to their ethnography which registers the relevance of *compadrazgo* in rural and urban Colombia, I find a different situation in Nomeque. Godparenthood seems to be less important in practice than in the anthropological books. However, opinions are not unanimous, Michael Whiteford registers an observation closer to my own findings. In his study of rural migrants in Tulcan, an urban neighbourhood in Popayan, Colombia, he addresses the, “*striking dichotomy between real and ideal modes of compadrazgo behavior*” (Whiteford, 1976: 86). In reality, he notes, “*Tulcaneses cannot remember the first or last names of the baptismal godparents of their children*” (Whiteford, 1976: 86-87). *Compadrazgo* is considered important by Tulcaneses but, in practice, its relevance is minimised.

In Nomeque, *compadrazgo* is not very relevant as there are few consequences deriving from this type of bond. Nor did I find that the ideological importance of the institution was particularly stressed. In some cases that I am going to analyse in full detail, families who were united by *compadrazgo* ties became enemies and fought each other. In others, the people of Nomeque, as in the Whiteford ethnography, hardly managed to remember the names of their *compadres* (1976: 86-87). On only one occasion, when the *pater familiae* died leaving debts, a wife, and three little children, did the *compadres* help the family during the funeral. Then they invited the children to their house a couple of times expressing their concern for them. After a couple of months their relationship with the orphans returned to the former distance.

## **8. Male outside, female inside**

Another element that influences the way the family is constructed is the migration of men. It defines men as *wanderers* (Reinhardt, 1988: 121; Chant, 1996: 15-17). This wandering nature is in sharp contrast with the sedentary lifestyle of a mother in

charge of a household. Men perceive themselves as wanderers, who have to move from one place to another and from one sexual relation to another.

Men talked about the action of "*echar raíces*" (to make roots) meaning the action of settling down and organising a home with a woman (see also Wade, 1994: 118). A man lives outside in the field or moves constantly in search of work or fortune. A woman, on the other hand, from the moment her first child is born, tries to construct a home and to settle down. When a woman does move, it is often to follow a man.

The household affairs are always in female hands. Women do not allow men to cook or even to get into the kitchen or to do any domestic work in the house. In the household women feel comfortable and secure. For Kristina Bohman, this division is clear-cut; the woman belongs to *la casa* (the house), the man to *la calle* (the street) (Bohman, 1984: 138). It is a division that has been described in several Andean ethnographies. Florence Babb, in her book on Peruvian market women, "*Between field and cooking pot*" says, "*While a man may be the jefe (boss) in the fields, a woman is the jefe in the kitchen*" (Babb, 1989: 139).

Male peasants usually spend the week working on their small farms. On Saturday they go to the village for the market day. They will probably stay in the village until Sunday drinking with their friends and waiting until their wives and children get out of mass. When they are completely drunk their wives would help them return home. This action is considered an expected duty for wives (Harvey, 1994: 85). In some cases, the wife lives in the village and attends a small shop at the entrance of the house. The central role of the mother is particularly present among these particular families who are not wealthy enough to save money but manage to live in the village fulfilling all their elementary needs.



## **9. Mothers and sons and daughters in law**

In Nomeque it was possible to see the important status acquired by grandmothers. This prestige is similar to the one described by Virginia Gutierrez de Pineda in her study of matrifocal grandmothers in what she called the Complejo Fluvio-Minero, a different cultural area than the Andean one (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968:245-248). As she also pointed out, and which I found valid for Nomeque, a woman in her forties who had already finished the process of biological reproduction and was in charge of the administration of her household, acquired a remarkable power. This power often contrasted with the will of the in-laws (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968: 248). There is, in these cases, a strong conflict between sons and mothers-in-law usually expressed in veiled tensions, but sometimes in arguments and even physical aggression; in this relationship it is possible to see people with different ideals of marriage pursuing contrasting goals and fighting for the control of the household.

German Villalba, a teacher at the Escuela Normal of Nomeque was divorced from his wife. In fact, his marriage was a failure from the very beginning and he had a very bad relationship with his mother-in-law. German had married a woman from a wealthier family. With the excuse that she provided them with economic support, his mother-in-law was constantly intervening in the couple's married life. This fact caused many tensions within the marriage. His wife, also a teacher, spent most of her free time at her mother's. Apparently advised by her mother, German's wife became more and more distant from him. She finally abandoned him and started a relation with another man, a teacher from the school.

German's reputation was severely damaged. He started to drink a lot and he had a terrible car accident in which he almost died. As a consequence of the accident,

he seriously damaged his vocal chords. He lost his normal voice and developed what people in the village considered a female one. In his own interpretation, as in other versions of his story, I found this connection between German's marital failure, his new status as a cuckold and a loss of virility related with the immediacy of the car accident. He attempted suicide jumping from a big bridge over the Magdalena river. A boat that was miraculously passing by rescued the nearly drowned German. At that moment, he said, he recovered his male voice.

In his late forties, he started a relationship with one of his secondary school students, a girl of only seventeen. By this time his reputation was already damaged. Marrying a very young girl, German would probably seek to exercise control over his relationship. I do not know how he was planning to control his relationship with his future mother-in-law, although being richer and older was in his favour. However, for most of the people in the village this wedding would be a mistake. Many people commented when they heard that the couple was planning a wedding. "*Le va a poder dar solo consejos y despues no los va ni siquiera a escuchar*" (He can only give her advice and then she will not even listen to it). "*Casarse con una sardina, con una mujer joven, solo sirve para tener cuernos*" (to marry a *sardine*, a very young girl, is only useful to get cuckolded). They also added that the girl was of very humble origin and that economic interest was probably her only reason for marrying him.

In another example, that is going to be discussed in more detail later in the chapter dealing with funerals, I observed such a strong conflict between daughter and mother-in-law that the dispute for power ended with the suicide of the unhappy wife. Doña Mariana Reina was constantly having rows with her husband. Her mother-in-law was, in my informants' opinion (mostly women), always provoking conflict between the couple. She was a teacher and earned her own money. They were all

very surprised when she committed suicide.

## 10. The conflict inside

It was possible to observe constant conflict in the family unit. Husbands were seen to be in an aggressive dispute against their wives, mothers-in-law and even against their own offspring in order to gain power.

Karina's family is a good example of the described pattern of women-headed households in conflict with absent fathers. Karina, a fourteen-year old teenager, is the eldest of three children. Her father left home after an argument in which he severely beat his wife. Karina told me, *"My father usually beat my mother. Once I tried to separate them and my father threw me down the stairs. Since then I have an injured leg and I can't walk properly."* Karina's elder brother defended his mother and fought physically with his father. The elder sons usually opposed their fathers expressing their solidarity to their mothers while competing for the male's role in the household. Nola Reinhardt describes the conflicting relations she found between the elder brother and his father or step- father. For her this conflict also explains men's migration to the cities:

*One of the motivations for the nineteenth-century migration of young males in this region was the push stemming from the patriarchal relations of the household of origin. These pressures may be strongest in the case of the oldest male son, and, not surprisingly, in both households the oldest son became a wanderer (as well as an early drinker) (Reinhardt, 1988: 121).*

Afterwards, the children cajoled their mother not to let their father into the house again. She did not want to separate from him because of their children, but finally she decided to do it. Karina's father moved to another town where he started a new relationship with a young woman who gave him another son. Afterwards he also left

that woman and started another relationship: *"I know that he has another china (woman) now."* Karina's father does not consider it his duty to provide his family with any money. He argued that he was forced to go by Karina's mother and so it was her fault. He returned once and said that he would only pay if they would accept him again in his home.

Karina's mother has a sporadic job. Her children work for very little money during the summer holidays. Karina worked in a shop for a month, eight hours a day, earning the equivalent of approximately twenty pounds. Although, looking at the shop earnings, the owners would not have been able to pay her more. Apparently Karina's behaviour tended to reproduce the same pattern. Advised by her best friend, Karina was going out with men in their late thirties. Most of them were taxi and coach drivers who, in most of the cases, already had a wife and children.

Claudia Garcia's family is very poor because, she said to me, her father was a drunkard. He died four years ago. In Claudia's opinion, her father never did anything to make the position of the family any better. *"He had the chance"* she told me, *"several times but he just did not want to"*.

## **11. Aggression and the social construction of the male**

As Henrietta Moore points out *"discourses about sexuality and gender construct women and men as different sorts of persons"* (Moore, 1994:138). However, *"the interesting fact about such constructions is that they have only the most tangential relation to the behaviours, qualities, attributes and self- images of individual women and men"* (Moore, 1994:138). Masculinity is a complex process of self-construction in relation to others and involves at the same time confronting cultural representations, not always homogeneous, of what a male must be (see Wade, 1994:

115). Although, even if violence and aggression are only elements in this complex process of male self- construction, we can see that in the village of Nomeque aggression and violence are central to the constitution of masculinity.

I did not perceive the retention of honour as a central element in the social construction of a man. Virginia Gutierrez de Pineda asserts that the sexual conduct of a woman could be a matter of dishonour only when that woman has a middle or upper social status where values like virginity, marriage, fidelity, are determinant elements of her sexual conduct (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968: 164). Neither is this the case for Nomeque, nor do men pursue honour related with female sexuality.

Since birth, babies are dressed in different colours (pink for girls, light blue for boys). Dresses and ornaments are also used to identify the sex of a baby. When a child is able to speak, differences between sexes in the socialisation process are increased. Marcos, a four- year old child who lived very close to my place, was famous in the neighbourhood for his uncontrolled behaviour. He was constantly disappearing from his mother's control and entering different shops asking for sweets, sometimes taking them without permission. He threw stones at birds and dogs and played dangerously with fireworks during Christmas time. The adults, the victims of his actions, smiled and commented with pleasure on his predatory attitudes. In their opinion he was a young male growing, expressing his might and energy. Marcos' sisters, on the other hand, had quiet demeanours and helped their mother with her tasks. The children were six, nine and twelve years old, respectively. Marcos's behaviour was encouraged especially by his male relatives. By contrast, nobody would consider the same behaviour for his sisters funny or proper.

One of my informants was very proud to tell me that, when his son was only thirteen years old and in the first year of high- school, two girls fought for him in the

school. The director of the school called him and said: "*Arquímedes, what are we going to do when you arrive to the fifth year, you are already the gallinazo (cock) of the school.*" Arquímedes answered, "*Bueno, si me buscan, me toca quererlas*" (Well, if they search me out I am obliged to love them). The director, in my informant's tale, laughed at his answer and did not punish him for his behaviour, for him, it was the girls fighting, anyway.

Males are taught to do hard work outside in the fields. Women instead worked in the household, cooking and cleaning. A man will never cook in the kitchen if there is a woman who can do it for him. Furthermore, women will not allow men to do anything related to the kitchen. Males only prepare barbecues, outside, in a party where solidarity among friends is stressed.

### **11. 1 On men, drinking, solidarity, competition and aggression**

Men work in the field and go outside the home to drink. Drinking alcohol is the main male social act in Nomeque. At weekends, especially on Saturdays it is very common to see a woman with her children trying to help their completely drunk partner and father home. Peasants drink together enormous amounts of beer and "*aguardiente*", a type of sugar cane liquor flavoured with anis. Men often spend the money they earn in the fields out drinking. They go out with friends and they sit in a group. If one member of the group offers a round of *aguardiente* or beer the others feel it their duty to offer more rounds. Every time someone else appeared he would be offered one round and he would also offer one. In this way solidarity is reinforced but millions of neurones are lost. I could hardly walk home after one of these drinking sessions. Unfortunately, I could not write proper field notes until the next morning when I had forgotten half of the information.

Claudia Garcia's brother is a *"very hard worker when he is not drunk."* He could drink for four continuous days if he had worked hard and had enough money to do it. When he had the money, he called his friends and they all drank together.

Claudia is always scared when her brother is not at home and someone knocks at the door, because it always means bad news for her and she thinks one day they are going to tell her he is dead. Once he was severely injured in the neck with a machete by a jealous husband who discovered him with his wife. In another case he was thrown out of a moving bus because people wanted to get rid of him. He was drunk and started to insult everybody. He banged his head on the pavement and was nearly killed.

Claudia said her brother is peaceful because he does not use guns *"He only carries a knife."* He works in the market carrying potato sacks. When he is not drunk, he is very shy. Claudia is sure that her brother is not going to marry. *"Who would like to marry a drunken man?"* She thinks she has done a lot for him but everything was useless. Once Claudia made him join Alcoholics Anonymous but after the first meeting he went to a bar and started to drink. On another occasion he told her that he had converted to Evangelism and was not going to drink any more, but within a week he was drunk again.

Nelly is a young mother of 21. She works in a small shop earning very little money. She has a 6-year old daughter from Roberto. Roberto was working for the Communists at the local council. Nelly complained a lot because the mayor and his staff were heavy drinkers and every day they got drunk after or during their duties

After the last elections that took place six months before my arrival, the Communists had been replaced by the Liberals. Roberto was sacked and started working as a coach driver. Probably because of his problems, he increased his consumption of alcohol. Once, he had been drinking continuously for three days. On

that occasion, Nelly was very angry and desperately needed some money to buy her daughter some clothes for school. Husbands do not need to discuss with their partners what they are going to do with the money they have earned. The same can happen with wives but usually they have less money in their pockets (see also Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 191). Finally, Nelly solved her financial problems, by obtaining some money in advance from the shop where she was working<sup>30</sup>.

Another source of conflict between Nelly and Roberto were his continuous extramarital adventures. Nelly knew that one girl from the *Alcaldía* (municipality) was Roberto's lover. His lover was of a better position and was not interested in having a stable relationship with him, Nelly referred to her as *esa desvergonzada* (that woman of no shame). Roberto and his lover usually leave the municipality together and then he will return very late home. On these occasions Roberto beat Nelly if she expressed her anger to him.

Don Demóstenes Riquelme, a patriarchal figure in his sixties told me that when he was very young:

*"Le daba mucho al trago (he loved to drink a lot). "From here until the mountains I used to go with a cousin stopping in any shop for a drink. Once we were so drunk that we decided to go fishing at midnight. I fell down into the river and got frozen, but then we returned to the river and we continued drinking until the morning. That is the reason why I can't walk properly with my right leg. Once someone gave me brandy and I arrived home and I was very aggressive, I wanted to tirar las paredes (to destroy the walls). But, on that occasion, it was not my fault, it was the brandy".*

Olivia Harris describes a comparable situation in Northern Potosí, Bolivia, "I was drunk. I don't know what got into me" (Harris, 1994: 52). Don Demostenes

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<sup>30</sup> A wife often borrows money or food, or buys dresses, without the knowledge of her husband, and frequently a woman will also sell dresses or household utensils behind the husband's back (Reichel



Riquelme was telling this story looking at his wife who agreed with a sad gesture. It was obvious that in that case she had been the object of physical violence. A man completely drunk, as it is suggested in this story, indulges in physical violence.

Domestic violence, as it has been acknowledged in many Andean ethnographies, is often induced by the consumption of alcohol (see Harvey, 1994: 67, also Babb, 1989: 138). In fact, we shall see along this work how the consumption of alcohol is also present in most of the violence committed outside the household. As Olivia Harris pointed out, *"All violence is unleashed in the liminal state of drunkenness, when everyday life is suspended and normal inhibitions are lowered"* (Harris, 1994:49).

## 11. 2 A powerful man

The male has to be powerful and a mature rich peasant is seen as powerful. A poor young male is normally extremely aggressive because he has to show his might to be considered powerful by the community.

Wilson is the youngest son of a conflict- ridden family where an absent father is in constant violent conflict with his wife. Wilson has often been protected by his mother from the constant beatings that most of his other eight brothers received. The family is very poor and they are renting a small wooden house in the outskirts of the village where they live together in two rooms. Wilson is a complex personality who can be extremely violent with his mates especially when he feels provoked and needs to express that he is not going to stop at any provocation. Otherwise he is calm and nice.

In a community where power relations are unstable and fluid, violence may be used to construct the self. Being aggressive a young man is feared and later on, may

also gain respect. On the other hand young women prefer mature and powerful men instead of immature, weak, and younger men. A powerful man is not controlled by anyone, and effectively controls his wife and offspring.

### 11. 3 An alternative maleness

The aggressive ideal of maleness we have already seen is not the only possible male social behaviour seen in the community. However, this assertion does not mean that an alternative form of social behaviour is considered equal to the hegemonic one. As

Moore points out:

*"It would be a mistake, however, to represent the process of taking up a subject position as one of simple choice. For one thing, the historical contextualization of discourses means that not all subject positions are equal: some positions carry much more social reward than others, and some are negatively sanctioned"* (Moore, 1994,150).

Male homosexual behaviour has in the community, as we will see, a less negative perception than the one we would expect from a society usually stigmatised as "macho". In some cases, homosexual behaviour can be a successful strategy to get out of the violent circle of male competition.

I was surprised to find that, in two different cases, in two different families, famous and aggressive elder brothers had admitted to having homosexual younger brothers. The youngest brother of Danilo Hurtado, a famous killer, was homosexual. The youngest brother of Mariano Rodriguez, another assassin, was also homosexual. Was homosexuality the other side of the coin of male behaviour?

The community associated homosexuals with females and no aggressive behaviour was expected from them. The aggressive males did not harass the

homosexuals and, except for some jokes in which they express their "superiority" and disdain, they seemed not to care about their sexual behaviour.

Being the brothers of famous murderers they were probably well protected and many men would probably prefer to avoid problems with them. In fact, other males did not consider the homosexuals "real" men and made constant jokes about them, but nonetheless, nobody expressed explicit anger or hate towards them. In this context, homosexuality appears as a strategy for constructing a non- aggressive male identity.

The Sacristan, in a more subtle and hidden way, was homosexual as was a young man who collaborated with him in the parish. In these cases it is possible to think that the Church represents a non-violent neutral ground. Being homosexual is also a way of staying out of the aggressive competition for power. As Henrietta

Moore notes:

*“While non-dominant discourses certainly provide subject positions and modes of subjectivity which might be individually satisfying and which might challenge or resist dominant modes, those individuals who do challenge or resist the dominant discourses on gender and gender identity frequently find that this is at expense of such things as social power, social approval. And even material benefits” (Moore, 1994:150).*

However, being the brother of a murderer, to practise an extreme ideal of maleness is also at the expense of your own security. The two young brothers of the murderers already had one person in their respective families who was fighting aggressively to fulfil the ideal of masculinity. Being as aggressive as their brothers would be very dangerous and difficult with the chance of being the object of revenge. They probably saw how difficult and risky that task was.

## 12. The social construction of the woman

Aggression is not a relevant aspect in the cultural construction of femininity in Nomeque. When women told me about their lives, I perceived in their ideas about femininity two main and contrasting aspects: the rearing of children and the organisation of domestic economy on the one hand and the stress on beauty and seduction for the attraction of male sexual partners on the other. The first one can be related to rationality and security, the latter with instinct and danger.

Young women are concerned with the organisation and administration of the household. They are openly worried about how a hypothetical or real partner will work, how much money he will earn, how much of that money will enter the household, how much security for her and her children he will assure.

A mature woman, as we have seen, is in charge of the economy of the house and is also responsible for the rearing of the children. She, in fact, administrates scarce resources in difficult circumstances. Practically every household has a courtyard where some hens and turkey are grown. Sometimes, pigs and often one cow that gives milk and has to be moved to a near pasture, are also reared. Some fruit trees with "*moras*" (blackberries) or "*brevas*" (figs) yield harvest several times a year. Women are in charge of these resources, of the money they have obtained by their own labour, and of the money their partners provide them with. A woman who is a good manager of the household resources is not only very much appreciated and respected but a very independent character.

Girls have more formal education than boys, peasant families invest more money in girls education than in that of boys. Helping their daughters to become school- teachers is a task for many parents who see in this profession a respectable reinforcement of the household economy and of maternal feelings. This difference in

formal education has a sad consequence for many peasants. Young women often prefer more educated men and disdain living in the highlands in a poor house without electricity or comfort. They will try to find a partner who can maintain a house in the village. The scarcity of available women in the community reinforces the feelings of resentment and aggression of young and poor peasants.

In Nomeque girls stay in the school system for much longer than boys. This phenomenon has many explanations. Boys seem to be more useful to the household economy than girls. For example, peasant boys start to work in the fields at the age of nine or ten. They are especially required to look after cattle. As boys are culturally prepared to do tough and rough work they often have problems with scholarly tasks (see Krohn-Hansen, 1990: 90-91). On the other hand, girls are taught to obey and use their hands to perform manual tasks skilfully. They can accept school discipline more easily. As Don Maximino Morillo pointed out once: *"With the people that are not made for study, that don't like to study, it is better not to pay for their studies. Let them finish the fifth year and send them to the field to work."* We have already seen that many uneducated male peasants have enormous difficulties in finding a wife. The better education of the women produces changes in gender roles. However, these changes do not occur without some tension.

## 12. 1 Domestic Violence

*"Dijiste que no te quiero porque no te he dado nada, acordate la paliza que te di esta madrugada"* (You said I did not love you because I did not give you anything, remember the beating I gave you this morning) *Popular Copla*.

Tensions in the domestic sphere often end in violence. Women and children are constant objects of domestic violence. However, these actions are not perceived as

violent by the community. They are the internal affairs of any couple or family. I quite often perceived the consequences of a row in the faces of the women of Nomeque. Doña Romualda, a poor woman who worked selling "*lechona*" (fried pork) was constantly beaten by her husband and I saw marks on her face several times.

These conflicts and, especially, the aggressive way used to solve them, are not exclusive to the lower classes. One member of the local council, Gladys Fernandez, is married to a wealthy merchant called Morales. During the fieldwork, her husband was having an affair with another woman. One night, when he returned very late and very drunk to their home, they had a terrible fight. Because he was drunk, she did not let him in. Her husband got terribly angry and threatened her with death and also threatened to kill himself and their daughter if he was not allowed to enter the house. When her husband managed to get in, she decided to escape with her daughter and they asked the priest for refuge at the parish house. At two o'clock in the morning the priest took them by car to Sutagao where her mother lived.

Males returning home completely drunk, in some cases after two or three days of constant drinking, generate the conflicts that often end with the beating of the woman (Wartenberg, 1992: 415; Harvey, 1994: 83-85). Women protest against this behaviour but in most of the cases they fight to recover their beloved from the arms of other women and try to forget the beatings. In many cases women complained of being beaten by their partners when their partners are seeing another woman (see also Bohman, 1984: 232-233; Wade, 1994: 132; Wartenberg, 1992: 415). I found acceptance and resignation in women regarding the beatings caused by their husbands, they are along with their children the victims of domestic violence (see Olivia Harris, 1994: 60). For Wade the beating of a wife is induced by the man's lack of control over his lover that in turn is transformed into anger and aggression against

his controlled partner (Wade, 1994: 132).

Norma, a woman in her late thirties, discovered by chance who her husband's lover was. That very day Norma knocked on her door. She insulted her and threatened her with death. They fought physically and had to be separated by some neighbours. Her husband punished her severely for that action (see Bohman, 1984: 233).

The judge of Nomeque who has jurisdiction over aggressions and petty crime, told me that many women had come to her office to talk to her about the beatings they had to put up with. But practically none of them decided to denounce their husbands.

Young girls and boys were often the object of their parents' violence. Once, I visited a very poor household with a veterinary to cure a pig. While we were there she showed me a girl with a burned arm, "*They probably punished her*", the vet told me.

Don Fermín Chaves was a shopkeeper who, many years ago, had been a member of the guerrillas and a friend of Juan de la Cruz Varela, the famous peasant leader. Once we found him very sad and Presentación Choachi asked him what the problem was. He answered that he felt guilty because he had severely beaten one of his daughters. He beat her with his belt several times.

Presentación told me afterwards that Don Chaves severely beat his sons and daughters when they did wrong things, but he loved them very much. "*He is very proud of walking around the village with his daughters by his side.*"

## 12. 2 Women in power

Women can become powerful and overcome the difficulties posed by male patriarchal

ideas. A successful woman in the community is the one who exercises control over her husband, her offspring, and her sons and daughter in law. Doña Luz is happily married, an unusual case in the village, and is always considered as having more power than her very calm husband. She is in charge of a butcher's shop, a task generally reserved for males.

Doña Luz once told me the following story:

*"It is considered bad luck if a cock sings in the afternoon, we think that a person of the family can die if such a thing happens. I was with my grandparents when I saw a cock preparing to sing in the courtyard. I thought the cock would sing and one of my grandparents would die. I took a big log I had in the kitchen and I threw it at the cock. I killed him. When my husband arrived, he saw me plucking the cock. He asked me -why did you kill the cock?- And I answered that I killed the cock because he was going to sing. He did not believe me so I said that, anyway, in this house no cock is allowed to sing only the hen".*

### **12. 3 The Choachi family, matrifocality and poverty**

The relation between matrifocality and poverty has been noted by several authors (Lewis, 1977:30; Valentine 1968: 138-139, Stolcke, 1984: 292). Their findings have often been criticised by authors who considered that matrifocality was under-valued in relation to a Christian- Western ideal of a family composed of a mother and a father (Hewit and Leach, 1993: 25). On the other hand, they denied that poverty was the consequence of matrifocality and stated that discrimination and marginalisation were often the causes of poverty (see Chant, 1996: 16- 17). These arguments are not central to the point I want to make. I am not stating that matrifocality is the cause of poverty only that in the community most of the matrifocal households are poor. On the other hand, this relationship between matrifocality and poverty is not as direct as it seems. A case study will show that a general pattern that connects matrifocality



with poverty could have its exceptions. Matrilocality can also become a strategy for social climbing.

The Choachi are seven sisters who are now living in Sutagao and in Bogotá. Their male brother is the eldest and is a silent peasant who drives the school bus. The sisters do not have any social relations with him or his family. One of the Choachi sisters, Rebecca, was married although now she is separated from her husband. She has two children, a boy and a girl. The boy is an engineer and is quite successful in his profession. Her daughter started university recently. Another sister, Presentacion, never married but has a daughter who is finishing high school.

The three children are raised by the seven sisters who take care of them. Until recently, most of the Choachi, except the married sister, have been living together in the same household. The two children of the married sister have always been there visiting or having lunch daily.

Many people commented to me about why it is that almost none of the Choachi sisters ever married. *"It is because they were always too proud of themselves, trying to look for the best possible candidates, none of the people of Nomeque was good enough for them and the ones they wanted were probably beyond them"*. By not getting married the Choachi sisters avoided confronting their social expectations with their social reality. Instead, in the effort they give to educate their children they manage to place them as actual or future professionals in an urban setting. Their female dominant household (see Chant, 1996:24) successfully managed to accumulate enough wealth to be considered middle class. One of the sisters works in a bank in the town and has a nice new car. Another one worked as a teacher of music in the town and also in Bogotá and also has a car. Another sister works as a teacher in the town. Together they managed to live in a very nice and small but rather

comfortable house.

### 13. Summary

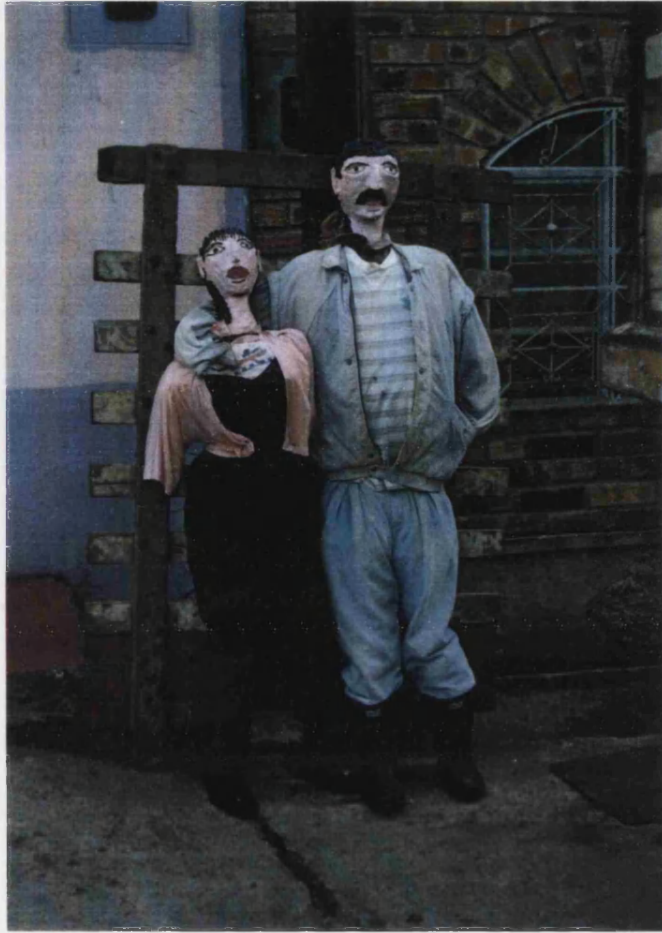
In Nomeque there is a dominant set of values and practices called *patronazgo* that is resisted by an alliance of loosely related phenomena called *madrazgo*. Assertive masculinity is stressed in people's ideology. However, the male ideal of *patronazgo* is difficult, in some cases impossible, for the man of Nomeque to realise. Families in the poorest strata of local society are centred around the mother. A successful woman manages to exercise effective control over her husband, daughters, sons, and sons in law. In the wealthier or more formally educated families paternal involvement in the household is more frequent. A successful man has to balance his loyalty to his network of male friends outside the household with his control over his family (Wade, 1994: 130). A non-successful man tends to abandon his paternal responsibilities. Drinking alcohol with friends and living outside are important elements of men's life that create and maintain links of solidarity among them. On the other hand, aggression and competition are present as central elements of the social construction of masculinity. Open homosexuality offers a way out of the aggressive contest for power. Mother-in-laws and son-in-laws have tense relationships in which power is often discussed aggressively. Sons often have violent disputes with their fathers in defence of their mothers.

Conflicts between husbands and wives often include physical aggression.

Women and their offspring are objects of domestic violence, although domestic beating is not thought of as violence by the community. In the matrifocal household there is a strong conflict between the elder brother and his father or step-father (Lewis, 1970: 72; Reinhardt, 1988: 121). In spite of the Catholic Church's effort,

paternal involvement in the household is low and "*Unión libre*" (non-legalised partnership) is the most common basis for the relationship between couples.





## Chapter four: Feuds, internal violence and social order in the town of Nomeque

### Introduction

In this chapter I describe the particular ways in which internal violence is practised and discuss the influence of ideas of masculinity and the family structure of the community in the reproduction of violence. The community of Nomeque is seriously affected by violent internal conflicts and differences between families quite often end up in blood feuds. I will describe blood feuds in relation to other forms of violence that are also present in the town of Nomeque. I will explore in particular the connection between inter-familial conflicts and local politics (see Uribe, 1990:1-9; Gonzalez, 1993: 43) and question how internal violence is connected with national politics.

I am also interested in the diverse ways violence is manipulated by the people of Nomeque. Is violence used as a means to solve internal conflicts related to violence used to create a self? How do poor and frustrated men use violence in order to become valued by the community? This study compares and relates the social aspects of violence, with all their implied family obligations and duties, to the individual aspect of violence and the way individual violent behaviour can be used to construct personality. It analyses the original characteristics of the people involved in these conflicts; in particular, the composition of their families, their social status, and their participation in the social life of the community.

As Peter Wade points out, male violence outside the home has a different feature to domestic violence.

*“Violence directed against men within the male circle of solidarity would have a very different and much more dangerous character, implying radical rupture and the possibility of retort and escalation”* (Wade, 1994: 133).

In a region where power is disputed by the army, the guerrillas, and the drug lords, family groups are involved in blood feuds. These families have problems with their neighbours and prefer not to turn to the legal system of the national state for justice, but instead they use private violence to "solve" their internal conflicts or to establish a social relation of hatred with their enemies (cf. Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961:195). However, in some particular cases, the state is used by the families not to pursue justice but as another weapon against the adversary family (see also Waller, 1988: 4). In any case the national state is almost totally ineffective and it is not able to stop, to suspend, or to interfere in these conflicts.

Although it is considered inappropriate to speak of vengeance killing, feuds, raids, and warfare as four clearly separate categories of violence since they are often linked (Black-Michaud, 1980: 19-20) I, nonetheless, define the specific violent relations which are the subject of this chapter, as feuds. In doing so I take into account Black-Michaud's three critical factors that distinguish a feud from other types of violence. These factors are, "1) *the size and structure of the units involved*; 2) *the possibility of achieving (temporary) reconciliation*; 3) *the continuation of serial killings or acts of outrage long after the principals are dead*" (Black-Michaud, 1980: 17).

I am limiting the discussion of the nature of feud to the identification of the three referred critical factors in this ethnography. In this chapter, we shall look at the limited size of the familial units involved in the feuds; the attempts at temporary reconciliation, especially in the cases where the guerrillas oblige enemy families to



reconcile, which in fact only means that revenge will be postponed; and the continuation of the killings for more than one generation. I suggest that feuds are interminable (Black-Michaud 1975: 80), and that every agreement between the hostile parties only implies a delay in the search for revenge (Hobsbawm, 1983: 270).

The extended family is the minimal group that expresses social solidarity and actively participates in the retaliation "*for an injury inflicted upon one of its members*" (Black-Michaud, 1980: 41. cf. Fals Borda, 1955: 209). Nonetheless, some feuds present conflicts within the family and the consequences may include schisms and a division of the family unit. Surprisingly, the families involved in feuds live their everyday life in the village, working and walking around, without being questioned or looked for by any authority.

As I have already explained, there is no police force in Nomeque. The police station had been destroyed several times by the guerrillas and the authorities finally decided not to reconstruct the station again. This decision, warmly welcomed by the inhabitants of Nomeque who had suffered much from the previous incidents, reinforced the ineffectiveness of the state legal system.

### **1. Feuds and family structure**

The Castros, the Ramirez, the Caamaños, the Herreros, the Gimenez, the Porrua are all families involved in long term feuds and are all made up of numerous brothers. In fact only a family with many males can continue a feud for a reasonable period.

These are extremely conflict-prone families. They are families which are between the patriarchal type and the matrifocal one. They can be defined as families where patriarchy is in decomposition. It was possible to observe in them conflicts between the absent father and the sons, particularly the eldest son (see Reichel-



Dolmatoff, 1961: 100). These conflicts resulted in violence and aggression between father and son that could eventually end with parricide. Having a conflict with another family, the conflict-ridden family projects the inside conflict outwards. With the act of revenge, family solidarity is reinforced (see Durkheim, 1993: 262).

In Karina's case, already discussed in the last chapter, the eldest son protected his mother from his father's aggression and sent his father out of the house (see Reinhardt, 1988: 121). In fact his father continues visiting Karina, his daughter, and uses her as a mediator. However, he has no relations with his sons.

Two cases of patricide were observed in the village. Both were related to the Porrúa family. In the first case, Marcos Porrúa, the husband of a woman of the Gimenez family, was killed in the Sabana by one of his sons after a dispute about land and inheritance.

In the second case another Porrúa was killed in a confuse episode. He was drinking with two sons and his closest friend when the lights were turned off and some gun-shots were heard. His friend was accused of murder and spent some time in jail. Some informants considered that Porrúa had been killed by his sons and not by his best friend. In both cases it is clear that the community is aware that tensions between father and sons can explode violently.

Referring to the Porrúa family, Presentación Choachi told me that patricide can be explained by taking into account resentment that the mother can transmit to the children. If her husband abuses her and beats her, she can transmit her hate to her offspring. The father, she said, exercises an authoritative but distant power, lives outside and does not care about his children (see also Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 186).

## 2. The feuds in the town of Nomeque

In this section I will describe the blood feuds that took place in the village or its surrounding area during my fieldwork. Feuds originate in conflict-ridden families in order to solve problems related with land, women, or money<sup>31</sup>. Orlando Fals Borda enumerates the sources of conflict among the peasants of *El Saucio*: *Envy, jealousy, greed, and non payment of debts are motives for conflict and aggression which also bring about familial cohesion* (Fals Borda, 1955: 211).

A new source of conflict in the community is the scarcity of water during the dry season, a phenomenon unthinkable some years ago. There is less water due to the process of deforestation of the mountain slopes. On one occasion a group of angry peasants came to the local council to protest against the actions of a peasant they called Don Lopez. Don Lopez had told the peasants that he was authorised by the municipality to take water from the aqueduct. The peasants insulted the person in charge of public works although he denied any authorisation to Lopez. The peasants told him that if Lopez did not stop taking water they were going to *meterle bala* (put some bullets in him).

Most of the peasants carry guns. As Pedro Subachoque told me *todo chino usa revolver* (every Chinese -every kid- has a pistol.) Some fathers, he added, gave pistols as a birthday presents to their sons. One father gave a pistol to his son when he was only eleven years old. *Now you are a complete man*, he said to his son. For males, to have a gun is a reason to be proud and a way of becoming a man.

When a feud starts each family's sole interest will be the assassination of every

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<sup>31</sup> Evans-Pritchard relates similar causes for blood feuds among the Nuer: disputes for a cow; a cow or a goat eats the grass of another man and this man punished the animals; a man beats the little child of anotherone; adultery; the rights for water in the dry season; the rights to grass; a man takes an object without permission from his owner ( Evans-Pritchard, 1977:169.)

male member of the other family. Every male kept alive is a potential threat to the family survival because he can always take revenge. The killers intend "*no dejar ni semilla*" (not to leave even the seed), to erase that family from earth (cf. Hobsbawm, 1983: 270).

Feuds take their time and peasants prepare their revenge with caution. As Orlando Fals Borda notes: *But the peasants do not seek their revenge in haste. They patiently, laboriously, work toward vengeance* (Fals Borda, 1955: 209). It can be years until an opportunity for revenge presents itself.

## 2.1 The Ramirez and the Castros

During my fieldwork two families living in Nomeque, the Ramirez and the Castros were involved in a blood feud<sup>32</sup>. Four people were killed, two from each side. The Ramirez, considered by most of the villagers as the aggressors, left town and moved to a small farm of their own not more than a fifteen minutes car drive away from Nomeque. Their moving away failed as an attempt to avoid the conflict because other economic interests kept them close to the village.

Some of the members of the Ramirez family spent time in prison for crimes committed in Sutagao (a neighbouring city). These crimes had no direct connection with the feud I am describing but they show us an intimate connection between different types of violence. The Ramirez are called "*los osos*" (the bears) because they are big and hairy. People used to fear them and even if they considered them the aggressors in secret, they treated them respectfully in public.

I got closer to the Castros but, unfortunately, it was impossible to ask them

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<sup>32</sup> An interesting comparison of these feuds may be made with the description of the Hatfields-Mc Coys conflict in Appalachia, USA by Altina Waller (1988).

any direct or indirect questions related to these unfortunate events. I was present during their duties in the slaughter- house and during their leisure times. I also bet in favour of their roosters in the popular cock- fights. The Castros love to prepare fighting cocks and bet large quantities of money on them<sup>33</sup>.

After months in the field, the Castros finally started to say hello to me and to comment on the weather and also to tell me general news about the village. Anyway, I made friends with some of their companions in leisure and in work who provided me with a good deal of valuable information.

The Castros are butchers. The widowed mother, her six sons, and her three daughters-in-law rent a butchers shop together in which they sell beef. The Castro family is centred around the mother of the six brothers. Walter Castro, a half brother, the fruit of the Castro father's liaison with another woman, was only partially incorporated in the family. The Castros are known for having intense and violent rows with their wives. None of the Castro males attended elementary school for more than three years.

I observed the Castros several times at the slaughter- house. They usually went there on Thursdays to kill the cows whose meat was to be sold on Friday and Saturday. Slaughter is not a highly regarded task in the community and the slaughterhouse is only visited by people who belong to the lower class.

The slaughterhouse is a big room of some fifteen metres by four in which not more than three cows can be culled at the same time. Butchers bound the cow and pulled it into the room. It is not an easy task and sometimes the cows get very

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<sup>33</sup> For a description of cock fights in the Colombian countryside see Reichel-Dolmatoff's *The People of Aritama* (1961: 195-197).

nervous when they see the dead ones. Some cows resist aggressively and can cause serious injuries to anyone in their desperation to escape.

When the cow is in the room the butchers have to tie the animal to some strategically located rings. Then they pulled the animal until it fell down. Afterwards, the butcher cuts the animal throat targeting on its carotid. When he manages to cut the vein a spring of blood, like a small geyser, bursts out from the animal. The animal reacts and screams. Some three minutes later the spring of blood diminishes and the animal stops fighting. Five minutes afterwards the butcher unties the animal, moves it, and starts to take off its skin. Without knowing if the animal is dead or alive the butcher starts taking off the skin, cutting and separating the meat in different pieces. He finishes his task covered in blood. Women help the butcher in his work by taking out the guts, the liver, and the kidneys and washing them. During the slaughter the butchers swear many times calling the cow a "*hija de puta*" (daughter of a bitch) or "*puta*" (prostitute) particularly at the moment when the cow tries to fight.

The Castros' behaviour on these occasions does not differ from that of the rest of the workers except that they are among the more skilled and fearless workers. Once, an animal tried to escape and started to run around in the slaughter- house. Everyone tried to find shelter. A young man showed clearly that he was panicking. The Castros, with the complicity of others, started to make aggressive jokes about him and what they considered his cowardly and feminine attitude.

## 2.2 A broken friendship

The Castros and the Ramirez used to be friends some time ago. Many informants said it was very common to see them together in many places, drinking and chatting. The Castros and the Ramirez were also *compadres* between them. Because of this

friendship the Castros became the Ramirez's tenants in a small house in which all the Castro family lived together. The Castros did not pay rent for some months. For Margarita Riquelme this was the origin of the conflict: "*everything started in a very silly way.*"

Disputes about property quite often result in feuds. At the beginning of a conflict there is only mistrust; then the parties involved exchange offensive words and physical aggression is the next step. Orlando Fals Borda notes that, "*No campesino suffers an insult idly. He first attacks his insulter with fists. If the brawl develops well, he resorts to such other weapons as a beer bottle, a knife, a machete, a heavy stick, or a revolver if available*" (Fals Borda, 1955: 209). As I already expressed in the Introduction to this work, the insults break the respectful code of communication and prepare the field for physical aggression (see also Reichel Dolmatoff, 1961: 189).

In December 1994, a particularly serious dispute started between the two families. During the discussion the Ramirez brothers' mother took a big knife in her hand and gave it to one of her sons commanding him to kill the Castro brothers' father. The youngest Castro put his body between the fighters, and the Ramirez finally killed the boy, who was only fourteen years old. The army was patrolling the village that day and they managed to send both mother and son to prison in Sutagao. One of the soldiers was shocked to find the young boy had been stabbed. He could not believe they were killing children. After some days in jail the two Ramirez were freed because nobody formally accused them. The court dismissed the case on the grounds of lack of evidence.

While they were in prison Walter Ramirez, the most feared Ramirez brother, returned home and accused the Castros of being responsible for these events. One night, a month after the first incident, four masked men entered the Castros' house

and killed Nicolas Castro, head of the family. The whole community commented on this killing. The people who were less confident in my presence denied the possibility of identification of the killers. They said tautologically, "*No se sabe quienes fueron, porque iban enmascarados*" (nobody could tell who was who because they were wearing masks). However, my closer informants had no doubts who the killers were, assuring me that it was the Ramirez. Afterwards, when it became obvious, everybody took for granted that I knew who the killers were.

After these events the Castros started to prepare themselves for revenge. All the people in the village knew this fact and every one publicly commented on it. Every time I passed by their butcher shop I could see a Castro practising shooting with a compressed air gun. They were shooting at a bull's eye in a side road.

Eight months later Tiburcio Ramirez, the head of the family, his wife, his daughter, and his granddaughter went to Nomeque to pay taxes, to sell their house and to sever relations with the village. As we shall see, they were not able to cut the relationship established through the feud. When the Ramirez were at the council hall, they were asked to pay the last bills. Tiburcio decided to go to his old house to pick them up. His wife was scared and preferred to wait for him in the municipality. He was walking with his daughter and granddaughter when he passed the Castros butcher shop.

The Castros and the Ramirez started insulting each other in front of the shop. Tiburcio Ramirez told the Castros he was going to sell the house and with that money he would pay someone to kill them all. When they passed by the Castros shop again Walter Castro got out of the shop with a gun and shot Ramirez and his daughter. He kept shooting them until it was obvious they were not going to wake up again. However, Walter Castro did not shoot at the little granddaughter. When his enemies

were killed he just put his pistol in his trousers and walked slowly along the road.

When the ambulance arrived the woman was still alive but died before they could take her to the nearest hospital.

Walter Castro was only half brother of the other Castors. He had a relegated position in the family and only after this incident he was recognised as a full member of the family. He disappeared from the scene for a couple of weeks. They said he took refuge in a small farm in the highlands of a far away *vereda*. However, when the situation calmed down (something that happened in less than a month) Walter returned to the village and continued to live his everyday life.

The tragic incident deeply affected the villagers. When the killings took place Father Melquiades was furious and said in his Sunday sermon that "*the blood of this revenge stains every one of us*". For a while the people commented on the killings and its consequences.

After this incident the Castros started going everywhere together. I never saw a Castro alone again. Generally two of them walked first and a third one walked behind them. They were always carrying guns. Romulo, a shop- keeper, told me once: "*it has to be difficult to live that way, always cuidándose (to watch out) for their enemies*".

### 2.3 Injustice

In the community analysed, people's own explanations of feuds often stress a negative perception of the system of justice. James Greenberg refers to a similar perception in his study of inter-village feuds in Oaxaca (Greenberg, 1989: 151). In Nomeque, many people note that corruption in the Justice system and especially



corrupted lawyers are to blame for these events. Don Pedro Subachoque, a baker, stated:

*"Ramirez's mother was fighting against Castro's mother when she gave a knife to her son and said to him 'kill her', he killed the youngest Castro son who was trying to protect his mother. Both went to prison.*

*Castro's father seized Ramirez's house to obtain money in compensation for the death of his son. Therefore, Libardo Ramirez, who had also been previously in prison, killed the Castro's father for claiming compensation. The Ramirez's lawyer then alleged that the murderer of Castro's son was Ramirez's son but, instead, the owner of the house was Libardo Ramirez and so it was not possible to make any indictment over the house. The lawyer succeeded in putting the house out of the case and at the same time he obtained the freedom of Ramirez's wife.*

*Libardo Ramirez sold the house and obtained 30 millions for it, (my wife was near and saw Libardo counting the money). Then he passed by the Castros' butcher shop and the Castros asked him for the compensation money. He answered them: 'this five millions are to get my kid out of prison and the rest are to kill you all'. It was immediately after this that Walter Castro took a gun and killed them".*

Not all the people in Nomeque condemned the Ramirez; Margarita Riquelme felt pity for them remembering that the Ramirez father used to help her father selling the harvest of potatoes. *"He was a good and hard worker, although he used to get drunk quite often".*

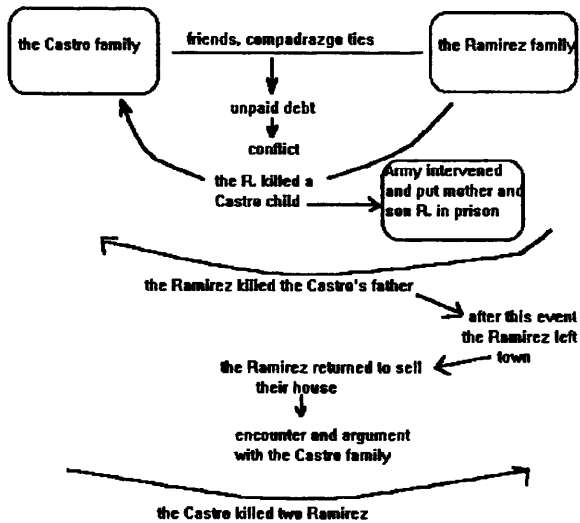
## 2.4 On feuds and eternity

Local people speak of feuds as if they are endless. This idea does not differ from Black-Michaud's opinion that feuds are interminable *"because each homicide inexorably leads to a sequence of hostilities down the course of time"* (Black-Michaud, 1975:80).

Pedro Subachoque said:

*"But this will continue, it never ends, the Castros must leave the town because the Ramirez have been in prison and are murderers and they will not stop. It has always been like that, people cannot get rid of it even if they try to escape. You know the tale about the devil? A man had a farm but he was very poor and unsuccessful. He envied his neighbours who were doing better. So he went to the forest and called the devil (see Taussig, 1980: 94-96). The devil appeared and he asked him for the best harvests for his farm, to become rich and to attract the most beautiful women. The devil makes him sign a contract by which after ten years he must bring him his soul. Nine years passed in which he lived as a very rich man having fun with the most beautiful and young women and everyone envies his animals and fruits (Taussig, 1980: 95). But he started to feel depressed because he couldn't avoid thinking that in a year he had to give his soul to the devil. So he decided to play a trick on the devil, he sold everything and he ran away. He passed towns and villages. The day of the deadline he was rowing a canoe in the jungle when he saw a cultivation of corn and a house. He said to himself -I am going to hide here-. He knocked at the door and the devil opened the door. The devil said to him -Oh, you were the one with the agreement, was it you? How did you find me? I had forgotten the contract, thank you for coming. And that hut was the entrance to hell. Nobody can escape".*

*"Some people spend all their lives taking revenge. The only reason for living is revenge. There was a man who was the chief of a "cuadrilla", gang of one political party. He murdered a whole family except one young boy who managed to hide. The boy grew up and searched for the old man. He searched for him and searched for him and finally found him in a farm in La Dorada, Caldas. He was rich and living in a beautiful house made with the money he obtained in his robberies. The boy obtained a job in the farm. It was very difficult to kill the old man because he was constantly protected by many guards. In that area they used a lot of dynamite to fish. Once the old man and his guards started to drink and got drunk. The boy then told the old man that he knew that in the Valley he had been feared and the old man said that yes, it was like that. Then the boy asked him if he remembered a family he had killed. And the old man told him that he had killed all those "hijueputas" (a literal translation would be sonsofabitches all together) and that nobody was left from that family. The boy, then, replied to him saying that it was not true that nobody was left, he had survived to take revenge. The old man smiled because he had felt protected by his guards, but the boy took out a piece of dynamite and hugged the old man. Both exploded and every part of the house was covered by bits of their bodies".*



***The Castro-Ramirez feud***

### 3. Narratives of feuds

Narratives of old feuds are powerful discourses in the community that explain animosities and divisions as well as friendships and solidarities among families. As Michael Gilson states, "*Enacted stories motivate and animate the social processes of which they are an integral part*" (Gilson 1996: 57). Many feuds developed during the last twenty or thirty years in Nomeque, and some of them continue to be very present in people's memories.

#### 3.1 The Caamaños and the Herreros

One of the most relevant feuds people of the community remember took place between the Caamaño and the Herrero families. In fact so present is this feud in the

people's memory that there is a Nomeque version of the talion law that refers to it. It is known as: "*La ley de los Caamaño, ojo por ojo y daño por daño*" (the Caamaño's law, eye for eye, and damage for damage). Different narratives about the same facts are combined showing the diversity of the versions. This diversity also expresses the social place and distance the narrator has with these events.

*"The father of the Herreros was the first man killed. At that time his children were very young. The Herrero were four brothers and a sister. The father of the Herrero, people say, had been killed because he stole cattle (apparently this was the principal activity of the family then). So his children grew up as orphans, asking questions and suspecting they ended up with the conviction that the Caamaños were responsible for the crime. When they grew up they decided to take revenge. They killed the father of the Caamaño in the plaza of the town while he was sitting on one of the benches, enjoying the sun. The Caamaño were three brothers and two sisters"*

*"Then, Eleuterio Caamaño raped a certain Lopez's wife. Lopez turned to the Herrero family to help him take revenge. So, the Herreros and Lopezs' killed the rapist Caamaño together. Afterwards the Herreros ambushed the Caamaños up in the mountains but the Caamaños managed to escape. The Caamaños reacted meanwhile by ambushing the Herreros up in the mountains. The Caamaños wounded Victor Herrero in one leg, captured him, put a pistol in his mouth and said: "Dogs are killed in this way," and, afterwards, they blew his head off. All these happenings are known in town because the custom exists of commenting on these actions in public as heroic acts."*

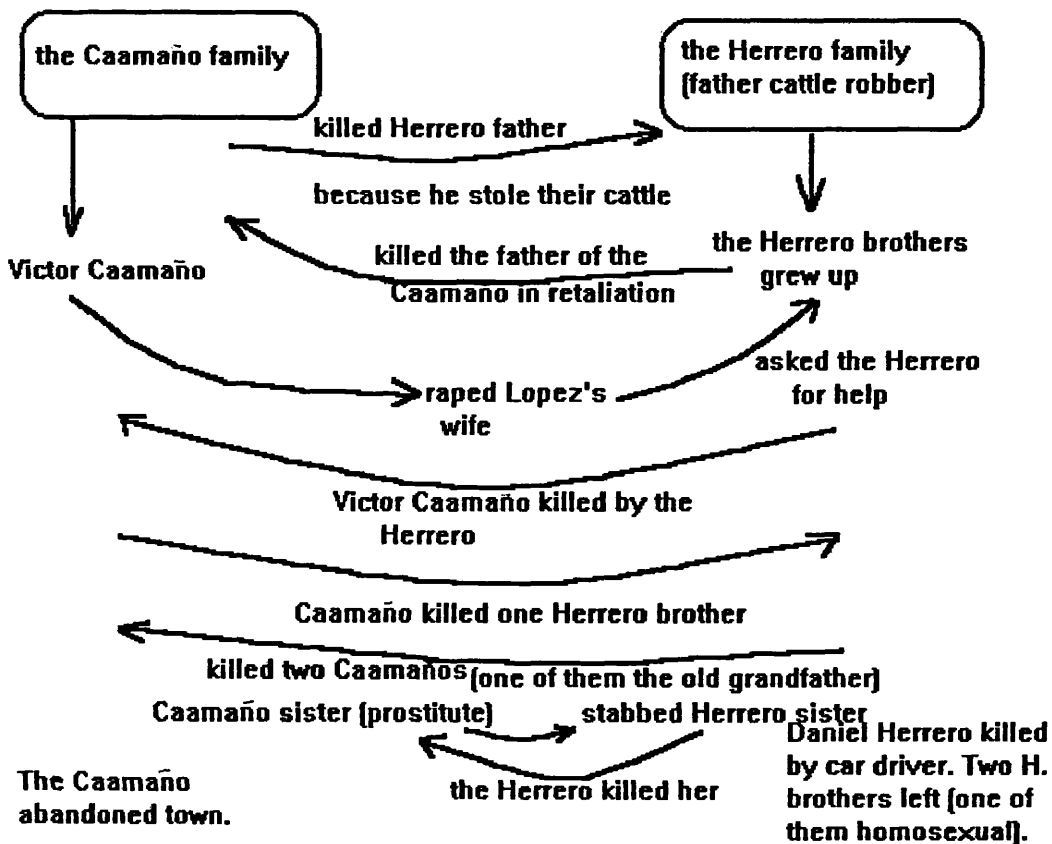
*A former mayor of the village has told me: "When the corpse of his murdered brother was carried to be mourned Daniel Herrero spread his brother's blood on his face and body and said to me: "Doctor, I am going to take revenge. A few days afterwards the Herrero brothers killed another two Caamaños, Eleuterio and Don Fernando. Eleuterio was caught on the way back to his farm. The other was the old Caamaño family head, the grandfather of the kids, an aged man who would have been able to do no harm. Daniel Herrero put his pistol in the old man's mouth and killed him the way the Caamaños killed his brother."*

*A female member of the Caamaño family, Leticia, who worked as a prostitute in Sutagao attacked a female member of the Herrero family, Morgana, hurting her badly but without killing her. Shortly afterwards male members of the Herrero family went to Sutagao. With the help of a friend of theirs disguised as a client they managed to lure Leticia Caamaño out of the brothel and stabbed her to death. Following this event the last male member of the Caamaño family, Remigio, left the town.*

*“Daniel Herrero was feared by many in the village for his bad temper, especially when he was drunk. He often got involved in fights and was said to have killed many people. One night, Daniel, quite drunk, asked for a lift to his farm from a boy who used to offer this service in his own car. The boy responded that unfortunately his car was already reserved so he couldn't. Daniel started to insult him and moved his right hand towards his pocket. The young man got scared took his own pistol out first and shot Daniel Herrero dead at once. The day after the boy left town forever fearing a revenge.”*

This is probably the clearest example I found in my ethnography of choosing between one of the two possibilities Peters found in feuding societies, outside the family unit, that are, *“either the two parties had recourse to geographical separation and ceased to live within a range at which the conflict could be daily pursued, or else one of the two parties resorted to physical violence against the other”* (in Black-Michaud, 1980: 18.). What always surprised me was that in the great majority of cases people have the chance to leave the area but they stay and die.

There are only two Herrero males in the village now. One was very aggressive but calmed down because of what happened; the other is homosexual and, as someone put it in the village, *“he is not involved in men's affairs”* (as already explained the brother of another well-known killer is also homosexual).



### 3.2 The Gimenez and the Porrúa

Another feud still present in the memory of the community involved the Gimenez and the Porrúa families. The Gimenez family has played an important role in the region's politics. They were the principal agrarian leaders of Nomeque, close friends of Juan de la Cruz Varela and members of key importance in the regional and local sections of the Communist party. The Porrúa, instead, were, at that time not very much involved in politics. Then, when the feud against the Gimenez started they became enthusiastic members of the Liberal party. The descendants of both families are still actively involved in the political life of the village maintaining their opposite political identities. Family conflict and politics are involved in this feud in which, as we will see, the familial elements seem to have pre-eminence and the political ones to be

subordinated. This connection between the political conflict and the familial one has been present in the endless series of revenges that in the countryside constituted the core of what we call *La Violencia* (see Uribe, 1990:1-9; Gonzalez, 1993: 43).

Marcos Porrúa married Gisella Gimenez a sister of the Gimenez brothers. As Marcos treated his wife very badly, the Gimenez brothers threatened him with death if he did not change his behaviour. They did it publicly, humiliating him and asserting their own power. This might have been the reason Marcos Porrúa decided to take action first. As Gerardo and Alicia Reichel-Dolmatoff note: "*Such quarrels between a son-in-law and his wife's family often take on the character of personal vengeance. Everything is done to break up the union, not because the man mistreated his wife, but because he insulted her family*" (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 195).

Carlos and Teofilo Gimenez were brothers and the principal Communist leaders in town. A witness told me "*They were having a party in a local bar organised by the Communists of the village. Suddenly we heard some explosions and an old man came running and crying on that someone had shot at "Carlitos" and wanted to call the priest to give him the last sacrament. Shortly afterwards a car passed by and the driver said it was too late and that Carlos had died. We were all very afraid as we thought that there were politics involved in the assassination and that the village would start rioting because of this. Then we realised that the killers were the Porrúas, their in-laws.*"

*Then we heard more shootings that came from the bridge where another Porrúa (twin brother of the first killer) unfortunately met Teofilo Gimenez. Both knew about the incident, there was no alternative, the Porrúa shot at Teofilo first who died instantly."*

People of Nomeque remember the funerals of the Gimenez brothers as the

biggest ones that ever took place in the village. Hundreds of people from all across the region of Sumapaz and also from Bogotá were present with the people of Nomeque to show their final solidarity to the peasant leaders.

The war between the two families started and the Gimenez took revenge, killing two Porruas. Marcos Porrua, who had married a Gimenez daughter, abandoned the village and went to live in the *Sabana*. Later he was murdered by one of his sons in a family fight. Marcos's son had taken the side of his mother a constant object of his father's violence; in this way the cycle of retaliations was closed and revenge was finally fulfilled in a paradoxical way.

The Communist party wrote on the Gimenez brother's burial stones that they had been killed not because of a family feud but because of their Communist ideas. Father Santana got very angry because of this and tried to cancel the inscription. However, in the cemetery of Nomeque it is still possible to read: *Caído en la defensa del pueblo y de los ideales comunistas* (fallen in the defense of the people and the Communist ideals).

The rivalry between families is still expressed in political terms. One member of the Gimenez family was a member of the local council by the time I was in the field. One member of the Porrua family had been a member of the local council before the last elections and was campaigning to make a come back.

### **3.3 Family and tragedy**

The Porruas are perceived as a tragic family always involved in terrible events. Their familial story is full of internal conflicts between the father/husband and his wife and male sons. The nature of this conflict has already been discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. I return now to Marcos Porrua's life story.



Mariela Ramirez's mother was studying at a nuns' boarding school in Sutagao. "*La Presentación*" is still the most traditional Catholic institution for girls in Sutagao. Mariela's mother was secretly having a love affair with Marcos Porrúa and became pregnant. But, as referred to above, Marcos Porrúa was also having a formal relationship with one of the Gimenez sisters and decided not to recognise the child as his. Mariela's mother hid her pregnancy and when the child was born she killed him and hid the corpse in the garbage where someone discovered it. Because of her strange behaviour during the last months the nuns immediately thought she might be the author of the crime. She confessed to what she had done and went to jail. It was a great scandal and many people considered her as the incarnation of evil. After some years in jail she returned to Nomeque, met Mariela's father and reconstructed her life.

A cousin of the Porrúa twin brothers killed his wife in front of their daughter. Another brother of the twins was killed in dubious circumstances. He was drinking with one of his best friends and two of his sons in a bar. Suddenly, the light went out and some shootings were heard. A witness remembered the cold way the Porrúa brothers put their father's corpse in the car. His friend was accused of the murder but everybody in town was sure he had been killed by his own sons.

Another conflict-ridden family, the Herreros, was famous for attracting tragedies. During my fieldwork one Herrero who was living in the Sabana died. He was killed by the weight of his own tractor after he went to work one morning completely drunk.

### **3.4 Other instances of revenge**

There are many other stories involving revenge. Many never produced the same escalation of violence as in the cases already referred to, because of the small size of

the family, or because one of the families decided to abandon the town to their enemy.

In other cases my material is incomplete and their stories are not central to the life of the community analysed especially because they happened in peripheral, far away and isolated places. I will, nonetheless, relate the story of another pair of families that were involved in blood revenges. They were the Gomez and Rodriguez of the highland veredas of *El Tendido* and *La Cajita*.

The Gomez and the Rodriguez had a long land dispute. Twelve years ago when Pablo Lanza was the Mayor of Nomeque el "Mono" Gomez (*mono* in Colombia means blonde), a young boy in his early twenties killed one of the Rodriguezs. He did not want to be caught by the police and hid in the highlands controlling the unpaved road to Nomeque. Pablo Lanza who had property in the highlands could not pass by and once when he tried to pass "Mono" shot into the air. Finally Pablo Lanza decided to visit him unarmed and Gomez was in his house waiting for him with a roasted game animal he had hunted the night before. They ate together and Lanza told him that it was better for him to go with him to the police station. Gomez told Lanza to return by himself and that he would follow behind. Lanza was scared but he returned to the village and Gomez walked behind him and went to the police station.

"Mono" stayed in a cell at the police station of the village for four days before being moved to Sutagao's prison. During that time Lanza allowed him to have "marital visits" from his girlfriend letting them to sleep together. One night, Lanza even rented a band of "Mariachis" who gave him a serenade. Mono Gomez stayed in prison for four years. Three years after his return he was killed by the Rodriguez.

Another serious case, which did not escalate until the end of my fieldwork, shows the divisions of the community and also how violence is present in the whole

society. A teacher at the *Instituto de Promoción Social* did not approve a student in the last year of his subject, *Educación Física* (physical education). As a consequence the student had to repeat the year. This is not very common in a subject like *Educación Física* but the student shown a very aggressive attitude to the teacher throughout the year. There was a division between the fathers of the students who were in favour of the student and those who were against him. At the end of the course there was a Ball in the school. The student, who had drunk *aguardiente* beforehand, something completely forbidden, stabbed the teacher while he was leaving the party. The screams for help of a desperate female colleague saved the teacher's life. After the incident the student was expelled from the Institute. One day the teacher was walking on the streets of Sutagao and the former student appeared on a bicycle and shot him three times. The teacher recovered in the hospital and finally managed to survive. The student, who got a good lawyer, did not go to jail.

#### **4. Legal compensation and revenge**

Alberto, a peasant, once told me that he knew Tomas Figueroa, a peasant in Nomeque who had a conflict with his neighbour. Figueroa sowed a field with potatoes and said:

*"From this field I am going to make two million pesos, five hundred thousand to buy a gun and one million five hundred thousand to pay for the lawyer. Then, he sold his harvest, bought a gun, killed his enemy and afterwards went to see a lawyer with political power in the village. He was a good lawyer because he made him free. Many lawyers make money from these conflicts. Nowadays there is also one lawyer in Nomeque who is making a lot of money and is developing considerable political power (in clear reference to Alvaro Martinez the lawyer of the Arizas, the local drug lords).*

As we have already seen, people in Nomeque do not like to turn to the official legal system or to the police to find justice. If there is a shooting both parties will prefer to say that it was an accident even when it is quite impossible to believe it. There is a particular case that can be considered an exception to this general rule.

Pablo Lanza told me the following story: two peasants, having had large quantities of aguardiente had a fight. Dalmiro Tibacuy injured Washington Velazquez with his knife, wounding his eyes. As we have already seen in several cases, alcohol has much to do with violence. Alcohol reduces inhibitions and makes passions grow (see Greenberg, 1989: 153; also Harris, 1994: 52).

After being injured, Washington Velazquez went to see a doctor. The doctor told him that he would lose the sight in one eye and part of the vision in the other. The desperate Washington sued Tibacuy for compensation. After some discussions the lawyers of both sides reached agreement, and Dalmiro Tibacuy had to pay Washington Velazquez compensation.

Washington received the money and immediately decided what to do with it. He bought a pistol in Sutagao, went to see Dalmiro Tibacuy and shot him dead. While he was shooting him he shouted "*because of you I am going to be blind 'hijo de puta', son of a bitch*".<sup>34</sup>

## 5. Feud arrangements

I was told that the guerrillas were quite successful in suspending the effects of feuds. They organised meetings in which the principal members of the families involved in the conflict were called and obliged them to solve their conflicts.

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<sup>34</sup> Peters (1951: 303) refers to a similar Cyrenaican Bedouin dictum that says that a horse bought with blood money will be used to ride when bringing vengeance (in Black-Michaud, 1980: 12.)

Compensation was never ever paid for a life, but if the dispute started with a problem of property the guerrillas could settle it with their judgement. If the parties did not proceed to stop the revenge, I was told several times, the guerrillas could threaten the lives of the families involved. I do not know why this procedure has not worked in most of the cases described above, but I was also told that these agreements only postpone the revenge and never reconcile the families effectively. The feud will be carried on again when a better occasion appears. The arrival of the army and its permanent position in Nomeque during the last six months of my fieldwork possibly allowed these events to happen.

The director of one of the secondary schools told me that on one occasion he tried to reconcile two hostile families. The families, as is often the case, were friends. A boy from one of the families left a girl of the other pregnant. He abandoned her and did not assume any responsibility. His family, instead of making him reflect about it and change his mind, defended and protected him.

After these events, the families ended friendly relations and became enemies. A sister of the pregnant girl and a brother of the boy entered the school. They hated each other and fought on several occasions. Once, they had a row in which the boy took out a pistol in class and, in front of all his companions, threatened her with death. After that, the director called the main members of the two families to School. During the whole meeting they never looked at each other in the face. He did not manage to reconcile the families but he obtained an agreement: no more incidents at School.

## 6. Summary

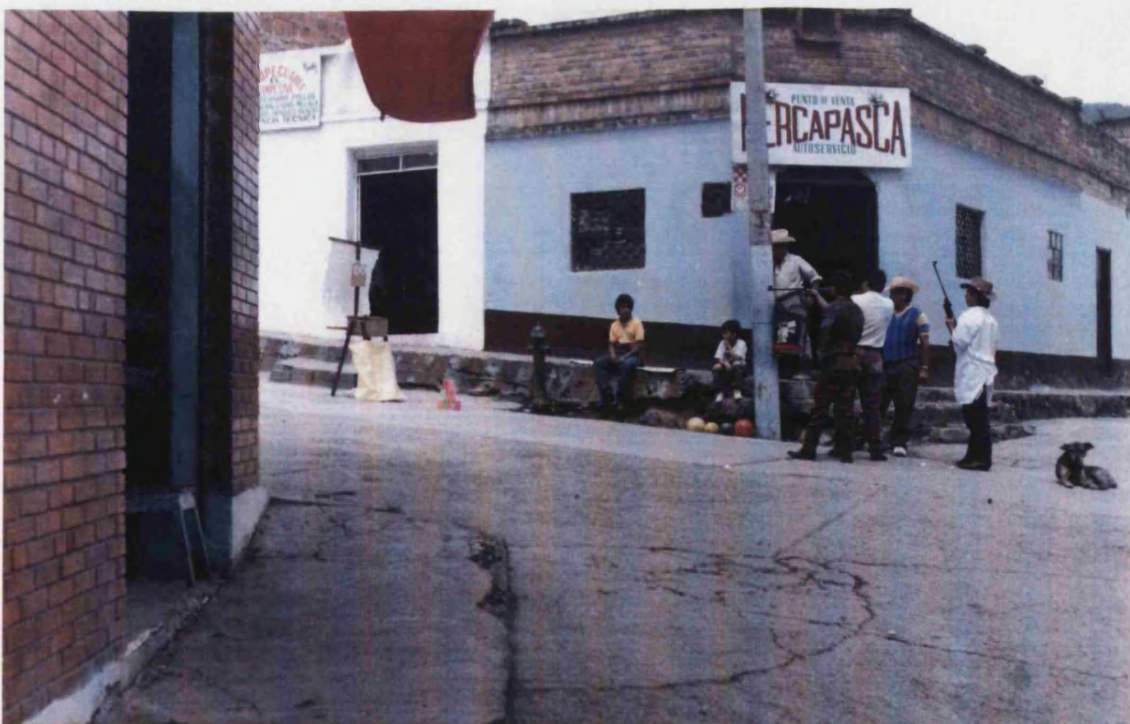
In the community analysed, blood feuds between families are related to land boundaries, money, and women (Fals Borda 1955: 211). Families who are involved in feuds are composed of a number of male brothers or male first cousins. These families are in the great majority of the cases poor. Poor males are more aggressive because they are frustrated men, they have difficulties in controlling their household, particularly their wives and offspring. All these families present a very conflict-ridden internal pattern and, as a consequence, they are feared and respected by the community.

Externalising the violence outside these families reinforces solidarity among relatives. Family ties are strengthened and, at the same time, a peaceful relation with outsiders is weakened. The main social relation with outsiders becomes the feud. All the family efforts are focused on the annihilation of the hostile family. When a member of a family is killed and the war is open the families will try to kill any male member of the other one (women, too, sometimes). By killing every male member they avoid the possibility of another revenge (cf. Hobsbawm, 1983: 270). In order to avoid the endless circle of revenges a family can abandon the region. In fact, as it is extensively shown in this chapter, most of the families prefer to stay in the region assuming all the tragic consequences of that decision.

Political identification is also related to families' animosities and friendships. Politics and feuds can be found mixed together especially in periods of political turmoil. The Colombian national state has practically no control over these violent actions. People do not ask the state to intervene and the state officers prefer not to do so.

The guerrillas have been more successful as mediators among families by

using the threat of violence. They have managed to suspend feuds but not to make them disappear. Feuds are interminable. As social relations they could be suspended but they can always be restarted.



Shooting exercise in the centre of Nemeque performed publicly by members of one of the feuding families.



**Chapter five: Patriarchs, heroes, suicides, and traitors, social respect and social rejection in funerary rituals****Introduction**

The analysis of funerary rituals is useful to show how the community of Nomeque perceives and treats the dead. This chapter discusses differences in funerary rituals and the analysis provides invaluable information on the particular and selective expressions of social solidarity. Violence is an important element tacitly present in some of the funerals analysed. Instead of centring attention on the disruptive aspects of violence I would like to show how violence can be used as a means to construct social boundaries and social solidarity; how, by the use of violence, a social group recognises itself as a community.

Having observed twenty burials, I noticed qualitative and quantitative differences in the funerary rituals of different members of the community. These divergent traits seem to correspond to the sex and social position of the deceased, and also to the way he or she died. Through differences in funerary rituals the community reinterprets the life of the dead and constructs a fixed social idea of who he or she was in the past.

Death rituals express the social perception of violence and power in the community. An assertive masculinity is a central element in this construction of social differences that can be perceived through the analysis of funerary rites. Males are the principal agents, if not the monopoly-holders, of direct force. They receive a selective treatment from the community that recognises their special status as persons who have to deal with death.

The tragic death of young males in Nomeque seems to be considered as an *"altruistic gift"* offered to their community (Bloch and Parry, 1982: 15-19). Their tragic death may be catalogued as the *"good death"* par excellence, *"an immolation of the individual in the altar of the social group"* (Bloch and Parry, 1982: 17). By contrast, suicidal conducts are socially rejected and condemned.

As we shall see, suicide appears as an act inexplicable to the community, while blood feuds are considered part of everyday life. In the Christian context of Nomeque, suicidal death appears as the *"bad death"* par excellence, *"the suicide acts for himself alone, and loses for others his regenerative power"*(Bloch and Parry, 1982: 17).

A more accurate analysis of the data shows that even if there is a clear distinction in the treatment of both types of death, some cases do not show a precise pattern and the social interpretation of a dead person is put under discussion. Are funerary rituals so different from one another? Are all the young dead considered martyrs? It is important to refer to the gender conflict present in the funerals of women who committed suicide. There is a struggle for the social recognition of the deceased in which gender differences are exposed.

I have structured the material incorporating: 1. Funerals that can be associated with the cult of the hero; 2. Funerals that can be associated with the death of patriarchs; 3. Old people's burials; 4. Funerals of those who committed suicide; 5. Funerals of those killed by the guerrillas.

## 1. The importance of death

Funerals are one of the most important social activities in the community. People in the village are very much concerned with attending funerals. It is considered a way of expressing compassion and solidarity. *"En Nomeque somos muy solidarios con el que muere"* (In Nomeque we have a lot of solidarity for the dead). *"Acá me tiene, por que hay que compartir el dolor ajeno"* (*I am here because we must share in the pain of others*).

People of the highlands or *"tierra fría"* (cold land) often compare what they consider their great solidarity with the less compassionate people of *"tierra caliente"* (literally warm land, the lowlands where the weather is extremely hot). *"In "tierra caliente" people are less concerned with others and do not come when a neighbour dies."* I happened to be in a town in the lowlands when a funeral procession passed from the church to the cemetery and on that occasion, only seven people were present (something completely unusual in Nomeque).

Funerary rituals are not the only rites related to death. Particularly important are the cults concerning the place where a person dies. These cults support the argument that the perception of violent death is specific. If a person is murdered or if he dies in an accident the relatives customarily place a cross in the place where this incident took place. The cross is covered with flowers that are replaced, at least during the first years after the tragedy and certainly on the anniversary of his death.

Another cult is the celebration of the "Novena," a rite that is performed nine days after death. It consists of a mass for the soul of the dead and a visit to the tomb by the relatives and friends who deposit crowns of flowers on the tomb. This rite is a reaffirmation of the social solidarity expressed at the funeral.

The anniversary of the death is solemnly celebrated with a mass and a procession to the cemetery. When the death is a consequence of a blood-revenge, the kin are particularly interested in obtaining a massive number of people for the anniversary to reaffirm that the deceased is not forgotten.

The town of Nomeque has a small cemetery of one "*fanegada*" (less than one hectare) in size, placed some three kilometres from the centre. The placement of the dead in the cemetery is to a large extent determined by the lack of space in it. Families try to place their dead together. However, in most cases they are spread around a certain area of the cemetery and mixed up with other dead.

The oldest and more traditional families used to bury their dead in the parish church but this tradition was forbidden and almost all those families have left Nomeque for the city years ago. Except for some very old, roughly made, and run down mausoleums, most of the dead are placed either in earth tombs, with a cross and an inscription, or in vaults. People who were questioned about placement always denied the existence of any difference in the use of any of these tombs. In fact, I did not perceive any consistent order in the placement of the dead. Instead, people constantly complained about what they considered the general disorder and dirtiness of the cemetery. I have no difficulties in relating this "disorder" to the egalitarian society constructed after the agrarian rebellion. As we will see, the social construction of hierarchy is, instead, clearly present in the differences between funerary rituals.

## 2. Funerals associated with the cult of the hero

The funerals described in this section are the objects of special cults and an expression of massive social solidarity. They reflect the importance given by the community to particular lives and deaths. In the cases analysed the dead were always males, in one case a mature person but in most cases young people and all died in unfortunate circumstances.

The burials analysed can be compared with the special cults related to the beautiful death of the hero described by J. P. Vernant (1990:51-74). This author analyses the idealised death in the battlefield dreamt about by young Greek warriors during the epic times of the Illiad. Heroic warriors preferred a short life and the eternal glory that a death in the battlefield used to provide rather than the obliged loss of their virility and force as a consequence of the irreversible process of ageing (Vernant, 1990: 55).

Dying violently in "*la fleur de la jeunesse*" they assume for themselves the eternal remembrance of the future generations. People will remember them, as we are probably doing now, at the pinnacle of their virility and beauty, untouched by the decay of age (Vernant, 1990, 59-60).

On January 22, 1995, Nicolas Castro was killed. His corpse was mourned in Sutagao in a funeral house for two days and buried on the afternoon of the 24th in the cemetery of Nomeque. The corpse was placed in one room of the house. The coffin was kept opened for everyone to see, with the corpse dressed in the dead man's best dark suit.

Two large candles gave some light to the dark room. During the mourning of the corpse ("*velatorio*"), the relatives and friends gave their condolences ("*pesame*") to the family and saw the corpse. Every hour Nicolas Castro's wife or another close

female relative started praying a part of the rosary. The people that visited the dead received a glass of "*aguardiente*," sugar cane liquor and some food, soup or chicken.

A Catholic mass was offered for the soul of the dead in the church of Nomeque. After the mass, the priest blessed the coffin and this act ended his involvement in the funeral.

About two hundred fifty people attended the mass in the church. Afterwards some eight hundred - one thousand people escorted the coffin to the cemetery. Some jeeps were carrying wreaths of flowers. The names of the families or friends who brought the wreaths of flowers were printed on a purple band.

Approximately two kilometres separate the cemetery from the church. As the funeral proceeded, a band of "*Mariachis*" followed the coffin carried by the male Castros. The butchers of Nomeque rented a Mexican style "*mariachis*" orchestra and offered it to the memory of their dead colleague (the word *mariachi* comes from the French word "*marriage*" because during Napoleon the Third's invasion of Mexico they were used for weddings).

At the funeral service the *Mariachis* sang songs related to death like "*Nadie es eterno en el mundo*," (Nobody lasts for ever in this world), a popular Colombian song about our mortality and about the nonsense of crying, because nobody returns from the "*deep dream*." They also sang "*La cruz de madera*," (the wooden cross) a Mexican song that, on the contrary, refers to the need to keep on praying for your dead relatives. The musicians continued singing and playing their instruments right next to the tomb.

According to Juan Yasser, a member of the local council and also to Gilberto Castillo, the grave-digger, the *mariachis* are a recent introduction to funerals, not

more than three years ago. Both said that it is a custom introduced by the drug dealers.

A trumpet played solemnly and the participants kept perfect silence while the coffin was being placed in the tomb. Women opened the coffin for the last time, to see the dead man dressed in his best suit, a black one that peasants wear on important and solemn occasions like weddings or funerals. The crying of the women interrupted the silence. People threw flowers on the tomb, mostly taken from the wreaths. The close relatives kept the senders' inscriptions of the wreaths.

Afterwards, at the entrance to the cemetery, next to a bar called "*La última lágrima*" (the last teardrop) the relatives of the deceased offered beer and soft drinks to the participants, the rejection of which counts as an insult. Then, the male relatives talked among themselves in low voices.

I was there with a peasant who is married to a sister of the deceased. The relatives of the deceased invited him to join a close circle of men. I heard them lamenting: "*Esto no puede seguir así*" that means "*It cannot continue like this*" but also "*We have to do something about it*" and "*Es la segunda muerte en un mes,*" (it is the second death in a month.) After these events the Castros started to prepare themselves for revenge.

The funerals of the Ramirez, killed by the Castros, were quite different from that of Nicolas Castro, killed by the Ramirez. The mourning took place in a very reserved way in Sutagao and it was difficult for me to find the location where the corpses were being mourned. I was finally directed to a chapel but when I arrived the mourners had already left.

Before the burial, the family prayed alone in the chapel and some informants said that one Ramirez made a vow and solemnly affirmed he was going to take revenge.

The funerals took place in the cemetery of Sutagao. A bus carrying relatives of the Ramirez appeared. The coffins were carried in two funeral cars, behind them three jeeps were full of Ramirez relatives and acquaintances. Very few people appeared from Nomeque, almost all the participants were relatives. There were not more than three hundred people. The males took the coffins from the cars and started to walk to the cemetery, the funeral proceeded in silence.

With great tension in the atmosphere, the Ramirez sons carried the coffins with angry faces. The impression I got at that time was that as soon as they could they were going to kill as many Castros as possible. The males were self-controlled and did not demonstrate any sadness. They just looked with their angry faces while only the women cried.

The people took flowers from the wreaths and threw them into the grave. A little girl, the one that saw her mother murdered, placed a bunch of flowers over her mother's tomb. Afterwards, the relatives gave beer to the participants.

Gilberto Castillo, the grave-digger, is Ramirez's second cousin. I had the impression he did not want me to be present at the funeral. He told me a day before the funeral that it had already taken place. I was surprised to find him at the burial and although at fault, he did not apologise. He said that the Ramirez decided to do it in Sutagao because they considered the people of Nomeque to be on the Castros' side.

I found Gilberto Castillo's position at this funeral a quite difficult and ambiguous one. As a relative of the Ramirez he was obliged to participate in the funerals but he was also concerned about his relations with the Castros. As a



neighbour of Nomeque he wanted to play an impossible mediator's role. His doubts and worries could be an explanation for his lying about the funeral date.

Gilberto was very worried because few people from Nomeque were present. He told me: *"I told the Ramirez that the people of Nomeque were not their enemies, but they said Nomeque people were on the Castro's side."* Except for Gilberto and for Oscar Gonzalez I did not find many acquaintances among those present. There were one or two faces I already knew, probably some relatives from the countryside, but very few people from Nomeque.

On Wednesday 22nd, January, 1995 Agustin Tamayo a young cyclist champion who participated in European competitions such as the Tour du France, was buried in Sutagao after his tragic death. His burial can be considered a *"heroic"* funeral par excellence. He was killed by a truck when he was training on the road.

I was very close to Alberto, the husband of his sister in law. It seemed as if the whole of Sutagao, a city of more than thirty thousand inhabitants were there. I calculated one thousand people present during the mass in the cathedral and a multitude of more than five thousand waiting outside. The priest made his sermon placing this young cyclist with the heroes of Colombian history. The priest told the attendants that Agustin's death was not useless and that he had died for Colombia in general and for Sutagao in particular.

It was very difficult to go from the cathedral to the cemetery because there were so many cars and buses and all of them were covered with wreaths. When the procession of cars finally arrived at the cemetery, many people were already there waving their handkerchiefs. People threw flowers at his tomb and a band of Colombian singers played some songs in his honour. He was buried in a niche of the cemetery.

On Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1995, Hugo Herrero, of only twenty years of age, died tragically. He was working on a small farm in La Calera, a place very close to Bogotá. He was drunk while he was working with his tractor when it turned upside down and he was killed by its weight. His father, Cesareo Herrero, was cousin of Daniel Herrero and his brothers who were involved in a blood feud with the Caamaños. His paternal-uncle is in prison in Bogotá for kidnapping.

Hugo Herrero's mother died about ten years ago. Since then he became very close to his sister who, with great effort, finished her high school last year. Hugo did not finish primary school. Presentación Choachi was very sad about his death, because she considered that Hugo and his sister were trying to overcome their tragic inheritance and the bad reputation of their family.

He was mourned in the house of Cesareo Herrero in front of the telephone office in Nomeque. The coffin was open and he was lying dressed in a dark suit (some female relatives washed him, dressed him, and placed him in the coffin). Two large candles were the only decoration of a very poor mourning ceremony. Relatives came and went. Chairs were placed around the room and they sat for a few minutes with sad faces. While I was there some women sat praying a "*Novena*" together in loud voice.

Father Melquíades celebrated a mass in the church. Two hundred people escorted the coffin to the cemetery. The march to the cemetery was preceded by a hearse, behind which the male relatives carried the coffin on their shoulders. Hugo's sister walked immediately behind escorted by a group of women who were trying to calm and console her. She lost control of her emotions and fell to the floor.

Hugo's sister recovered but in the cemetery she lost control and started to scream saying "*Dios mío, Dios mío, y ahora que hago sola?*" (Oh God, Oh God, what

am I going to do alone now?). "*Huguito, don't do that to me, what can I do? What can I do?*" Some males while they were looking at her started to cry too although consciously trying to control their emotions. Some women tried to start praying some "*Novenas*" but they were constantly interrupted by their own crying.

Hugo's sister started to move around the cemetery and she went to her mother's niche where some relatives were taking her mother's bones out to put them with Hugo's. Presentación Choachi told me that it is very common to do this, and also very useful because the bones of your family are together. It can only be direct relatives' bones. Both sets of bones were placed in a niche. People threw flowers from wreaths and only one wreath was left intact to cover the entrance of the tomb. At the entrance of the cemetery the relatives offered beers and soft drinks.

I met Don Severiano Barbado, an old peasant. He told me that one of his nephews had died in Bogotá where he was doing his military service. Nobody knows exactly why he died.

*"The military told the family that it was an accident, but someone said it was suicide or he was killed, no one knows very well." "His father was an ignorant peasant and the military took advantage of him. They told him they could not bury him in Nomeque because it is a 'red zone'. So, they buried him in Bogota in a military cemetery. But anyway, the funeral was so lovely, they did it with military honours and everything, 'una verraquera' (brilliant). I didn't go because I am too old but they showed me the pictures. Well, a dead person is a dead person but the burial was great."*

### **3. Funerals of Patriarchs**

This section will describe the death of old patriarchal figures. The deceased were involved in decisive political activities especially in the Communist Party and in the agrarian movement during the peasant's struggle for the land. In both cases there was

a tension in the interpretation of their lives. The use of *Mariachis* was disliked by the members of the Communist Party.

On Wednesday February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1995 Pedro Guerrero, president of the local council, member of the Communist party and former leader of the peasant movement, died in Bogotá in a hospital where he had received treatment for diabetes. Pedro Guerrero was in his late sixties when he died. His funeral was one that featured a *Mariachis* band.

His corpse arrived in Nomeque that afternoon with twenty cars blowing their horns to announce his arrival and a hundred of his sympathisers waiting for him at the main square. Margarita Riquelme and her sisters, members of a prominent Communist family, were all dressed in black and had tears in their eyes. Pedro Guerrero was mourned in the council hall where he was placed in a closed coffin. The coffin had a glass window through which it was possible to observe the corpse lying in a dark suit.

Almost all the authorities of Nomeque and all the important members of the three main political parties, the Liberals, the Communists and the Conservatives gave their condolences to the Guerrero family. Many peasants with their *ruanas*, (the local poncho), also passed by to see Pedro Guerrero's corpse for the last time. People drank *aguardiente*, (sugar cane liquor), in the hall.

The following day at mid-day, a Catholic mass was celebrated for the soul of the Communist leader. Because of the large congregation, the mass took place in the main square in front of some one thousand people.

The band of the "*Escuela Normal*" (one of the two Nomeque's high schools) started the homage by playing the national anthem. The coffin was covered with a red flag with the symbols of the Communist party. Father Melquíades talked about people who gave their lives for their friends, and remembered Pedro Guerrero's attitude

towards the poor and the people that needed his help. Afterwards there were political speeches by the Communist leader Oscar Gonzalez and finally by the Mayor of the town.

At one o'clock a caravan of about fifty cars, full of wreaths, escorted his corpse to the cemetery of Sutagao, some thirty minutes by car. The caravan stopped in Sutagao's cathedral where male members of the Communist party and relatives of Pedro Guerrero transported his coffin on their shoulders.

A band of *Mariachis* was waiting at the entrance of the cemetery to play. Presentación Choachi was very angry about their presence because she associated the *Mariachis* with people murdered or with drug dealers. "*Pedro Guerrero was a peaceful and respectful guy,*" she told me, "*I don't think he would have liked to know that the Mariachis were going to play at his funeral.*" "*Mexican music is for illiterates, lower class people*" she said. She thinks *Mariachis* are used only in male funerals, and generally when a person is killed.

Instead, for Marta the veterinary, a "*serenata*" (serenade) by the *Mariachis* is one of the most beautiful and expensive things people can offer you,. "*Because they could not offer it to him when he was alive they offered it when he is dead.*"

The coffin appeared covered with the Communist red flag. The *Mariachis* started to sing the same "*La cruz de madera,*" "*the wooden cross*" and "*Nadie es eterno en el mundo,*" "*nobody lasts for ever in this world.*" When they placed the coffin in the tomb people threw flowers they stole from the wreaths.

A member of the Communist party said that a comrade was going to say goodbye to Pedro Guerrero in the name of the Party. The politician, from Bogota, made a very conventional speech talking about the Communist party of Colombia, the peasant movement in its fight for its liberation and the example of Pedro Guerrero for

the revolutionary cause. Then the comrade shouted "*Compañero Pedro Guerrero*" and the people answered "*presente*" he repeated "*Compañero Pedro Guerrero*" and people again answered "*presente*" and finally he asked "*¿Hasta cuando?*" Until when? and people answered "*Eternamente.*" Not all attendants participated in this sort of Communist chant, only those directly related with the Party.

Later a couple of male guitar players appeared dressed in old leather jackets. The *Mariachis* played one song and then the other group played the next. The *Mariachis* repeated their already known repertoire of funeral songs plus a Brazilian popular song of Roberto Carlos "*Tú eres mi amigo del alma.*" The other group sang political songs like "*Comandante Che Guevara,*" and also some Colombian folk songs, (they looked like the official singers of the Communist party). Afterwards beer and soft drinks were served to those attending.

Margarita Riquelme (a member of a Communist family) was very sad after coming back from Sibate, a close village, where her uncle was buried. Her uncle, Don Plácido Moreno who was president of the local council, had died in a car accident. Margarita told me proudly that thirty wreaths were sent to his family.

A *Mariachi* band also played at this funeral "*You know, now there is this custom that if the dead wanted two or three songs when he was alive then the Mariachis will sing them in his funeral.*" "*Before people sang religious songs. I certainly do not like this 'parrandera' music in a funeral (parrandera is a word that comes from parranda, a party with many drinking and dancing).*" "*Like in Pablo Herrera's funeral where musicians continued playing rancheras till the night.*"

#### 4. Old people funerals

This section is concerned with the analysis of the funerals of old people who have died from natural causes. Both female and male dead are analysed. None of them were considered politically powerful although, at least by the community standards, a rich person was classified in this group. The community, through its presence, expressed its respect for the elderly.

On Wednesday 21st June 1995, Blanca Gimenez de Castillo an old woman over seventy years old, was buried in Nomeque's cemetery. She died of "*muerte natural*" (natural death) leaving behind numerous sons and grandsons. Father Santana celebrated the mass and said good bye to her corpse at the entrance of the church. He blessed the coffin saying "*que las almas de los fieles difuntos descansen en paz*" (may the souls of the devoted dead rest in peace) and threw holy water over it. The male relatives carried the coffin by hand to the cemetery and four hundred people escorted it.

Nobody sang any songs but one of her daughters said a poem in her honour. Many women had tears in their eyes and screamed and cried when Blanca Gimenez's corpse entered the tomb. The male relatives and friends stood at one side of the tomb, smoking cigarettes, talking and even smiling. However, the closest male relatives surrounded the coffin with the women.

An old man told me that the dead was a very good person who took care of her mother when she was ill. It seems that there is no idea of pollution related with death. During the funeral many people stepped over the tombs to see the burial. A peasant sat down on a stone cross. After the funeral the relatives brought beer and soft drinks to those present.

On Thursday 29th June 1995, German Romero, a peasant from the highlands, was buried. Don Germán Romero died when he was a hundred and three years old. Most of the three hundred to three hundred and fifty people that were present were peasants from Zaldua, the *vereda* where he used to live. He had a wife and many daughters and grandsons.

At the funeral I met a Communist local councillor who told me that the people of Nomeque felt great solidarity for the dead. They did not sing during this funeral and a member of the local council said that the *Mariachis* are a new custom in the village and that they are used when a young person dies tragically. *Don Germán*, he added, *died of a "natural death" at his one hundred three years old, what else can you ask from life?*

Nobody, except Don Germán's wife, was particularly sad, for it was considered that he died very well and in his own bed. After he was placed in the tomb people threw flowers over the coffin. Later on they started to drink outside.

On Thursday the 20th of June 1995 at 2 pm Victorino Castillo Salazar was buried, a rich brother of the poor Gilberto Castillo the grave-digger and sacristan of the village. Apparently, Victorino Castillo became rich because of his contacts with the drug dealers. For Presentación Choachi it was very difficult to explain why this person suddenly managed to buy two bakery shops in the main square and six buses that serviced the route Sutagao-Bogotá.

Don Victorino died of diabetes at sixty-five in a hospital in Bogotá. By the time he died the doctors had already amputated both his legs. He left eight sons and many grandsons. Six buses came from Sutagao. The coffin was transported by car to the cemetery. Along the short road, cars and buses sounded their horns. About three hundred people escorted the coffin and the cars on foot and altogether there were



probably five hundred people present. Every car carried a wreath mostly made in Sutagao. They were easily distinguishable as the ones made in Nomeque are usually less elaborate.

These displays reminded me of the words of Manuel Sanchez in Oscar Lewis'

*"A death in the Sanchez family"*:

*"It's a little ironic but even the dead have their status. The difference in price decides whether you travel first or second class. If you pay more, you get an elegant hearse, a fancy casket, a later model of bus and the mourners are treated with every consideration"* (Lewis, 1969: 92).

During the procession women sang a religious song and prayed Avemarias in a loud voice. In the cemetery the rosary was prayed and afterwards women sang "*Tu eres mi amigo del alma*" (You are my soul friend), from the Brazilian author Roberto Carlos. Some people took advantage of the visit to put some flowers on their relatives' tombs. A woman knocked at a tomb three times and said "Abel, Abel" and started to talk to her former husband. Marta told me people think they can wake the dead if they called them by their own names.

Most of the important political and economic people of the village were present at the funeral. People went down to "*La última lágrima*" and the relatives of the deceased gave beer and soft drinks to them.

On Saturday 22nd July 1995, Jorge Almendralejo was buried at 3 pm.

Although the funeral took place during cold rain, 250-300 people, most of them peasants, escorted the coffin. A funeral car led the procession and, behind it, the coffin was carried on the shoulders of the close male relatives. At the cemetery, many people surrounded the tomb and, probably because of the rain, the walls of the grave crumbled down and Gilberto Castillo, the grave-digger had to dig it again. He made a

speech before covering the grave saying that the deceased was a very good person, a humble and honest worker, and that he would be with the Lord. Nobody sang but women said some prayers. Afterwards the relatives offered beer and soft drinks to those attending.

On Friday, 28th of July 1995, Victoria Soria de Martinez, who died when she was over seventy years old, was buried. After the church service 150-200 people escorted the coffin to the cemetery. At the front a hearse led the procession; behind it four wreaths were carried on foot, and behind them the coffin, carried on the shoulders of the close male relatives. She was not buried in a grave but in a niche. Gilberto Castillo felt obliged to speak again and told the audience that she was a good person and that she was probably resting in peace. Then he repeated three times: "*concédele Señor la paz perpetua*", "Lord, give her everlasting peace". Afterwards the women started to pray *Avemarias*.

The relatives took the flowers out of the wreaths and threw them one by one into the grave except for the two most beautiful ones that were left in front of the roughly constructed wall. At the entrance to the cemetery the relatives gave beers and soft drinks to those present.

On Thursday 7th June 1995, Doña Amelia Luro an old woman over seventy years old was buried in Sutagao cemetery. Male relatives carried the coffin on their shoulders. One hundred and twenty people were present. The ceremony was conducted in silence and in haste, probably because they did not want to coincide with the Ramirez burial that was going to take place some minutes later.

The relatives took the flowers out of the wreaths and threw them into the grave and they put the inscriptions from the wreaths in a safe place to remember those

who had brought them. Doña Amelia was buried in a niche in the cemetery of Sutagao.

On Tuesday 24th October 1995 at 2 pm Doña Dalila Martinez de Castillo was buried. A priest who arrived from Sutagao celebrated the mass in the church. Father Melquiades was out and the family of the dead did not want Father Santana to celebrate the mass. According to Father Santana, when the husband of Doña Dalila died he left him a beautiful piece of the wood of a dead tree. Father Santana wanted to put it in the Natural Science part of the museum because of its unusual form. When Father Santana went to pick it up one of Doña Dalila's daughters offensively said to the Father: "*You Father are always trying to keep everything for yourself*". The sentence was an allusion to robbery. Father Santana got extremely angry and after this incident he did not want ever to have anything to do with this family. In the church there were two hundred people, not that many if we consider that it was a wealthy family.

A white funeral car led the march to the cemetery with two hundred people walking behind the male relatives who carried the coffin on their shoulders. Presentacion told Rosa Carrillo: "*Few people but the ones that must be, here we can see the people of always*". Among the people, I saw the Mayor's wife and his parents, some elegant people from Bogotá, and the more prominent families in town.

When the coffin arrived they opened it so that everyone could have a final look at the corpse. Then the coffin was closed and deposited in a niche. While Gilberto Castillo was closing the niche with bricks a group made up mostly of women prayed for her soul. They prayed a "*Responso*" that consists of the padrenuestro, the avemarias, and a litany that says "*Concédele señor el descanso eterno*", "Lord, give

her eternal peace". Afterwards in *La última lágrima* (The last tear- drop) they offered us beers and soft drinks.

## 5. Funerals of suicides

Suicide funerals observed in the community involved two women. Men seldom committed suicide although there were cases in the past. In Gerado and Alicia Reichel-Dolmatoff's study of Aritama there is a description of a very similar experience in which women were the only ones who committed suicide during their fieldwork although they were told that men also do commit suicide. *...recent cases of suicide involved three women, and we were told that men rarely commit suicide, although some examples were given* (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 405). Orlando Fals Borda in his study of Saucio, a village of the Sabana of Bogota, talks about the social rejection of suicides and about their rarity, the only case his informants could remember was, curiously enough, a girl forsaken by her lover (Fals Borda, 1955: 213). All these cases show us a common pattern in relation to gender. Women are seldom the perpetrators of violence against others but, instead, might exercise violence against themselves.

The contrast between the funerals given to suicides with those of the patriarchs or heroes could not be more dramatic. As we have already seen, suicidal action can be perceived as a crime against society and can be considered negatively by the community (Fals Borda, 1955: 213; Bloch and Parry, 1982: 15-19).

The funerals in Nomeque showed a social rejection of the suicide by most of the male relatives, although, one case shows the tensions and contrast that exist in the community regarding the perception of suicide.

Females and some close male relatives expressed a different perception of suicide. Social solidarity for the dead was among only the closest relatives and friends. In both of the cases the dead were females. In one of the cases the male relatives purposefully refused to behave respectfully during the funerary ceremony. Females, as I have already stated, tried to show respect to the deceased.

Constant conflict and particularly humiliation by family members is a main cause of suicide in Nomeque. Elisabeth Bronfen, in her study on death, femininity and the aesthetic, provides an interesting analytical approach to the causes of female suicide although she has a slight tendency to reduce female bodies to texts:

*“The choice of death emerges as a feminine strategy within which writing with the body is a way of getting rid of the oppression connected with the feminine body. Staging disembodiment as a form of escaping personal and social constraints serves to criticise those cultural attitudes that reduce the feminine body to the position of dependency and passivity, to the vulnerable object of sexual incursions. Feminine suicide can serve as a trope, self-defeating as this seems, for a feminine writing strategy within the constraints of patriarchal culture”* (Bronfen, 1992: 142).

The Dolmatoffs in their study of a Colombian village described the causes of people committing suicide in Aritama:

*The motivations for which a person might commit suicide are family conflicts, jealousy, death of a beloved relative, physical aggression suffered at the hands of a husband, or humiliations and insults suffered innocently from neighbours or family members* (Reichel- Dolmatoff, 1961: 405).

Comparing again the cases found in Nomeque to those described by the Reichel-Dolmatoffs coincidences are astonishing. For example, in one of the three cases of suicide described by them, a woman who lived in the same household with

her mother-in law had several fights with her and finally committed suicide (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 405). The other two cases described by the Reichel-Dolmatoffs were related to women who quarrelled with their husbands (1961: 405). I have compared these examples with the cases observed in Nomeque.

On the 4th February 1995, Marina de Reinal, only 35 years old, was buried. She committed suicide after a life of constant problems with her husband and especially with her mother-in law. At Marina de Reinal's funeral, only forty people, approximately, appeared in the cemetery. There was no mass before and it was a silent ceremony. Gilberto Castillo, the grave-digger, talked to the mother of the dead. She was very sad that no one was there and asked him why. Gilberto told her that nobody liked what the dead woman had done. He told me, later, that committing suicide was a terrible action and that he couldn't understand how people could do it considering the beauty of life.

"Some years ago", Gilberto Castillo told me, "*antes de los concilios*," "before the Councils" (he probably refers to the last Vatican Council), suicides were neither allowed to be buried in the sacred land of the cemetery nor, even, to have any kind of "*honras funebres*" (funerary honours). "*Nowadays, all these norms have changed and people can bury suicides in "camposanto"* (literally: sacred or holy places). Is there a changing attitude towards suicide? Apparently yes: the next example shows the absence of a complete rejection of suicide. However, as we have already seen, death is always contested.

Gilberto continued:

*"Doña Marina was the type that made her husband's life impossible. She was always provoking rows. She was a teacher and could easily abandon her husband and take care of her own children. Even if the children would have to stay with the father, who is the one that has the rights, she could perfectly well have left the children and*

*left home. We had all expected the aggression of her husband, tired of bearing this endless situation, instead she surprised us all deciding to commit suicide."*

On Saturday the 29th of April 1995 a girl seventeen years old, Olga Fernandez, was found dead in the river. She was epileptic and she did not eat nor talk to anyone during her last days. Mario Castillo (Gilberto's brother) thought it was a suicide although some people afterwards, like Presentacion Choachi and other people closely related with the Fernandez family, denied it. The funeral of Olga Fernandez was particularly interesting because of its disruption. No more than eighty people were present and the male relatives carried the coffin to the cemetery on their shoulders.

At the cemetery, there was a physical violent fight between the grave-digger (Gilberto's brother) and a male relative. Apparently the reason was that the digger was not doing his job properly. In fact he could not put the coffin into the grave because he had miscalculated the size of it. He dug the grave again while Olga's sisters cried loudly. One of them started singing a song called "*Amor eterno*", (eternal love). The song was about always remembering the presence of love and wishing that the eyes of the loved person had not shut forever. Simultaneously the grave-digger was making jokes about the singer and the dead. When the song was talking about eternal love he said "*but she is covered with earth actually*" and also "*nobody will remember her.*" While he was saying these things most of the male relatives laughed and celebrated the grave-diggers' jokes. All the women and some of the closest male relatives of the deceased tried to create an atmosphere of respect while most of the other men prevented that possibility through subversion. This funeral highlighted more than any other the tensions surrounding social perceptions related to death.

## 6. Funerals of people killed by the guerrillas

In the following examples I am going to analyse a particular set of violent deaths that were not considered heroic ones by the community. The approval of the guerrillas' actions, or the fear they produce, have a direct influence on the scarcity of people at these funerals. At one funeral, however, many people were present and their angry faces reflected their opposition to what they considered the injustice of the guerrillas' decision to murder that person. None of the following deaths received the special treatment we have seen for those shown above, not even when the deceased was a young male.

Nicasio Varela Vargas was killed by the guerrillas who had accused him of being a cattle robber. He was only twenty-four years old. I asked Gilberto Castillo about Nicasio's funeral. He told me that very few people were present, less than one hundred. I asked him if there was any music in the funeral. He answered that of course there was not. I asked him about the *Mariachis* and then Doña Luz who was listening to the conversation said: "*How can the Mariachis be present with such a horrible death?*"

The guerrillas also killed Victorino Cabrera accusing him of being an informant and a thief. He was buried in Sutagao. There was no funeral advertisement (every time there is a funeral there is an advertisement fixed in the most central part of the town so that everyone can know where and when the funeral would take place). Instead, Gilberto Castillo used the megaphone, just once, to tell the people that the funeral was going to take place that afternoon in Sutagao. I asked Presentación and Gilberto if they were going and both said no. Presentación suggested that I should not go. But, Gilberto added, there are some relatives that will definitely come.



As a third example, Manuel Restrepo Pardales, a man in his late forties was killed by the guerrillas the night before "*Nochebuena*", the 23rd December. He was buried at 3.30 pm, the following day. A popular party was interrupted for some minutes to let the coffin cross the main square in silence. The bells sounded and the Restrepo family came out of the church carrying the coffin.

Two hundred people escorted the coffin in silence with very sad and angry faces. Men were marching in the front line of the procession and the women walked behind praying "*Novenas*." When the coffin was placed in the niche people sang "*tú eres mi amigo del alma*." When I asked again why there were no *Mariachis* they told me "*This was not for Mariachis*." Very few flowers were thrown at the coffin because very few wreaths were sent. Afterwards, beer and soft drinks were offered to those attending.

## 7. Summary

The community expresses through its solidarity its appreciation of the hierarchical position of the deceased; through the quantitative and qualitative differences in the funerary rituals it acknowledges the social significance of the dead. To give a special funeral to a deceased person reflects the interpretation of his or her life. Ambiguous and indeterminate lives are permanently judged and fixed through the irreversible interpretation of funerals.

The deaths of patriarchal political figures and of young males tragically killed can be connected. The participation and behaviour of the people in both types of burials is similar. In fact, a young male who has suffered violent death gains a comparable recognition to that of an old and respectful political figure. However, there is an important difference. In the patriarchal funerals analysed there was a

tension between two groups that fight for appropriation of the main interpretation of the life of the deceased.

In both cases people with more traditional ideas of the patriarchs Communist' struggle were openly against the presence of the *Mariachis* in the burial. This tension can be easily exemplified in Pedro Guerrero's funeral with the rivalry between the *Mariachis* band and the Communist Party official one.

The *Mariachis* were playing "*rancheras*" placing the dead in the Mexican representation of courageous males. The Communist party singers brought to memory Che Guevara and the Communist representation of the collective action and social struggle.

If the *Mariachis* were rejected as dis-respectful and inappropriate, the Communist rites were not accepted unanimously. No wonder the member of the Communist Party who made a non- religious prayer for the comrade Pedro Guerrero obtained the attention of only part of the crowd.

*Mariachis* can be related to the death of relevant political figures or with young people tragically killed, in both cases always males. The funeral of Nicolas Castro, murdered by the Ramirez, showed this pattern. To my surprise, this was not however the case at the funeral of the Ramirez, murdered by the Castros. In the latter there were no *Mariachis*, fewer people attended the funeral and everything in it seemed to be less elaborated and less sophisticated, although it is important to point out that one of the buried corpses in the Ramirez funeral was female. This factor may be of some significance. Another significant difference is the negative judgement the community expressed about the Ramirez family because they were considered the aggressors in their conflict against the Castro family.

When the dead was not an important political figure but an old person, the community did not perform elaborate rituals but showed enormous respect.

There is a sharp contrast between the community participation and behaviour in the funerals of patriarchs and heroes than in those of suicides. Suicides, which during my fieldwork were always been female, present another interesting contrast. On the one hand, suicides were socially rejected by most of the community, but on the other hand some close relatives, particularly women, tried to show respect for the deceased.

Why did the males in one of the burials disrupt the solemnity of the funeral? People imagined themselves in the position of the dead and by behaving in this way men tried to stop the dissemination of the most obvious interpretation of the suicide: that by committing suicide the woman was accusing her family for the death.

Men's authority was threatened and their behaviour can be seen as an answer to this threat. Females, on the other hand, put themselves in the position of the woman and, feeling compassion for her, tended to blame men with their behaviour. In the burial of the cyclist, everyone favoured the (invented) social interpretation. Here the dead was made into a hero and this conversion was unanimous.

A negative judgement, and also fear, contributed to the interpretation of the death of people murdered by the guerrillas as villains rather than as heroes. They were socially condemned and received a sparsely attended burial. Although when the community considered a murder practised by the guerrillas as unjust, the participation and involvement in the funeral was large.

The analyses of the funerals show us that the community constructs an interpretation of the dead that is expressed in the funerals. A violent death can elevate

the dead person to the category of a hero or martyr but can also decide to reject the significance of a person's life.



A gathering at the cemetery entrance after the burial. Alcoholic drinks are offered to all participants, offers that cannot be turned down.



A massive line of participants' vehicles on the one kilometre road that connects the plaza and the cemetery of Nomeque, prior to the burial of a popular political leader – while the coffin is taken from the church to the cemetery.





Funeral of Pedro Guerrero a Communist and Agrarian leader (note the Communist flag covering the coffin and the *Mariachis* band playing)



The funerals of Pedro Guerrero in the city of Sutagao







## Chapter six: Land, women, “mariachis”, and horses

### On drug lords political power and cultural representation

#### Introduction

Drug lords' representations and actions are related to *patronazgo* values and practices. Moreover, as we shall see, drug lords try to incarnate and enact the specific system of representations we call *patronazgo*.

In Nomeque the importance of Mexican popular culture disseminated by films and music but adapted and transformed by Colombian peasants is striking. *Patronazgo* values are merged into this adaptation of Mexican popular culture referred to in this thesis as “*Mexican*” representation. *Narcos* (drug lords, *Narcos* is short and slang for *Narcotraficantes*) try to imitate the values and idealised characters that appeared in Mexican songs and films. In them, violence is idealised and used as a means to construct a male self, a personality, and also to create hierarchy among former equals. In the analysis of violence as performance, violence is understood *from the perspective of the perpetrator* (Kron-Hansen, 1994: 367).

The drug lords' place in this “*Mexican*” representation and in the community of Nomeque is also discussed. I have taken into account, on the one hand, that drug lords are former peasants and, on the other hand, that present peasants want to become drug lords. In this game of reflecting mirrors I try to explain what the drug lords represent to the community and, at the same time, what their own representations of the world are.

The *Narcos* or drug lords presence in the town of Nomeque and their interaction with the community will be described. In this description we shall see the

role of the peasant social origin of the drug dealers: their *Mexican* passion for land, women, *mariachis* and horses.

Why do *narcos* become a social climbing ideal for many peasants? An answer to this question can be found showing how, by their social and economic activities, particularly by their conspicuous consumption, they successfully reconstruct hierarchy in an egalitarian setting.

The drug lords' influence in the existent power relations of the village is going to be a particular object of this analysis, especially in relation to local politics and other forces, such as the guerrillas, operating in it.

### **1. The “Mexican” representation**

All the values present in the peasant set of values I call *patronazgo* are also present in Mexican songs, films, and attitudes accepted and adapted by the community. We are accustomed to reading studies about the impact of American images in other cultures. Here, instead, I will try to describe the impact of Mexican films and music in a Colombian peasant community.

Since the fifties and sixties the Mexican film industry has had a great success among Latin American lower classes particularly among the rural ones (see Schnitman, 1984: 40-45; also Schuman, 1987: 222). However the particular genre of films I am going to talk about, *películas de Charros* (*Charros'* films, *Charros* can be schematically described as Mexican cowboys) originated in the twenties as part of a Nationalistic movement against, but also imitating, American Westerns (de los Reyes, 1993: 235 also Schumann, 1987: 222).

In Colombia, since the forties, these films have been projected in the main squares of towns and villages during the market days using white walls as screens (see Uribe, 1992: 48).

The Mexican film industry produced a series of films with a precise pattern: they represented a world of idealised violence in which a strong male overcame adversity and, finally, meted out justice with his own hands (de los Reyes, 1993: 235, Schumann, 1987: 222).

In these films women have a subordinated role which is useful to make us recognise who is the desirable hero, the *good guy* of the film. The main character is also a great singer of "*rancheras*" (Mexican popular music) and any film stops virtually any time the director considers it appropriate to insert a song (as far as I know it is always appropriate).

In these films there is usually a contest between two male figures: the villain and the hero. The villain sings but the hero sings better, the villain is considered attractive by women but the hero is more so, the villain rides well and has beautiful horses but the hero rides better and his horses are incomparable. Showing their abilities the contestants also express who is the one who deserves to be considered as a hero. Such a person has to be generous. He shows his solidarity among males, by drinking and partying. The hero uses violence to impose his will for justice and the state and its law are normally absent in these films.

Manuel Peña points out that:

*"The twentieth- century Mexican canción- ranchera is noted for the prevalence of one theme- la mujer traicionera (the treacherous woman) and other complementary stereotypes. Stereotypical, also, is the eternal lament of these songs, which is accompanied by the ever-present copa de vino- the wine glass- to help the forlorn lover drown his despair. If we were to interpret the ranchera at face value, we might conclude that Mexican women are a treacherous and debased*

*lot and that Mexican men are emotional weaklings who readily succumb to alcoholism to obliterate their sorrows. Neither of these conclusions would be correct. If anything, the traditional Mexican woman is faithful to a fault, although the second assumption, the Mexican's strong attraction to alcohol, may stand closer scrutiny"* (Peña, 1991: 30).

Colombian rural society has deeply identified with the Mexican rural world as it was represented in Mexican music and films. The people of Nomeque love these Mexican actors and singers; they know their names and discuss among themselves which one is better than the other. Although getting older they still consider Vicente Fernandez the best one.

Fernandez visits Colombia frequently, and many people dream of going to Bogotá to see his performances (a few actually did). It is said that he was personally invited by Pablo Escobar, the famous drug dealer, to sing at his private parties.

## **2. The "Mexican" representation in Nomeque**

The town of Nomeque is known in the region as "*Mexico chico*" (little Mexico). Asking why it was called this, people answered that it was because "*every one has a poncho a hat and a pistol*" and because of the fame of "*peleones*" (fighters, trouble-makers); as we will see, this Mexican representation is everywhere<sup>35</sup>.

The car people use is a type of jeep or land rover they call "*campero*." They often give names to these cars, and most of these names are related to Mexico ("*el Mexicano*," "*Azteca*," "*Mariachi*"). In the region there are several bands of "*Mariachis singers*" who play at the principal social activities. But these Mexican

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<sup>35</sup> Susana Rostas in *The production of gendered imagery*, where she looks at the meaning of gendered images in the context of indigenous revival in urban Mexico, says, *The need to assert or create 'Mexicanity', to search for a Mexican identity, is not new. It has developed over time in terms of an archetypal and/or stereotypical imagery which is reflected in writing produced during the course of the twentieth century* (Rostas, 1996: 209).

images are particularly present in the way they act and perceive themselves. People of the community and often in the whole region, prefer Mexican music to *Salsa* or *Cumbia*, although *Vallenatos*, a popular music from the Atlantic Coast, is listened to as much as "*rancheras*."

This presence of the "Mexican" is particularly important among peasants but is not only restricted to them. I will show an example that demonstrates that these representations also affect professionals.

Pablo Lanza, a veterinarian, was in charge of the UMATA, the stock herders and agricultural advice centre. He had arguments with the people who were under his authority and they complained of his authoritarian manners and tried to remove him from his office. I met Pablo before he had a very important appointment with the Mayor of the village where this issue was going to be discussed. The Mayor had already opted for a solution that would have appealed to King Solomon: neither Pablo nor the people who contested his authority would continue in office. However, before the meeting, although Pablo knew there was something wrong, he still had some hopes that his position would be respected. Pablo Lanza waited anxiously outside the Mayor's office. He prepared for the occasion by dressing himself as a kind of Tex-Mex cowboy; with Texan boots, white trousers and shirt, a hat and an embroidered "*chaleco*" (waist- coat). His dressing up was, in his opinion, proper for the occasion, a way to reaffirm at this difficult moment that he was not only a vet but also a proper man. A proper man in Nomeque dresses as a *Charro*.

### 3. Drug lords and patronazgo values

How are *patronazgo* representations particularly "*Mexican*" representations related to the drug lords? To answer this question I have observed the *Narcos* and their social behaviour. The drug lords connected to the analysed community were poor peasants in the past who, by means of predatory violence, have obtained their power.<sup>36</sup> I will define them, following Anton Blok (1974: 33), as violent peasant entrepreneurs. In an unstable, non- stratified community, with fluid power relations, aggression is a way of establishing domination among former equals.

It is interesting to note that the drug lords' power and respect comes from their merits and not from their inheritance. It is by the use of violence to construct a business and a network of social relations that a Narco establishes power.

As we have seen, Mexican songs ("*rancheras*" and "*corridos*") and films make reference to aggressive males who constantly risk their lives, act as a womanisers, drink and are generous to their male friends. These behaviours are a pattern of conduct for *Narcos*. The *Narcos* are, in fact, peasants who fulfil this image of idealised violence and in doing so they express the peasants' extreme ideal of maleness.

For Alvaro Camacho Guizado the *Narcos* are accepted or repudiated socially because they incarnate the "conservative" values of a sector of the Colombian society (Camacho Guizado, 1994: 50.)

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<sup>36</sup> See in this respect the very interesting but somehow elitist opinion of Salomon Kalmanovitz defining the *narcos* as a "machismo que se salio de madre" (a machismo that lost control)(Kalmanovitz, 1989: 23.)

A drug lord invests his money in buying land, building expensive mansions and breeding horses. He spends it on women and parties<sup>37</sup>. What is the rationale for these actions? A *Narco* expresses, with these actions, peasant ideas and representations of the world that are present in what I called the "Mexican" representation. These ideas relate power and richness to land property, give a great importance to horses as symbols of status. They establish the necessity of conspicuous consumption by which peasants construct links of solidarity, hierarchy and complicity between men.

On the one hand, a drug lord (in the area analysed) fulfils the ideal of maleness and becomes an example for less successful peasants. On the other hand, a drug lord, coming from the lower status of rural society, has a peasant representation of the world and acts in accordance with it. Narcos appropriate the Mexican representation and act it assuming the role of the hero.

#### **4. The narcos in the town of Nomeque**

In the town of Nomeque, the drug lords' power is challenged by the existence of the guerrilla; their presence makes the drug lords' influence less important than in the lowlands although the drug lords do exercise important control over the town's social and political activities.

The uncle and nephew of the Artazas family were involved in the business of drug dealing and laundering money. The Artazas were originally from the village but they, by the time I was doing my fieldwork, were living in a farm in the lowlands between Nomeque and Sutagao, closer to the latter.

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<sup>37</sup> I am obviously talking about drug lords living in a rural area. Camacho Guizado clearly distinguishes the Narcos of peasant origin, performing philanthropic actions in favour of the local people and reproducing their own rural values from the urban bourgeois who, knowing the urban social codes, manages in obtaining more social tolerance from the upper circles (Camacho Guizado, 1994: 217.)

The Artazas were, some years ago, related to "*El Mexicano*" (not surprisingly the Mexican representation appears again), the famous and feared member of the Medellin Cartel and the lieutenant of Pablo Escobar.<sup>38</sup> "*El Mexicano*," was in fact not Mexican but a former Colombian peasant born in Pacho, Cundinamarca. El Mexicano controlled an important area between Cundinamarca and Boyacá before the police killed him.

Apuleyo Artaza, one of his lieutenants was known for having committed three murders in the past before he became rich. He became a millionaire "*de la nada*" (from being no one) as an envious member of the municipality pointed out.

The Artazas were also supporters of the Liberal party. Alvaro Martinez, his lawyer, was a candidate to become an MP in the last national elections but failed. People did not vote for him mainly because of his brother who was a famous killer and usually does the dirty jobs for the Artazas. In fact, his brother was the killer the Artazas use when they need one but, and this was people's major complaint, he was also a killer for himself and in a very "unjustified" way.

Four years ago he killed a pensioner after a discussion in which the poor man asked him to turn the volume of the music down in his car because it was late and he could not sleep. Tiburcio Martinez got angry, insulted him, and continued playing the music. During the same week he was driving past a bar along the road to Sutagao when he saw the pensioner again, he stopped the car and shot him in front of the treasurer of the town and other local authorities. No one denounced the killer to the police.

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<sup>38</sup> Maria Victoria Uribe makes also reference to the Mexican names used by Rodriguez Gacha to name his haciendas and his horses (Uribe, 1992: 48.)



## 5. Horses and land

In Colombia, there is a special breed of horse: the "*caballo de paso fino colombiano*" (the fine step Colombian horse). This horse is the result of the Spanish introduction of the Castilian and Andalusian canter horses in the difficult mountainous topography of this region, this combination produced a very elegant and flexible horse with a special step. The "*paso fino*" horse is small and very comfortable to ride, although its flexibility depends mostly on the ability of the rider (and some riders, in the region, are exceptionally skilled). A skilled rider is the one who can exercise complete control over the animal without forcing it or showing any effort in his task.

These horses are bought and sold by the Narcos in numerous operations and are also shown as a social trophy to be admired. The Artazas in addition to many other drug lords, are very much interested in horses, in fact one of their main legal activities is to sell and buy horses. These transactions are, on the one hand, a way of laundering money and, on the other hand, refer to the acquisition and exhibition of power and status.

Horses were very much appreciated by the traditional Colombian upper class; partly because of that, and partly because of their peasants' representation of property, drug dealers wanted them. They poured their money into the horse business and got the best ones. When the drug business money entered the horse circuit, the traditional upper class was not able to compete anymore. The Horse Breeding associations were gradually dominated by the overwhelming presence of the drug lords.

The acquisition of horses by the *Narcos* can easily be compared to the process of land acquisition. In some areas of Colombia, like the warm valleys below Nomeque, around Sutagao, the traditional landowners were obliged to sell their

property to the drug dealers. Drug lords are obsessed with acquiring and possessing land <sup>39</sup>. Even when there was a lot of pressure to do it, and if the non co-operative attitude of the owner could put a threat to his life, drug lords usually paid very good money for the land (see Camacho Guizado, 1994: 212; Reyes Posada, 1994: 120).

A drug lord will try to buy property in the territory that is under his control. *El Mexicano*, in his struggle against the strong man of the Emerald centre in Muzo, Boyacá, bought enormous stretches of land in an attempt to surround the emerald zone with property under his control (see Uribe, 1992: 19).

Members of a traditional family told me the story of one of these acquisitions of land made by "*El Mexicano*" in Pacho, Cundinamarca. "*El Mexicano*" first sent one of his lieutenants who told the family the interest his lord had in their property and he arranged a meeting with "*El Mexicano*" in a local cafe.

From that moment the family realised that they had no other option but to sell the *hacienda*.<sup>40</sup> The father of the family and two of his sons went to the interview with the drug lord. They remember a big fat man chewing "*bazuco*" (a primary elaboration of Coca) and drinking *aguardiente*. "*El Mexicano*" respectfully called the father of the family "*Don*". He had known him from the time when he was a young wage labourer and he temporarily worked in the *hacienda*. "*El Mexicano*" wanted the *hacienda* with all the furniture and everything that was in it, and he offered an excellent price for it. There was no room for discussion.

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<sup>39</sup> Alvaro Camacho Guizado affirms that recent studies demonstrate that one third of the most fertile land of Colombia is in Narcos' hands; that means three million hectares, approximately (Camacho Guizado, 1994: 212.)

<sup>40</sup> Violence is also related to drug lords' acquisition of land. Alejandro Reyes Posada notes that 49% of the municipalities that are severely affected by violence have been the object of relevant acquisitions of land by the drug lords (Reyes Posada, 1994: 120.)

Later, the wife of the owner asked to keep one wardrobe with no economic value attached to it only a sentimental one. "*El Mexicano*" refused to satisfy such desire. He was not only buying a piece of land he was also buying all the objects that were owned by his predecessors. He was symbolically acquiring his status as a landlord.

## **6. The fair of Nomeque**

Agrarian Fairs are very common popular feasts in Cundinamarca and throughout Colombia. They are popular fairs where farm animals and products are exhibited. During my fieldwork, the municipality of Nomeque organised a fair for the first time in the last five years.

The fairs had been suspended in the past because of violent incidents between drunken people. There is a national ranking that classifies the fairs in relation to their importance and continuity and because of the suspension, Nomeque's fair had been ranked for this particular occasion as a third class one. The chance of having the fair again after some years produced excitement in the atmosphere, with everyone commenting about the forthcoming event.

Three months before the event the Mayor of the town, together with the local council's members, created a special commission called "*Junta de Ferias*" whose function was to organise the fair of Nomeque. Artemio Ramirez was nominated president of the commission and Alvaro Martinez vice-president. Artemio Ramirez, a former Mayor of the town, was a rich peasant who had land in the highlands and used to buy and sell horses to the drug lords. Alvaro Martinez, previously mentioned, was the lawyer of the local drug lords, and also the brother of a famous killer.

The commission literally stole the cultural office of the town and removed the cultural secretary from it. They decided the date of the fair and what type of activity was going to take place. Particularly important was the decision that allowed the participation of horses from other areas and allowed the drug lords to display their horses and those of their friends.

The election of a Potato Queen was an important event that implied the previous elections of participants, each one representing a different "*vereda*", (local unit) or school. The Artazas maintained a low profile during the organisation of the fair although they were behind the most important events and decisions.

At 5 am on Friday 26th of May a *Mariachis* band woke up the village with their music and noise and the fair of Nomeque started. In the plaza, and along the two main streets that led to the bullfighting ring several tents selling *aguardiente* and beer were situated. In the plaza some tents sold also "*carne asada con papas*" (beef with potatoes) and "*Lechona*" (a dish made with the meat of a young pig mixed with rice and some peas).

### **6. 1 The *cabalgata***

At twelve o'clock the "*cabalgata*", a social event that consists of riding horses around the town, started. There was no particular contest involved in it, and no trophy to be won for there was no need for trophies; the riders were competing in showing their horses and their abilities in handling them. More than seventy horses and riders participated. Most of the participants were men but some ten women also took part in the "*cabalgata*." The men were dressed up in white with big Panama hats and Texan Leather boots. The women showed more variety in their costumes and their hats were

more diverse and sophisticated. In the "*cabalgata*," the most impressive horses were again the ones ridden by the Artazas. While the *cabalgata* was taking place around the town everyone was looking and making comments on the horse of one, or the hat of another or about the difficulties someone was having in controlling his horse or, on the contrary how good a rider another one was. The brother of the late Mayor of Sutagao who had been killed by the guerrillas a year before was riding a beautiful white horse, using this opportunity to launch his campaign among the people of his town present at the fair.

## 6. 2 Floats and would- be queens

When the riders disappeared over the horizon, the floats carrying the candidates to the beauty contest made their entrance onto the scene. Every candidate was supported by a group of people who organised the construction of the float and the lending of the dresses. On previous days every participant had been told how to walk, how to use the make up, how to behave, how to dress and what to answer and say in order to become queen.

There was a makeup course organised by the *Junta de Ferias* for all the participants. A woman in her forties, who worked in the make up of regional beauty queens, taught the make-up course.

Some participants, who had better chances and were more interested in winning, searched for women who were more in touch with "modernity," sophistication, and Bogotá. A participant asked Clarita, a teacher, how to act and behave in order to become a beauty queen. The girl was then invited to Clarita's home and was told how to walk and to smile. Some encyclopaedias were also

provided by Clarita in order to help the contestant to answer the questions related to "*cultura general*" (general culture).

The ideal model for the contest was provided by the National Beauty Contest. This national pageant takes place in Cartagena every year. All the Colombian regions are represented in what is considered as one of the main Colombian popular events (taking into account the multitudinous audience it has, only international football matches have more audience and popularity). The National Beauty Contest was also considered to be very important by the people of Nomeque. All the people in town, both men and women, knew everything about the National contest, and could say the names of the principal candidates before the day of the election and discuss the most accurate details of the girls wanting to be queens.

Most of the floats used to carry the candidates were transformed lorries whose back space was used to carry the participant, her "*acompañante*" (her escort, a young man dressed in an elegant suit), and her court. The participants represented every *vereda* (local unit) and school of Nomeque. Some of the floats were very humble and simple while others, like the ones of the two high schools were more sophisticated. Most of them recreated a particular aspect of the peasants' life, or the history of the place, dressed as peasants, Indians or conquerors.

One of them, for example, represented the legend of Zoratama. I have already related the story of the tragic Indian princess who helped Lázaro Fonte, the Spanish conqueror. As we have seen, after Fonte's death in the jungle, Zoratama was deprived of all her properties and, desperate, committed suicide throwing herself and her son, born of her relation with Fonte, into the cold waters of the Guatavita lake.

### 6. 3 The party

During the late afternoon and the evening a group of "*música norteaña*," Northern music, (from the North of Mexico) a kind of modern music with Mexican influence, played in the plaza. They were called "*Los Patrics de Colombia*" and were dressed in a kitsch and extremely colourful Tex-Mex style.

People danced until the late evening. Everyone was dancing and drinking and most of them continued drinking for the three days of the fair. Some peasants walked around the town with difficulty, completely drunk, insulting or fighting each other. At night there were fireworks. The soldiers who were keeping order at the fair were also drinking and dancing.

### 6. 4 The next day

The next day started with a musical duel between two *Mariachi* bands in the bullfighting arena. They sang one *ranchera* each and people expressed their preferences for either band. There was also a "*guerrilla*" of roosters, which consisted of five fighting cocks that fought against each other, and everyone considered that very amusing to watch. During the day there were competitions of cows, bulls and oxen. There were considerable variations between cows in the same categories, for example, a big, well-nurtured cow, competed against a quite thin one. At night, there was a big dancing party where everyone was drunk as if at a carnival. The atmosphere allowed people to act in a way that would have been considered bad on an ordinary day. Old men chased young women touching them and very young girls danced with their friends and kissed each other passionately and in public. While two orchestras were playing alternatively during the party, the inspector, a young female lawyer, controlled the security of the event from the sidelines and ordered the soldiers to go

and stop any argument or fight which developed between peasants. There was only one serious incident, when a drunken peasant stabbed another one with his knife and managed to disappear before the soldiers arrived.

## 6. 5 The horse contest

The most popular event, which everyone looked forward to, was the horses' event. The Sunday started with the horses' contest. The public crowded the bullfighting arena where excellent horses were to be shown. The most favoured horse was, as I already explained, the "*paso fino Colombiano*."

Most of the horses are property of the drug lords who considered them as symbols of status, fortune, and power. The horses were admired by the crowd. The public made constant comments about which horse was most beautiful, which rider the best and, especially, who was the owner of each animal.

The Artaza brought their own horses from their ranch "*El Monte*," and helped the display of the horses that came from "*La Estirpe*", a breeding farm whose owner was, in the past, "*El Mexicano*". The show took place in the bullfighting arena. During the morning, the horses were shown in competition and, in the afternoon, along with their riders. In the competition horses and riders showed their abilities in different disciplines trotting, cantering, and galloping; trying to demonstrate that their horses were most flexible and their riders the best ones. The horses passed one by one to the arena performing some prefigured circles. Then, they cantered over a platform that showed the harmonious rhythm of the horse by the noise of the steps. Judges were officially invited by the association of breeders. The Arizas' horses and the ones of "*La Estirpe*" won all the first prizes except for one horse of Graciliano Pardo who obtained one first prize.



During the contest "*Marco Polo*," a horse which was not in the competition, was presented; it was a superb animal that won the admiration of the crowd. The horse had already won many first prizes in the most important fairs and competitions. Pablo Lanza made me look at its back, on it I read "J. R. G." the initials of Jose Rodriguez Gacha, "*El Mexicano*" who, as I explained, had been killed. Nobody probably was brave enough to erase the initials after his death, or, perhaps, nobody was interested in doing so.

### **6f The pageant**

The Artazas paid for a band of *Mariachis* who played for the five days of the fair. They paid for the prizes of the participants in the election of the beauty contest, and for the royal crown of the "potato queen" that would be elected on the last night of the fair. The drug barons also offered tons of beer and *aguardiente* to their friends and acquaintances.

On the last night the election of the queen took place in the theatre of the "*Escuela Normal*". There was a crowd of about 800 people. The Artazas and their court of currying favour supporters (some fifty people altogether composed of other drug lords from Bogotá, some male friends and some dyed blond exuberant women) were placed in reserved seats in front of the show.

After some traditional dances performed by a folklore school of dance for children from Bogotá, "*Los Soles Aztecas*" (The Aztec Suns), the band of *Mariachis* started its presentation, playing Mexican songs. The *Mariachis* had been directly paid by the Artazas. The drug barons constantly contracted *Mariachis* in their frequent and famous parties that they organised at their farm.

After singing some three songs the leader of the band took the microphone and told the crowd that a person who loved Nomeque with all his heart and who had, through his actions, made an important contribution to the fair (he briefly enumerated them) was going to say some words.

After this introduction, Apuleyo Artaza, the drug baron, went to the stage and gave a speech in which he explained how he had helped Nomeque and how much he loved his village. His friends and most of the public enthusiastically clapped their hands in his favour. Then he took the microphone in his hands and started to sing a song. He sang "*rancheras*" and the "Mariachis" band played their instruments. His second song was a "*ranchera*" from Vicente Fernandez's, a famous Mexican singer, repertoire.

The song says: "*El orgullo de haber nacido en el barrio más humilde*" (the pride of being born in the most humble neighbourhood), "*alejado del bullicio de la falsa sociedad*" (far away from the noise of the fake society). When he said "*falsa sociedad*" (false or fake society) he stressed the words looking without respect and also, it seemed to me, full of resentment at the place in which the Mayor and other "respectable" people were sitting.

After singing two songs Apuleyo Artaza called his uncle who also sang one more song. When he had finished all Artaza's friends and most of the public clapped their hands. They looked as if they were having a great time. Although, not all at the assembled public expressed the same feelings and Presentación Choachi, the most charismatic of the Choachi sisters, did not clap her hands and looked angrily at them. Later on she told me she was very angry about it and thought it was something that could be a future problem for the Mayor of the town who had not intervened. Pablo

Lanza, who fought the friends of the dealers in the fair commission, did not go to the election of the queen because he already knew what was going to happen.

Then, the chairman of the "Junta de Ferias", Artemio Ramirez, made a speech in which he expressed his sympathy and admiration for the young Apuleyo Artaza. Then it was the turn of the Mayor. He hardly said anything knowing that he was in a very ridiculous position. He thanked the people of Nomeque for the peacefulness of the fair, which had finished without a death, a very positive occurrence.

Some years ago, the local authorities had decided to suspend the fair of Nomeque after one in which three people had died. "*No hay feria sin muerto*" (there is no fair without a dead person) is always said by the people, expressing the idea that a death is an essential aspect of the fair. He also talked about the importance of creating a good image for Nomeque, and finished his discourse exclaiming "*Viva Nomeque*".

Then, the election of the beauty queen began. The participants paraded several times, showing their bodies in different expensive but lent dresses. They later on answered several general questions. Some girls were in serious trouble with the questions, and made the audience laugh with their weird answers. The questions were very diverse and arbitrary. Some participants were asked about literature or geography, others about what they thought they would do if they were crowned queens, another one referred to the importance of presenting a good image of Nomeque.

The people started to shout showing their preferences for one specific candidate against the rest. The showman, trying to calm them down, said: "*lets behave properly for the image of Nomeque*". The Artazas had their own candidate, the daughter of a rich peasant economically connected with them. They openly

expressed their support for her, their friends shouted her name and most of the audience joined them.

There were three judges in charge of the election. One of them was a young lawyer working with Alvaro Martinez, the Artazas' lawyer. The others were connected to the government. One of them was the tourism secretary of the Cundinamarca region and the other one was a woman with a more obscure position in the regional bureaucracy. The potato queen elected was Martina Pardales, the candidate the Artazas supported.

## 7. Some disagreements

After the event Pablo Lanza said that the mistake was not to let Artazas sing but to let them spend eight million pesos (ten thousand dollars) in the Feria.

*"They bought the prizes for the horses and also the ones for the reinas (queens). They also brought the Mariachis band. But in fact they did not pay them four millions as they said. They will ask for that amount of money if I want them. But the Artazas are constantly giving parties and using them so they will ask him for two millions not more. The horse breeder La Estirpe from Bogotá is owned by a former testafarro (name giver) of Rodriguez Gacha. Even the best horse had the brand J. R. G. It was a mistake mezclar la mierda con el chocolate (to mix shit with chocolate)."*

Presentación Choachi was very angry with the election of the queen. She said:

*"The Artazas talked in front of all the political authorities of the village. The Governor of Cundinamarca was represented by her secretary of tourism, and nobody had the guts to stop the Artazas performing their payasadas (clown's actions)".*

## 8. Narcos and Mariachis

Partying at their estates and drinking with other males were the Artaza's main known social activities. The *Mariachis* were an obligatory presence in Artazas' parties. They

are a necessity in every drug dealer's celebration. Every important Narco, like a medieval lord, has his own court musicians. This economic dependency between the *Mariachis* and drug lords is not usually a direct one. The Artazas did not pay their *Mariachis* monthly but for each individual event. However, the Artazas were by far the main source of income for them and it would have been impossible for the *Mariachis* to play at another party if the Artazas asked for them.

The "*Soles Aztecas*" once played a song about "*El Mexicano*" which was composed by his *Mariachis* band and celebrates his goodness and generosity, and also the way he was betrayed and killed by an evil and anonymous gang of policemen.

The song represents "*El Mexicano*" as a very brave and generous man who loved to have fun with women<sup>41</sup> and friends but who was very much envied by his enemies who finally killed him. The court musicians were used to give eternal life to "*El Mexicano*" and he was transformed into an idealised male, a myth.

On another occasion, I was at a barbecue with Walter, a young lawyer, when he put a cassette of music on, in which a mariachis band played a song in honour to Apuleyo Artaza. I asked him about it and his answer was "*The people who are in those things, with a lot of money, paid for people to sing and cheer them up, like Pablo Escobar used to do*". Walter, is now working with Alvaro Martinez the lawyer of the Artazas. He is responsible for the Civil Law cases and Alvaro the Criminal cases. Since then, he has changed his old car for a better one and looks richer. He told me that he did not know them well but Alvaro and his brother (a famous killer) were very good friends of the Artaza. Walter was invited by Apuleyo to a "*feria*" in Velez,

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<sup>41</sup> As Peña notes in his analysis on the folklore of Mexican workers, "... the woman is singled out for a special, if ignominious, role in the folklore of machismo. Typically, in the *charrita colorada* (red jokes) she may be reduced to a state of absolute sexual passivity, an unwitting object of the sadistic amusement of the macho" (Peña, 1991: 33).

Santander to show horses with him. When Walter got drunk he told me he also received two horses as a present from the Artazas. One of them was a son of the famous "*Carbonero*" which was Apuleyo Artaza's best horse and as such had a song made in his honour. Some women talked in a loud voice about Artaza's parties, expressing their discontent and the belief that something nasty was always present at them. Men, instead, were proud to say that they had been invited.

### 9. "Testaferros"

The drug business creates a very *sui generis* entrepreneur less interested in a capitalistic ethos of accumulation than in the acquisition of status symbols and in the construction of networks of loyalty (see, Camacho Guizado, 1994: 214 also Santino, 1990: 63). Drug lords accumulate enormous amounts of illegal money they cannot deposit legally. They need to launder money and to do so they use other people who receive their money and put their name on some legal activity. These name givers are called "*testaferros*".

About ten years ago, Gonzalo Sidonia was responsible for the "*Caja Agraria*" a bank that gave subsidised credit to the peasants. He was in charge for almost ten years but he was sacked when his superiors considered he was acting in a *disorganised* way (a euphemistic way of saying that he probably robbed some money from the bank).

People continued to love him because he did not make any problems when he gave credit to the peasants. This was in part a consequence of his character, but credits were given easily because during that time this was promoted by the state. Gonzalo Sidonia, a funny and friendly person who likes to drink with his friends, is

now in the construction business, which is one of the main ways by which drug money is laundered.

Gonzalo Sidonia has become a very close friend of the Artazas. He is constructing some cheap apartments in Sutagao (nobody, in the construction business, invests in Nomeque any more), and the money came from Artaza's. Gonzalo talked to me several times about laundering money abroad and he suggested to me in a rather cryptic way, that if I was interested I would have to meet the Artazas brothers.

I went once with him and his *fiancée*, María, who was a young girl who had recently finished her studies in reforestation, to one of the Artazas' estates. Maria, with Gonzalo's help, obtained a job reforesting part of Artaza's property. I asked him who the owner of the *finca* (farm) was. Gonzalo told us that the *finca* (ranch) was the property "*de un amigo mío, Apuleyo Artaza*" (of a friend of mine, Apuleyo Artaza).

When we arrived, the Artazas were not present at their farm but Gonzalo asked for Don Bernardo the administrator of the house. He was not there either but, finally, a very humble peasant who treated us with extreme respect invited us to go in. Sidonia showed us the stable with about twenty "*paso fino*" horses, and pointed out the most beautiful and precious ones.

While we were there, Maria volunteered that a person had been killed here not so long ago. When was it? I asked her. About a month ago, she answered me. Gonzalo who must have heard the conversation intervened saying he did not know anything about it. Maria insisted, apparently unaware of Gonzalo's embarrassment, "*era un peón de la finca*" (he was a worker of the farm). Gonzalo then replied "Oh yes now I remember, he was a *palafrenero* (the person who keeps the horses) but he also was a *marihuanero* (a marihuana smoker) and a very bad person so they sacked

him, and afterwards bad people killed him not far away from here. Maria said "*They told me he was killed here and that he was still working for the finca*". *Who killed him?* Nora asked. *Oh nobody will ever know, as always,* replied Gonzalo happy to finish the conversation.

On another day Gonzalo visited us and invited us to another of Artaza's properties, their ranch in Carmen de Apicala in "*tierra caliente*", the hot lowland. One day before the appointment he excused himself and said that maybe on another occasion we could go but it was impossible to do it that very weekend. He disappeared for several months and although people told me about him I never met him again.

At the same time, the Artazas and their lawyer disappeared for a while. Some people commented that they were involved in a dirty business related with a estate they bought illegally. The owner had died and the inheritors were living in the USA. The Artazas, with the advice of Alvaro Martinez, Artaza's lawyer, bought the land from the guardian of the property who was not allowed to sell it. Apparently the owners returned and employed a stronger protection than the Artazas had. The Artazas were threatened with death and decided to disappear for a while.

Other people in Nomeque are known for their contacts and financial relations with the drug dealers. The Castillo family, who were very poor in the past, were suspected of receiving money from the Narcos. Apparently, their economic situation was very bad before one of the Castillo brothers, a teacher who was working in Pacho, Cundinamarca, returned to the village with money to buy two nice bakery shops that he gave to his brothers. He also bought four buses that go from Sutagao to Bogotá, and a nice house. "*Suddenly he resigned from his job as a teacher and returned to the village full of money*", an informant told me. "*All his brothers have*



*apartments now, I don't know any baker who has made such money in a poor village".*

## 10. The social perception of the business

People in Nomeque perceive drug dealing not as a criminal action but as a business and a product of necessity. They think that if "*los gringos*" (the Americans) did not consume drugs there would be no business. Drug dealers are mostly considered "*unos verracos*" (in this case, great tough chaps.) They are brave men who have managed to make money and to distribute it to the peasants.

Because of their need to launder money, Narcos distribute it among the poor, eg. if someone needs to buy a small farm or start a business, he can always go and see a Narco and asked for his help. In this way the Narcos construct links of subordination placing themselves at the top of this network of solidarity and reciprocity like the big men of Melanesia (see Godelier, 1982: 205)<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> The coincidences and differences can be compared although the some coincidences are quite remarkable in this scheme made by Godelier on the Big man (Godelier, 1992: 205):

- He is smart, prudent, selfish, a good speaker y knows how to convince.
- He uses a strategy of gifts and anti-gifs
- He is a great producer, but, above all, a great accumulator and re-distributor of riches.
- He is polygamous, has several women and children.
- Those who he has helped help him, and above all, youngsters who try to get married but do not own pigs and the other riches that must appear in the dowry.
- Above all, he represents his lineage, his village, his clan, and, on some occasions, his tribe too.
- His name and fame are spread very far.
- He turns into the privileged target of the gifts and anti-gifts of the other Big men of the neighbouring tribes.
- He distinguishes himself from all the common men, and especially from the young warriors "with their bloodshot eyes", whose violence and impetuosity are a disturbance in peaceful times.

The person involved in such an operation does not have to sign any written contract but he knows that he puts his life and that of his family in danger. He knows that, from that moment until the end of his life, he is subordinate to the drug dealer and that he owes him a favour. He also knows that the drug dealer can ask for his money back whenever he wants.

Most of the problems appear when the drug dealer dies and his family want to recover the money. This risk is directly related with the breakdown of the personal relations that exist between the drug lord and the name giver. Sometimes the drug dealer's family may also kill the "*testaferros*" (name givers.) Those are the iron rules of the game but, although risky, many people prefer to play it rather than continue living in poverty

## 11. Summary

In this chapter I studied the influence of the *patronazgo* image present in the drug lords' actions and representations. *Patronazgo* representation is accurately portrayed in Mexican films and songs in which violence is idealised. In it, male figures are strong, act as womanisers, are extremely generous to their male friends, and triumph over their enemies using any possible means.

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- He takes part in the family relationship among lineages and in the political relationships among clans, y arbitrates conflicts.
  - He leaves his riches as a legacy to his offspring, also a fame and the companions in other tribes, of whom they can avail themselves so that also they can grow in the sheaf of inter-ceremonial exchanges.
  - If he transforms reciprocity into extortion, he becomes, little by little, a despot. One day his faction will abandon him and then the end will come: he might die, murdered.
  -

The *Narcos* attempt to fulfil this image in their everyday behaviour. Through their actions they represent successfully the extreme male ideal of the community. In the *Narcos*, peasants recognise their idealised heroes. Their activities, instead of being condemned are, quite the contrary, justified and admired by the peasants. On the other hand, the drug lords included in this study are peasants who by using extreme aggression obtained power and a better, though risky, living. Living dangerously, knowing that death may come at any moment, is an essential aspect of *Narcos* life.

Horses and land are both important to peasants' ideas about status and richness and *Narcos* use them as conspicuous consumption to show their new status. In the acquisition of land and horses they attempt to acquire the traditional landowner's status in what was a hierarchical society. In this specific respect they can be compared to Anton Blok's statement on the origin of the Mafia in Sicily. The incapability of the State and the Sicilian landlords to ensure order and control resulted in a social vacuum which was filled by a violent social group of peasant origin, the *mafiosi* (Blok, 1974: 33).

Through feasts and parties drug lords show their social solidarity and strengthen their ties with peasants reinforcing their power in the community. Like modern feudal lords or Melanesian "*Big men*" the *Narcos* gain power over the peasants by contracts and agreements in which they impose their might. One way of laundering money is to give it to other people who will start a legal business, or buy a plot of land with it. By doing that, the *Narcos* not only launder their money but also create hierarchical links of complicity and solidarity among the peasants (see Camacho Guizado, 1994: 214).

The *Narcos* placed themselves at the top of a new hierarchical system showing not only that they are successful men but also that they are the men, the fulfilment of *patronazgo* ideas of masculinity.



A band of Mexican style *Mariachi* musicians performing during a popular feast in the streets of Nomeque.







Nomeque men during the *cabalgata* (procession of riders) during the fair.





A prominent politician looking for votes.



One of the beauty queen candidates during the *Feria de la papa* in Nomeque.





Beauty queen candidate with her escort on her carriage (above) and her assistants carrying Colombian potato dishes (below) during the *Feria de la papa*.



## Chapter seven: The Guerrillas in the town of Nomeque

### Introduction

The guerrillas have a key presence in the town of Nomeque and play a decisive role with considerable influence on the power relations of the entire unstable area. In order to understand their privileged position it is important to analyse the historical reasons that lead to it, and also to compare the guerrilla's values and representations to those of the analysed community. The guerrilla's successful and constant presence in the region cannot be understood without reference to the correspondence between the guerrilla's and the community's sets of values. Communist and Catholic ideologies have intrinsic ideas of solidarity and fraternity that positively feed back with the community and are picked-up by it. This convergence creates another type of violence: The guerrillas.

When I started my fieldwork, I was particularly interested in the relationship between the peasants and the guerrillas. I wanted to know if the revolutionary potential of the peasant movement could be activated by the guerrillas (see Huizer, 1980: 2-5). Instead, I found out that the peasant movement more or less died after the successful division of the big *haciendas* into small family plots.

The guerrilla's actions contradicted my previous expectations. Probably due to the peasant origin of the majority of the guerrillas and to their network of personal relations in the village, the guerrilla's became a defensive force interested in the protection of the peasants from other social classes and institutions that threatened their survival as a social entity. In Nomeque the guerrillas try to maintain a social order and a common idea of social solidarity in a community which is involved in a rapid process of social differentiation.

In the past, the guerrillas were related to the social struggle for the land. This is why ideas of egalitarianism and solidarity were common within the guerrilla's as well as the peasants' populist representations. The guerrilla's violence was expressed in a collective way; guerrilla's representations lacked most of the individualistic components of violence that were present in the drug lords.

This chapter outlines the guerrilla's struggle for the control of the social order of the village. Analysing the guerrilla's presence in the community uncovers essential information about both the way they act and how the community perceives them. The chapter will describe the particular way the guerrillas impose their power on the community. It lends importance, more than any written law, to a series of narratives that offer precedents of improper behaviour for community members. All these stories reflect what is correct and what is incorrect behaviour according to the guerrillas. And, no less important, what would be the punishment expected if the behaviour is incorrect by the guerrilla's standards. This order of things seems to be at least partially accepted by the community. Moreover, people seem to know the borderlines of what they have to avoid and the ultimate consequences of their acts. As Boudon points out, *In Colombia's "brown" areas, then, the guerrillas are the de facto state, even though the real state may maintain a presence de jure* (Boudon, 1996: 290).

The chapter will describe the influence and limits of *la ley del monte*, the law of the wild forest, and its contrast with the legal system of the Colombian national state. It will particularly discuss the community's actions which need to ask "the boys" (guerrillas) for permission (*pedir permiso a los muchachos*).

The guerrillas were often present in the community. Time after time they arrived in Nomeque dressed in their uniforms and carrying their weapons. However,

they were always disguised as peasants, with hats and the typical *ruana*, mingling with villagers. They were also present in an even more subtle way defining and controlling the life of the town of Nomeque.

### 1. Historical background

As outlined in the historical introduction, the guerrillas were organised almost fifty years ago during the turbulent period called "*la Violencia*." On the 11th April 1948 when Jose Eliecer Gaitan, a populist leader of the Liberal party, was assassinated in Bogota, most of the country was affected by massive riots, and immediately afterwards by governmental repression. This divided the country again into Liberal and Conservative factions. This civil war was fought mainly in the countryside where killings and revenge were the norm (see Hobsbawm, 1980: 264.)

By 1948 in Sumapaz, the peasants were already in occupation of most of the land and were fighting with the local landlords. At the beginning, in the Sumapaz area, the guerrillas were created by the peasants as a self- defence group against the repression of the Conservative government. "*Republicas Independientes*" ("independent republics") were created in rural areas.<sup>43</sup> A "*Republica independiente*" was created in the Sumapaz, with its own political organisation, which distributed and divided the land among the peasants (Legrand, 1986: 129).

Alfredo Molano describes the guerrillas' contribution to the organisation of the agrarian colonies:

*Insofar as the guerrillas were able to create defences for the colonists they tended to control the roles of the merchant and the intermediaries*

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<sup>43</sup> Hobsbawm never consider too seriously this denomination (Hobsbawm, 1983: 269.)

*and to provide for or attend to the population's most basic needs, such as education, health, and justice. Economically, the guerrillas' power was based on contributions or taxes from the colonists, paid either in cash or commodities or with labour. The colonists' obligations usually were fulfilled through collective work, either on "organization farms" or on the private property of others (Molano, 1992: 205).*

Later, after 1953, when the Rojas Pinilla government was interested in the "pacification" of the region, the guerrillas were divided between *Libres* (Liberals) and *Comunes* (Communists) (Pizarro Leongomez, 1991: 100.) By 1954 these two fractions violently fought for pre-eminence. In Sumapaz, Liberal landowners fought to have their land back. Most of the Sumapaz guerrillas joined the Communist Party. Since then the guerrillas have continuously been present in the life of the village.

In Gonzalo Sanchez's and Donny Meertens's opinion, in the Sumapaz region which has a long tradition of organised struggle for the land, in a short period of time, it was possible to transform a network of agrarian organisations into a large and disciplined guerrilla movement (Sanchez and Meertens, 1983: 39.) As Daniel Pecault notes, Colombia is also the only South American country where for forty years guerrilla warfare has formed the permanent background to social and political life (Pecault, 1992: 218).

There were also international factors that contributed to the birth of the guerrillas in Colombia, such as the impact of the Cuban revolution and Guevara and Debray's *foco* theses on the generation of an *insurrectionary armed enclave* (see Pizarro, 1992: 171).

Pizarro Leongomez notes three stages in the evolution of the Colombian guerrillas: 1) a first period (1949-53) with the hegemony of the Liberal party; 2) a second period from 1955 until 1958 with the hegemony of the Communist party; 3) A

third period that started after the Cuban revolution with the presence of a myriad of groups of diverse political ideologies (Pizarro Leongomez, 1991: 20.) In the Sumapaz region the FARC and the Communist party maintained their hegemony with almost no other guerrilla forces. For the first time since the National Front the Betancur government (1982-6) started talks with the guerrillas that have been part of the political agenda of his successors together with periods of war and military offensives (Boudon, 1996: 282).

The guerrillas have evolved from a self-defence group to a complex and organised institution. Richard Maullin defines this process as the *professionalisation* of the guerrillas: *Yet, while the tactics of the guerrillas have remained similar, their composition and political relationship have changed* (Maullin, 1971: 5).

William Ramirez Tobon thinks that in spite of the political and military organisation of the FARC they are still the vanguard of a peasantry that wants to colonise unused land. In his opinion, the FARC's main project is to resist the attempts of the large-scale capital to expropriate the land and to establish a democratic solution to the agrarian question (Ramirez Tobon, 1990: 68-69).

## **2. Who is who?**

Several guerrillas' units operate in the Sumapaz area. The most active in the area around Nomeque was the "*Frente Teófilo Forero*", a guerrillas' column, composed of less than forty individuals. All these diverse units formed part of the FARC, "*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas*" (Colombian revolutionary armed forces), with strong links to the Colombian Communist party. The FARC was officially founded in 1966, but its origins date back to the 1940s and the alliance between the Liberal and the Communist guerrillas that was forged in certain regions of the

country. The FARC are unquestionably the largest guerrilla movement, with approximately ten thousand men under arms scattered on thirty two fronts in almost every department of Colombia.<sup>44</sup> Some ten years ago the FARC together with the Colombian Communist Party launched an electoral alliance called *Unión Patriótica*, this alliance represented both the Communist Party and the FARC.

The FARC is the oldest and most traditional guerrilla force in Colombia. Its leaders in the Sumapaz area are all of peasant origin and it acts almost exclusively in rural areas with few urban and international relations.<sup>45</sup> It was originally formed by Liberal guerrillas who, after a military offensive of the state, created self-defence zones protecting areas of colonisation. The FARC became protected by and connected to the Communist party (Ramirez Tobon, 1990: 57-72).

### **3. Guerrillas and drug trafficking**

During the last years, the FARC has been accused of being involved in the drug business (Febbro, 1997: 22). I partially agree with this accusation because the FARC, particularly in the Amazon basin, have been protecting Coca growers and obtaining money from that protection. However, that does not mean that they are producing cocaine or exporting it to the USA; their participation in the drug business has always been indirect. Alfredo Molano remarks on the difficulties the guerrillas experienced in being involved in this business:

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<sup>44</sup> For information on the territorial dynamic of the different guerrillas movements see the work of Alejandro Reyes Posada, *Territorios de la violencia en Colombia* (1994: 111-122.)

<sup>45</sup> In this respect the FARC differs considerably from what were called "guerrillas of second generation" mostly originating among left wing students and with an important urban component (Pizarro cited by Bejarano, 1995: 16.)

*The cultivation and processing of the coca leaf from the outset created enormous difficulties for the guerrillas even though it placed huge sums of money in their hands. From a logistical point of view, it is clear that the tribute they imposed on the population as a tacit reimbursement for maintaining a social order favourable to the new production allowed the guerrillas to profit indirectly from the economic benefits of the boom (Molano, 1992: 213).*

The relation between the guerrillas and the *Narcos* has always been very tense and especially violent. As Eduardo Pizarro notes, *the guerrilla advance has been accompanied by an unexpected development of paramilitary groups all over the country, which threaten to plunge the country into the horrors of a generalised "dirty" war (Pizarro, 1992: 189, see also Amnesty, 1994: 34- 36)<sup>46</sup>*. Paramilitary groups are organised mostly by *Narcos* and landowners (which in many cases are synonymous) and they depend on the collaboration or silence of the police and the army (The Economist, 1997: 69-70).

In Nomeque, there are no paramilitary groups active in the area. The guerrillas who operate in the region of Sumapaz, compared to those in the Amazon basin, are not related to drugs production. However, whatever the extent of guerrillas' involvement in drug trafficking, guerrillas and drug barons are antagonistic forces that could be tactically allied in particular areas of the country against the national state but that would try to eliminate each other if possible (El Tiempo, December 16th 1997). Medofilo Medina considers that the ideological evolution of drug dealers towards anti- communism and extreme nationalism may have been retarded in the past as a consequence of the *dealers' coexistence with guerrillas of leftist orientation in regions of recent colonisation where drug plants were being cultivated (Medina,*

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<sup>46</sup> *Clandestine military units operating as death squads made their first recorded appearance in Colombia in 1978 (Amnesty, 1994: 34),*

1992: 164).

#### **4. Guerrillas and gender**

This study was made in a male dominated culture in which the guerrillas' political and social discourse remarkably denies gender differences and appears sensitively egalitarian in this respect. Many members of the guerrillas' forces were women who were able to obtain positions of power in the guerrilla's hierarchy without great problems. This happened in an organisation whose members and leaders were peasants. One of the guerrillas' fronts that operated around the area was under the command of *la Pitufa* (the smurf, a nickname that came from the Spanish name of the popular cartoon character.) *La Pitufa* was very young, apparently in her early twenties.

Once returning from an area in which they met the guerrillas, Pablo Lanza, the veterinarian, and Arturo, his assistant, made some jokes with sexual innuendos about what would happen if they ended up captured or kidnapped by her. They also commented, without changing their joking mode, that she was beautiful, small and sexually independent. They also added, in a more serious way, that she obtained her commanding position because of her courage. "*She was braver than any men in her group*"

#### **5. The guerrillas and the Catholic Church**

I am going to be very brief on this topic because it is going to be discussed extensively in chapter nine. The guerrillas were respected by and respected the Catholic Church, an institution also concerned with the primeval unity of the community. The guerrillas were actively opposed to the proliferation of Protestant



Sects and Cults. They did it partly because they considered the Sects as another form of USA cultural penetration and partly because they considered them as being against the unity of the community.

## 6. A refuge and a home

Desperate young peasants can find protection and shelter in the guerrilla's organisation (see also Febbro, 1997: 22). Mariana Perez grew up in the Valdivia family. Mariana was considered a mentally disabled girl, almost an idiot, by most of the people. She did domestic work for the Valdivias to whom she was in some way related. Mariana's position was ambiguous as she was both a member of the family and a servant. When she was finishing, with some difficulties, her school studies she got pregnant by Martín Ruiz. Martín Ruiz decided not to marry her (Presentación Choachi said that they put him in jail for some days for this reason). Martín, instead, married a teacher from the school and never recognised the son he had with Mariana. She married another man whose surname was Soto who was very jealous about her former relationship. Soto was constantly searching for Martín Ruiz to fight him. Martín was working as a taxi driver, driving people from Nomeque to Sutagao.

Once, when Soto was very drunk, he tried to fight Martín with a knife in the main square while he was waiting with his taxi. From that day Martín decided not to drive taxis any more. Soto also hated Argemiro, Mariana and Martín's son which meant that sometimes, when his step- father was drunk, Argemiro had to sleep outside his home. On the other hand, Martín did not recognise Argemiro as his son either.

During those times Argemiro was having severe problems, and took drugs for a while. Despite his problems, he was very intelligent and loved to read and study.

Father Santana and Presentación Choachi often let him borrow books from the library. The priest also gave him some informal lessons about religion, politics and sciences (Father Santana is very keen on astronomy). Argemiro was seriously thinking of going to the University.

Once, Argemiro had a terrible argument with his stepfather and was sent away from home. He was full of resentment and had no place to go. He finally left the village, went to the mountains and joined the guerrillas. He cut all his ties with his family except with his half sister Susana who adores him and who often meets him secretly. Argemiro told his step- father that if he treated his sister badly he would kill him.

On one occasion, Argemiro's sister was found crying by one of my informants. Susana told her that Argemiro's refuge with the guerrillas was all the fault of her father and mother who did not know how to treat and take care of him. In some respect, we can consider the guerrillas as a substitute home for him. Argemiro is now a commander in one of the guerrilla fronts that operates in the eastern plains (*los Llanos Orientales*).

Argemiro is an intelligent man and has a good “*career*” in the guerrilla’s organisation. In many other cases desperate children having no land and having often been sent away from their parents' home are integrated into the guerrillas movement as soldiers. The guerrillas have the structure to absorb many impoverished peasants<sup>47</sup>. They were quite well organised financially and were very proud of saying that they had enough money to dress every soldier in a uniform, to give him/her a gun, and some pocket- money.

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<sup>47</sup> To see a different class origin and background of other guerrillas’ organizations see an interview with Bernardo Gutierrez by Rocío Londoño published in Cuadernos por la Democracia, n3, Julio

## 7. The guerrillas' representation

I have already stated that the guerrillas' use of force is perceived as collective and not as individual as is the case of the drug lords' actions. The guerrillas' actions were always referred to by the community as taken by "*los amigos*" (the friends), "*los muchachos*" (the boys) or "*la guerrilla*" and never by a specific person. Even if some commanders were famous when the guerrillas acted, the unit's actions were always considered collective.

People used the guerrilla's own definitions and words to describe their actions. They often used the verb *ajusticiar* (to make justice) to describe the killing of people by the guerrillas, even when they were not in favour of their action. The use of terms that refer directly to the functions of the state (like "justice") to describe guerrillas actions shows that the guerrillas have displaced the national state not only in practice but also in the system of representations.

Another term used to describe the guerrilla's social control was *la ley del monte* (The law of the forest or also the law of the mountain). The term refers to a law that is effective in a particular space, the countryside, where the national state is not able to exercise its power. *La ley del monte* is an unwritten law but known by everybody, as are the consequences of violating it. There are actions that are completely forbidden and whose violation could cause death. There are, nonetheless, unusual events that cannot happen without *pedirle permiso a los muchachos*, requiring a special authorisation from the guerrillas. There are examples of both cases in this chapter.

The guerrilla's organisation connects the peasants with a collective past in

which the community fought together against the landowners. After their success in this struggle, the peasants obtained individual plots and withdrew into their individual lives. Once the peasants obtained their land it became more difficult to mobilise them together again.

Peasants' leaders recognise that the last collective struggle in which people were united was the fight for rural electrification. The electricity was provided for almost everyone about ten years ago (although some small groups living in isolated *veredas* still have no electricity). Several peasants believe that the guerrillas protect them from the Government, and from other powerful forces in the community.

### **8. The social perception of the guerrillas**

An overwhelming majority of peasants think that the guerrillas are acting on their behalf and that the hated police are against them. A peasant, already slightly tipsy, told me that people were worried about the peace negotiations, "*if there is peace who is going to protect us?*" (at that moment there were peace talks going on between the government and the guerrillas that were suddenly broken off by the government).

*"My brother has only one cow, what would happen if someone stole it? We get scared when we hear about peace talks, with peace we will have more thefts and violence. The guerrilla always have reasons for killing, they don't kill without knowing what that person is up to. They first inquire about what someone is doing, then they make an advertisement, and finally, they kill. The guy that was killed last Sunday who was only seventeen years old and couldn't walk properly, was working for an old "hijo de puta" (son of a bitch) who lives in the village and who is not going to live for long (he was probably talking about Don Manuel Subachoque who was subsequently killed). The old man paid the young boy. The boy informed him and he then informed "los federales" (the federals, the army) where the guerrillas were, for*

*that reason the guerrillas gave the boy four shots.”*

Another informant said: *“Before the arrival of the guerrillas there had been more fighting and shooting and violence, but since they arrived they went to see the people who had problems and advised them to stop killing each other. Now the army has returned and things are getting out of control again.”*

Don Demóstenes Riquelme, who has a farm in the Paramo told me that:

*“I used to have many problems with cattle robbery. Nowadays I have fewer problems because of the guerrillas. There are fewer cattle robberies because they kill the abigeos (cattle robbers). The robbers stole two cows from me two years ago and three cows four years ago and also four sheep on one occasion.”*

German, a teacher at the Escuela Normal in Nomeque and an active member of the Liberal Party, told me that when he was a boy the soldiers appeared one day and offered to cut the children's hair for free. He did not think about it and they cut his hair free along with other children. German returned to his home very happy and proud of his new hair cut. When his father saw him and realised that the soldiers had cut his hair he beat German up *“por sapo”* (because of being a traitor, an informant.)

German knew, as does anyone in the village, who the members of the guerrilla were. Some months ago when the guerrillas gave a talk in the main square, he met one guerrilla member who asked him: *How are you, teacher? Are you coming to the main square to hear our conference?* He decided to go to the meeting and he recognised many former students there.

Some people who said they were sympathisers of the guerrillas some years ago are quite critical of their activities nowadays. *“Then I sympathised with the guerrilla because in it they were people with ideals and a life full of effort. Now it is*

*transformed into a business, a dirty thing".*

### **9. The guerrilla's fight for control of the social order**

The guerrilla's main interest in Nomeque is to keep the social order and its principal competitor for the maintenance of this is not the Army but the police. In an attempt to monopolise control of the community the guerrillas attacked and destroyed the police station. They have done it on three occasions during the last four years.

During one of the reconstructions of the police station, while some workers were rebuilding a brick wall, one peasant in his *ruana* looked at the works and said in a loud voice *"I am waiting with anxiety till the moment they finish the work, to start with the house warming party"* (they all laughed at his joke, that was an obvious reference to the next attack that destroyed the station completely.) Then, the last attack happened, in which three police officers were killed. Afterwards, the government decided, temporarily, not to rebuild the police station.

The last attack on the police station, which happened some months before my arrival to the village, was particularly traumatic for their inhabitants. Several buildings around the police station and the *Caja Agraria*, (a bank for rural development) were either destroyed or severely damaged by the rockets, bombs, and bullets. Although no civilians were killed, people were shocked by the intensity of the attack.

During the attack on the village, some people had to cope with the presence of guerrilla members in their own houses. The guerrillas were fighting in them while the owners were hiding on the floor. The fighting continued throughout the day. After the fight there were no lights in the village and people were afraid of finding grenades or mines and of the many electric cables on the floor.

A young witness told me:

*"At the beginning we heard some gun shots and we thought that it could be a problem between families. Feuds were something very common at that time. Then, we started to listen to the shootings and more shootings and we realised that only the guerrillas could be making so much noise. When the first rockets exploded the complete house trembled. My little brother was seriously affected. He has been traumatised since then and for a long time he could not pass by the police station. He used to say that the place was full of grenades and land mines and cried. Since we moved to the city he prefers not to return to the town".*

During the night helicopters with reflectors were flying in circles around the village trying to find the hidden guerrillas. The helicopters were involved in several exchanges of gunfire until the next morning. Many people, especially the school-teachers, were in shock and decided to continue working in the village but to move their homes to the closest town. Some houses were still in a state of demolition during the time I did my fieldwork. Since then only the poorest people rent the houses that were closest to the police station. The owners moved to live in safer places. Most of the people rejected the idea of having the police station again in town. There was also a meeting at the municipality in which the Mayor and the counsellors expressed their doubts to the regional government on the rebuilding of the station. But I will refer to this topic in the next chapter.

## **10. The arbitrators**

In another attempt to exercise social control over the community, the guerrillas tried to make peace between rival families. As I explained in the chapter on internal violence, the guerrillas were quite successful in stopping feuds in the past. They arranged meetings between the principal members of the families involved in the conflict and obliged them to suspend their enmity. If the parties did not stop the cycle

of revenge, the guerrillas would threaten the lives of the families involved.

We already assessed that the feuds were suspended for a time only to become reactivated when the opportunity for revenge arrived (Fals Borda, 1955: 209). The arrival of the army and its permanent position in Nomeque during the last six months of my fieldwork was paradoxically, a good opportunity to re-start feuds affecting this process of dispute resolution.

### **11. The guerrillas and loans**

Most of the smallholders of Nomeque had received loans from the "*Caja Agraria*" (a national bank dedicated to agrarian development.) During the last few years the guerrillas have been strongly campaigning against the payment of the loans, alleging that the interest rates were too high for the smallholders. Many peasants decided not to pay the *Caja Agraria* creating a difficult situation for the institution. The *Caja Agraria* is always the main economic target in every guerrilla's attack. Every time they entered a town they searched for the *Caja Agraria* to take the money from it.

### **12. The racket**

The guerrillas also ran a protection racket with money taken from the rich people of the region. Daniel Pecault considers that those methods were acceptable during *La Violencia*, to dislodge the great landowners reluctant to pay the revolutionary levy, kidnappings and ransoms were common practice (Pecault, 1992: 235). In his opinion, when they stopped doing it during the 1984 elections the consequence was an increase of paramilitary activities and a weakening of the guerrilla's financial structure (Pecault, 1992: 235).



In Nomeque, even the powerful Artaza, drug barons, are obliged to pay the *vacuna* (vaccine), as this racket is called. They do so because in the Paramo they are less powerful than the guerrillas. In other areas, like the nearby lowlands, the Narcos are more powerful and, allied to the landowners (*Narcos* own most of the land), police and armed forces, they create paramilitary death squadrons. If someone refuses to pay the guerrillas will threaten his life and the life of his family.<sup>48</sup> The young son of Romualdo Carrizo, the owner of a big shop in Sutagao, was kidnapped in the municipality of Nomeque. I received two different and contradictory versions of this event.

The first version of the guerrilla's action was that they kidnapped the boy from the school. The guerrillas entered the school (a private institution closer to the city of Sutagao but in Nomeque's jurisdiction) and picked him out. In this version, four guerrillas entered the boy's class at twelve o'clock midday dressed in *ruanas* to hide their weapons. In the class- room they showed their guns in front of the teacher and the pupils.

I was told a second version of the kidnapping some days afterwards by people connected with the school. At the time, I am quite sure that this version was an attempt to create a better image for the school, which was severely damaged by the event. In the second version the boy was kidnapped on the road, on his way to the school. The guerrillas stopped the bus and asked for Miguel Carrizo. The young boy presented himself and the guerrillas took him in a car up to the mountains.

Immediately after the kidnapping the boy's family started long negotiations

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<sup>48</sup> *El Tiempo* (a Colombian newspaper) published in its edition on the Thursday 23th February 1995 the main racket operations in Cundinamarca. It assessed that in only one month kidnappings have risen from seven to twenty two. The victims were mainly *hacendados* (landowners) who did not pay the *vacuna*.

with the guerrillas that took almost three months. The father of the boy often met mediators or negotiators in Sutagao. The family was then forced to pay a huge sum of money. The guerrillas asked them to go to an isolated place near a mountainous road not using their own car. Immediately after the *vacuna* was paid, the young boy was liberated. He told his family that he was kept the whole time in a dark hole dug in a hut. They treated him well but they told him that if he escaped from his prison they would shoot him. He lost weight after days of receiving a diet based only of potatoes and rice.

As a norm, the guerrillas try not to threaten the lives and property of peasants or small shopkeepers. However, some shopkeepers were obliged to provide food for the guerrillas in particular circumstances. Rosa Carrillo received such an order and gave them what they asked her.

Don Saturnino Castillo, a gentle person but with a tough character, owned a pharmacy. He also had a phone, and people could ask to use it if they paid a fee. Once, a stranger, wearing a big black hat, a black *ruana*, and also black boots and trousers asked Don Torres to let him use the phone. Don Castillo answered flatly that the person had to wait because he was using it. When he had hung up the person in black tried to go behind the counter to use the phone. Don Saturnino Castillo immediately stopped him by saying that the private area started from that side of the counter and that the clients can only stand on the other side. Don Castillo then asked him what number he wanted to dial, because he always dialled the numbers by himself in order to control if the calls were local or national. The man attempted to dial by himself but Don Castillo refused to let him and kept the telephone in his hands. Then, the man in black moved his *ruana* and showed his pistol and said: "*I am Comandante Rodolfo from the sixteenth front of the FARC.*" Castillo phlegmatically explained to

him that he never looked into other people's businesses but he was in charge of his own place. Comandante Rodolfo got very angry and said: "*You are an extremely arrogant person and I already have received several complaints from the people about your behaviour.*"

Comandante Rodolfo's twenty year old girlfriend, who had just finished her high school studies wanted to use the phone in the same manner the next day. Don Saturnino Castillo maintained his position. Afterwards, he crossed the road and went into Rosa's shop where I was, by chance, buying some food. Don Castillo was quite worried and scared, and asked if the same girl had come there to use the phone. The whole Nomeque discussed the Don Castillo incident with Comandante Rodolfo with a mixture of fear and humour. They all expressed sympathy for Don Saturnino Castillo, and, fortunately, nothing serious happened to him.

There was another way the people used the term *vacunar* in reference to a guerrilla action. The term was also use to refer to the propaganda action of spraying paint on trucks and vans when they passed through a guerrilla's control on a road. A big Scania lorry was spray painted with the slogan: *FARC-EP treinta años de lucha* (FARC-EP, thirty years of struggle). The inspector told me that the drivers were obliged to keep the painting on for three months. If they did not do it as ordered they could be punished.

The guerrillas did not allow the peasants either to hunt or to fish in the Paramo. Peasants could be punished if they slashed and burned the remnant forest. The principal reason of these "*ecological*" measures is a practical one, the forest gives the guerrillas a place to hide. The abundance of fish and game is necessary for the guerrilla's survival in the Paramo for long periods of time.

### 13. Guerrillas justice

The guerrillas have their own form of justice. They persecute and sometimes execute criminals, in particular cattle robbers. Their justice is beyond discussion, it is excessively rigorous but extremely effective. People want effectiveness and rapid action. Instead, the Colombian national system of justice is inefficient and slow. Cattle robbers are rarely put in prison for more than a couple of days and afterwards they are out committing the same crimes again. Usually, after prison, they take revenge on the person who accused them.

Doña Luz, some years ago, had two nephews who had got involved in cattle robbery. She did not want to get involved and talked about it with the local judge. Her nephews got particularly angry with her and threatened her with death. Finally, they were both killed by the guerrillas.

Gonzalo Nuñez had good potato fields but he also was in the bad habit of stealing cattle. *Los muchachos*, "the boys" (the guerrillas) had advised him several times to stop doing it but he continued. So they appeared in his home and obliged him to go to the police. The police soon let him free.

Afterwards, *los muchachos* appeared in his home again and said to him: "*Come with us, they need you in town.*" His wife and children followed him at a distance. They killed him on the road.

One night, a group of armed men entered the house of Nicasio Varela Vargas. They obliged him to lie, face down, prostrated, with his hand behind his head. While he was lying, they sprayed him with bullets from a machine gun. Nicasio's wife was also present in the house with their child, but the guerrillas told her that *no era con ella la cosa* (it was not against her). Nicasio Varela was a well-known *abigeo* (cattle-robber). He was only twenty-four years old. People commented that he had received

several warnings from the guerrilla, to force him to change his *malos hábitos* (bad habits). But he persisted in his crimes.

Within a week the guerrillas murdered another victim, an alleged informant of only seventeen years old who was living in a high *vereda*. The victim was a young orphan boy who had been seen spending more money than usual and was on very friendly terms with the military.

People called these aforementioned guerrilla actions *limpieza social* (social cleansing). The guerrillas were literally cleansing the area of criminals and traitors. Doña Luz told me that, some years ago, there was a gang of boys in their twenties who were selling drugs in the village. The guerrillas, enforcing *limpieza social* threatened to kill them and because of that, they were forced to leave the village.

When the army arrived and stayed in the village for a long period the guerrillas needed to show their power. It was important to the maintenance of their power to explicitly explain to the population what would happen if they collaborated with their enemy and for that reason they started to execute alleged informants in town.

#### **14. A familial problem**

In one instance the guerrillas and the army were involved in a family problem and political violence was directly connected with inter-familial conflicts. This is a case of sibling rivalry and competition for limited goods (see Lewis, 1970: 72).

Victorino Cabrera and his brother Wilson inherited a small piece of land from their mother. The brothers were constantly having problems on the division of the inheritance. While the army troops were in Nomeque, Victorino Cabrera denounced his own brother, Wilson, to the armed forces and accused him of being a member of the guerrillas. The army entered Wilson's house by force and found some old guns

and dynamite in it (objects that can be found in almost every peasant's home in Nomeque). The army immediately arrested him and put him in prison.

Victorino denounced his own brother because of an old battle over the inheritance of their mother's farm. It is an interesting example in which a familial problem of rivalry between brothers for the inheritance of the maternal property is transformed into a political one. The armed forces and the guerrillas were in this case instruments of internal violence and revenge.

During the week Wilson Cabrera was in jail the guerrillas entered his brother's house and took Victorino Cabrera for a long walk into town. They then tied his arms to his back and shot him dead in front of the telephone office. They shot him in the head in such a way that it was extremely difficult to recognise him.

People commented after the murder that from the time he denounced his brother he had been condemned by the guerrillas. A week before his death he lost his hat in the artisan shop and the shop keeper, a very young girl, rushed out to give it back to him (afraid of making people think he had any relation with her.) She also added that Don Victorino was saying many silly things. However, I do not know if she was referring to Don Victorino's attitude towards the guerrillas or about his behaviour towards young females. Apparently, Don Victorino used to write love letters and poems to Claudia Garcia who worked in the same shop before.

Don Victorino was a man in his fifties who he had a moustache, dark hair and blue eyes. His corpse was found with a label attached to his neck saying: *por sapo y por ladron* (because of being a frog -informant and a thief), a clear message to any one who talked too much. Behind the corpse there was also one of the Army's advertisements that offer rewards to anyone who can give any information related to

the guerrilla. The signal was very clear.

### 15. The destiny

A jeep with some members of the guerrillas arrived at the village at ten o'clock at night. They took a tied prisoner out of their car and forced him to kneel. They shot him eight times and the place was specially chosen. The murder was performed in the main square, in front of the municipality.

The murderers left the prisoner lying in the square and drove their jeep up into the mountains. We heard the shootings and when they were escaping I saw the faces of the killers. They were dressed with *ruanas* (local poncho) and big Panama hats.

Very early in the morning, while I was walking the fifty metres from my home to the main square, I met Cirano, who told me that there was a *florero* (flower vase) that someone had left in the square as a present. The corpse was lying in the main square covered in blood. It was covered with a *ruana* (local poncho) with his hands and feet tied.

The person who was in charge of the judicial procedures, assisted by two soldiers, took some photographs of the victim in order to create a file and to try to identify the corpse. She was temporarily in charge because the last Inspector decided to quit after receiving threats to her life. She took her pictures while the soldiers were undressing the corpse, untying his hands and feet, and moving him to take additional photographs in the positions required. The corpse was pale and almost all the blood was spread on the ground. The corpse had received two bullets in its head, one in its ribs, one in the lower spinal region, and, at least two in its back. The temporary inspector and her assistants did this job in front of almost two hundred spectators

gathered for the Saturday market. In the crowd many children could be seen looking at the sight with strong interest.

When asked about the perpetrators of the murder the peasants shrugged their shoulders and answered that they did not know, not even the identity of the body. Only later and in different places and contexts did they say the killing was committed by *los amigos (the friends)*, that the guerrillas had done it. The dead man was identified as Manuel Restrepo, who was in his late fifties and lived in the margins of the community. Apparently, he had been seen several times chatting with the military.

As in the above case, after the death people tended to stress that they knew he was going to be killed before it happened. For them, Manuel Restrepo was marked for death before the killing. Like Santiago, the character of *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* of García Marquez, everyone except the victim seemed to know that Don Manuel was going to die (see García Marquez, 1981: 30).

Presentación told me that once when she was in Rosa's shop Don Manuel was there talking about the teeth he was going to get repaired and when he left the shop Rosa said: "*Why is he going to spend money on his teeth if before long he is going to be dead?*" Apparently, some days before his death the victim searched for Father Melquiades and told him he was sure that the guerrilla were going to kill him. "*He told me that he was in great danger, but I did not care too much because he has always been a little bit crazy. He had a bag with him and he opened it and took everything out and put the stuff back in again about six times while he was talking to me*". I am under the impression that this construction of the tragic destiny of a future victim is actually created *a posteriori*.



## 16. Dancing over the blood

When the temporary inspector was looking at Don Manuel's corpse, it was the morning before *Nochebuena*, Christmas Eve, when all the families celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. For that purpose, the municipality had organised a big party at the plaza. Instead of cancelling the event they threw sawdust over the blood and continued preparing for the party.

Then, I remembered what a veterinarian once told me: "*When there is a dead body at a party the people say el muerto al costado (the dead to the side) they move the corpse and the party continues.*" That night most of the town was dancing drunkenly with the music of an orchestra "*Los ases del condado,*" as if nothing had happened. People literally danced over the victim's blood.

## 17. Some dissident voices

Many people got very upset with the organisation of the party after the murder. Father Melquiades was furious with the Mayor of the town who did not suspend the party after the murder of Don Manuel Restrepo:

*"Le importa un carajo!" (He does not give a damn). The Mayor has to show a good example and educate the people, like Mockus does (Mockus was at the time the Mayor of Bogota who forbade fireworks during Christmas). Ruiz (the former Communist Mayor) was a better Mayor. He shut the canteens at five o' clock and at six everyone was sleeping. The other day at the Ball, a guy stabbed another with his knife. The guerrilla wants to challenge the Army to show that the guerrillas can do what they want.*

## 18. The killing of the Mayor of Sutagao

A year before my arrival in the field the late Mayor of Sutagao, Fernán Oreja, was killed in a confuse episode. He was stopped by a blockade organised by the guerrilla

on the road to Bogotá and, after he loudly identified himself, the guerrillas shot him down. The official version exalted the martyr figure of the Mayor and stressed the political intentions of the guerrillas directly related to the pursuit of local power in Sutagao. In accordance with this interpretation, the anniversary of the Mayor's death was commemorated by the national authorities with great demonstrations of pomp and respect. Before the event, posters with the face of Fernán Oreja covered the city of Sutagao. After a mass there was a military parade attended by more than a thousand spectators. In numerous speeches the figure of the murdered Mayor was exalted, and his death was explained in terms of martyrdom on the altar of justice and peace. A monument was erected on his tomb representing his sacrifice for the Colombian nation. However, I found with surprise that the official story was not unanimously accepted, particularly among many of his former comrades, the members of the Liberal party (Fernán Oreja's party). For them, the interpretation of Fernán Oreja's death was slightly different. In fact they stressed that the principal cause of his death was a mistake made by the Mayor. *Se hizo el macho en un retén y las guerrillas se la cobraron* (he played the macho in a blockade and the guerrillas killed him). In this version it is the arrogance of the Mayor and his fearless attitude the principal cause of his death. He provoked the reaction of the guerrillas challenging their authority and power. *Era demasiado macho para quedarse callado* (He was too much a macho to shut up) they said with some pride. For many of his friends it was this image of a fearless, although mistaken, person that was the one they wanted to keep to themselves. The death could be interpreted as a consequence of a clash between two different ideas of power and authority. Fernán Oreja's brother was the candidate of the Liberal party in the next local elections but he lost to an independent candidate. Nonetheless, he was very active preparing himself for the next elections,

campaigning around his area. As I have already said, during the fair of Nomeque he was seen on a magnificent white horse, reaching out to touch the hands of the people of Sutagao present at the event. His magnificent horse and also his elegant hat helped him perform the role of the strong male leader they were all missing.

## 19. Summary

The guerrillas were closely allied to the agrarian movement and the collective struggle for the land when they first appeared in the region. As a consequence of this past they were associated with community ideas of social solidarity.

Compared to the drug lords, who use violence in the construction of an individual male personality, the guerrillas act as a social group and a community-focused institution. This social aspect, and its aforementioned connection with the agrarian movement, relates the guerrillas with *madrazgo* values of egalitarianism. In the highlands, the guerrillas are more powerful than the Narcos and are able to impose their conditions: drug lords have to pay for protection. In other parts of Colombia, where the Narcos are more powerful they actively participate in paramilitary activities attacking the guerrillas and killing members of left wing organisations. Even if in Nomeque the guerrillas are stronger they have to deal with the existence of the Narcos because some of the idioms that exist in society support their ideas and existence. A conflict between these two idioms can be perceived in the interpretations of the death of the Mayor of Sutagao.

The guerrillas allowed and promoted the participation of women in its organisation. Women also play important roles in the hierarchy of the organisation.

Against a vision that stresses the revolutionary aspect of the guerrillas, I am interested in its function in the community assuring the social order, competing with

the nation state and protecting the poor peasants (Molano, 1992: 205). This protection implies silence from the peasants and, to a certain point, complicity (see Hobsbawm, 1985:20).

The guerrillas were respected by and respected the Catholic Church, an institution also concerned with the primeval unity of the community. Coincidences between Communist and Catholic values give ideological support to the guerrillas. These ideologies have intrinsic ideas of solidarity and fraternity that positively feed back with the community and are picked-up by it. The guerrillas rejected and opposed the proliferation of Protestant Sects and Cults. They did it partly because they considered the Sects as another form of USA cultural penetration and partly because they considered them to be against the unity of the community.

The guerrillas are particularly concerned with the social control of the village. They impose their own idea of justice which is effective but extremely tough on the criminals. In spite of the excesses committed, most of the peasants agree with this parallel and draconian legal system. At local level the guerrillas are interested in replacing the state as the main keeper of the social order. Reyes Posadas considers, somewhat sceptically, that the guerrilla's social position does not transform the social structure in favour of the interests of the lower classes (Reyes Posada, 1994: 121). However, I consider it an important achievement in support of the peasants in the area and the maintenance of the egalitarian consequences of the agrarian rebellion.

Many desperate peasants with no other place to go find, in the guerrilla organisation, a nurturing body that provides shelter. Because of all the above reasons, the guerrillas successfully appeared and were recognised as the protector of the peasants, especially the poorest ones.



The police station in Nomeque after the guerrilla's attack.

## **Chapter eight: The army, the police, the schools: The Colombian nation state in the town of Nomeque**

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes not only the presence but also the absence of the Colombian national state in the town of Nomeque. It discusses how the national state fits in Nomeque's life and how it is perceived in contrast or in coincidence with the values and practices of the community (see Dennis, 1987: 149-182). It also discusses the social perception of legality in a community in which the national legal system is in competition with other social actors who rival to replace it (see Boudon, 1996: 279-280). Are we in the presence of a break down of the nation state or, quite the contrary, of a competition for different states and legalities?

In Nomeque, even if people have a strong national identity as Colombians, they do not perceive the state as a unified entity. Tensions and contradictions between institutions show us however that the Colombian national state itself does not act in a unified way. For these particular reasons, every relevant state institution is the object of a special and separate treatment in this inquiry. The fragmentation of the perception of the state has direct consequences in Colombian society. Fernan Gonzalez stated that the precarious position of the Colombian State is reflected in the diffusion and fragmentation of the power in the society (Gonzalez, 1993: 39). In other words, an atomised national state contributes to the process of the atomisation of society. Pearce critically notes that:

*“The relationship of the state to the people is therefore one of neglect and, in many areas, abandonment ... In these circumstances people have sought a means of survival outside the orbit of the state, which often means outside the law... If there is a culture of violence in Colombia that exceeds that of the poor areas of Latin America, it is historically as well as socially rooted”* (Pearce, *Colombia Inside the Labyrinth*, pp. 115-117 cited by Boudon, 1996: 289).

This fragmented state facilitates the competition of other social forces that occupy the vacuum it leaves. In Paul Oquist’s opinion after the period called *La Violencia* there was a partial collapse of the national state (Oquist, 1978: 183). This assessment implies the difficult task of accepting that before *La Violencia* there was an active and effective national state in Colombia.

The description of the activities of the national army in Nomeque, of its attitude towards peasants, its propaganda and the way it is perceived by the people, shows the difficulties and ambiguities of the relationship between the armed forces of the Colombian national state and the villagers. On the one hand, we are dealing with an institution that successfully manipulates the most precious national symbols associating itself with the nation. On the other hand, this institution is perceived as an alien power that restricts the freedom of peasants and acts against the community.

I will elaborate on the local perception of the police, and describe their actions as seen by the people of the community. This part of the chapter is centred on people's narratives since, after the last guerrillas' attack in 1993, the police station has not been re-established in Nomeque.

The analysis of the justice system highlights its extreme ineffectiveness and the limitation of its action in the community. The description of the role of its members will demonstrate its limited success in exercising their professional duties and the high



risks involved in working in the judicial apparatus of the state at a local level.

A more ambiguous role is that concerning the position of the Mayor of Nomeque in the display of forces in the village. He is forced to mediate between superior forces that struggle for the control of the community. It is a risky game in which his life is in danger. It is interesting to compare the institutions above with the positive impact of the national education system in the life of the local community. Finally, a brief analysis of the *Caja Agraria* highlights the importance of private networks in the distribution of public services.

### **1. Colombian Nationalism and the state**

There is an interesting paradox related to Colombian's ideas of nation and state: On the one hand villagers are very nationalistic and experience a common feeling of patriotic solidarity (see Pitt Rivers, 1954 :202-210). They enthusiastically express these feelings in national feasts (including football matches) and in almost every event in which the National anthem is played (something that happens quite often). On the other hand, there is a failure in relating the nation state and its institutions to this strong nationalistic feeling. Fernan Gonzalez thinks that Colombian national identity is in the process of construction (Gonzalez, 1993: 40). If, with this image, he wants to refer to the aforementioned paradox (Colombians are nationalistic but do not associate the nation state to this patriotism.) I partially agree with him. However, it seems to me that Fernan Gonzalez does not appear very convinced of the importance of Colombians' national feelings. This view coincides with most of the Colombians I spoke to, who believe that they are not nationalistic at all. On the contrary, I experienced a very strong affirmation of nationalistic values and an expression of



national emotions.

At least in Nomeque people were very proud to be Colombians and they openly and loudly expressed their nationalism and identity. The guerrillas and drug lords have no difficulties in separating their patriotic feelings from their fight against the Colombian State. There is no contradiction in this respect because they perceived their struggle as one in support of Colombia and in their actions they display national symbols and utter constant expressions of patriotic feelings.

## **2. The national army in the town of Nomeque**

I will analyse the Colombian national army in interaction with the community of Nomeque. This analysis will highlight the political autonomy of the armed forces (cf. Leal Buitrago, 1984: 264-265) and it will show the ambiguities of the community of Nomeque's perception of the armed forces. Towards the end of my fieldwork the army made its appearance in Nomeque. At the beginning, the army did not have a constant base in the village. However, soldiers often arrived in town, especially on Saturdays, and controlled the road that links the town of Nomeque with the city of Sutagao. They usually stopped cars and trucks, looking for guns and asking the passengers for identification. Following a governmental offensive against the guerrillas, they established a camp some two kilometres up from the village. A Lieutenant Colonel was in charge of approximately one hundred soldiers and established a permanent base in the community.

After their arrival, the Lieutenant Colonel and his soldiers were involved in intense propaganda trying to turn the population to their side (see Landazabal Reyes, 1985: 163). Simultaneously, they were trying to cut the guerrilla's support network in

the community and they entered some suspicious peasants' houses searching for weapons and pamphlets.

The army, in one of its operations, put two peasants in jail who were found possessing some guns and black powder (which, in Nomeque, almost every peasant stores at home). The Lieutenant Colonel tried to obtain information from Horacio Carrasco, a retired sailor from the Colombian Navy. Horacio was proud of his past in the Navy and serving the country but he did not go along with the Lieutenant Colonel's approach. Later, with the help of the Mayor of the town, he mediated to obtain the freedom of the peasants in jail. The Lieutenant Colonel reluctantly decided to let them go free.

One of the liberated peasants, Muñoz, complained at the way he, and especially his daughters, had been treated: " *fueron vejadas,*" he said, explaining that they were offended and badly treated but not touched by the soldiers.

On another occasion, a platoon of soldiers guided by the Lieutenant Colonel, interrupted an assembly of the Union of Teachers of Nomeque. They took pictures of the participants with the obvious purpose of scaring them in order to control their activities.

This double policy of propaganda and toughness (the carrot and the stick) resulted in its rejection by the population of Nomeque. As we have already observed, the murder by the guerrillas of selected people who had collaborated with the army, was enough to convince almost everyone to avoid any suspicious contact with the army.

## 2. 1 Propaganda

The first step of the military's propaganda campaign to obtain the sympathy of the local population was a visit to the poor *Simon Bolivar* neighbourhood. As part of this campaign, the army gave food to the inhabitants of *Simon Bolivar* and toys to the children. Afterwards the Lieutenant Colonel talked on the radio in Sutagao. He said that the peasants were already tired of the violence and the *subversion*<sup>49</sup>. He also added that the people had received the message of peace from the Army very well.

## 2. 2 The band's contest

On a sunny Saturday in October the village was occupied by an impressive military presence. Three helicopters flew in circles around the village. The governor of Cundinamarca visited the place in the morning but, after talking in private with the Lieutenant Colonel and the Mayor of the town, decided, for security reasons, to return to Bogotá.

A contest of musical bands was organised in Nomeque. The municipality was the organiser of the event but the army wanted to profit from it. The Lieutenant Colonel assumed he was the main authority in charge and occupied the balcony of the municipality, gave orders to the organisers and talked to radio "*Caracol*," a national network that was present especially for this event.

The show started with the singing of the National and the Cundinamarca's anthems (see for a comparison with Peru, Gose, 1994: 69-74). Then, the Lieutenant Colonel made an emphatic speech from the balcony with the Mayor at his right. He

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<sup>49</sup> In the Oxford Advanced learners dictionary subversion in its first meaning is "*to destroy the authority of a political system, religion, etc*"(1995: 1193). In Latin America, especially during the seventies and eighties, the term was used in excess by the militaries to define the action of every left wing movement.

asked the population to collaborate with the army in the fight against the guerrillas. He described them as: "*These criminals who want to take your children of fourteen or fifteen years old out, to make them fight as guerrillas by force.*" The Lieutenant Colonel said that the population of Nomeque was peaceful but "*they have to avoid being tricked by these bandits.*" When the Lieutenant Colonel finished his speech, Raul Carrillo, in charge of the sports in Nomeque and, after him, the Mayor of the town, made very cautious and short speeches.

Musical bands, coming from all the neighbouring towns and also from Bogota, started to march in front of the municipality. Before every band the soldiers forced or persuaded some children, who were only five or six years old, to carry banners and to form part of the parade. The soldiers dressed the children in shirts that said, "*I love the army.*" The children were persuaded to carry banners that said: "*pare la violencia*" (stop the violence) and "*paz es progreso*" (peace is progress). Two soldiers were helping the children in this task trying to make the letters of the banners more visible. With this action they eliminated any plausible idea of spontaneity.

The parents of the children involved worried about their children, and, when possible, took them away. For this reason, the last banners was carried by two big and young soldiers with their guns on their backs and the banners said "*no más violencia*" (no more violence).

During the contest there was a professional speaker, from Bogotá, who constantly reminded people of the presence of the army and its help to make this festival possible. I met Margarita Riquelme, a member of the local council representing the *Unión Patriótica*. She was quite worried about the soldier's interruption of the teacher's meeting the previous week and about the soldier's action

of taking pictures of almost every one during the bands' contest.

Very few people of Nomeque were present at the festival. In fact, the place was crowded with outsiders. Most of those present were members, teachers or relatives of the musical bands. Most of the people of Nomeque preferred not to be seen at the show, worried about the consequences of the military use of the festival.

Each band represented a particular school. There were twelve musical bands coming from schools of Pandi, San Bernardo, Sutagao, Tibacuy and Bogotá. Contestants had been divided in three categories: infants, beginners, and seniors. The bands of Nomeque obtained only two third places (consolation prizes).

The uniforms of the bands were very much like USA's independence parade. They were pseudo-military uniforms with stripes and full of colours and military caps and hats. The level of the bands was good and there was a great effort in presenting the adequate uniforms that were probably quite expensive. Most of the people, including the members of the Communist Party, were passionate about the bands and military music although some bands played also *Cumbias* or Simon and Garfunkel music.

The Lieutenant Colonel personally gave the prizes and ordered his soldiers to take photographs of the ceremony. Afterwards most of the people decided to return to their home- towns.

### 2. 3 Rewards for captures

The day of the musical bands' contest soldiers pasted advertisements on the walls of the village. The advertisements offered rewards for any information leading to the capture of some guerrilla leaders. As Olivia, a young student at the high- school told me, "*before you say something you are dead.*" With this sentence she was advising me of the power and social control the guerrillas exercised over the village. The reward for the capture of the guerrillas was forty million pesos, some fifty thousand dollars at that time, a lot of money for a Colombian peasant (for a poor anthropologist too). The advertisements showed the pictures of Jose Maria Piedrahita Loaiza, known as "*El Che*" and of Castellanos Garzón. Presentación Choachi told me that none of them were from Nomeque although their surnames were very common in the area.

Presentación took the advertisement off the wall of the museum arguing that the wall had to be clean. She told me that the guerrillas had already distributed their pamphlets. The pamphlets clearly stated that any person has to maintain a distance of at least four metres from any soldier and has to avoid having any contact with them. I felt the tension in the atmosphere.

### 2. 4 Halloween

The 31st October is celebrated in Colombia as Children's Day, coinciding with the USA celebration of Halloween. The children dress up for the occasion, knock at the doors and ask for sweets saying "*triqui, triqui, Halloween*" ("*triqui, triqui*" is a nonsense translation for trick or treat). In the evening, in a new small park near one of the rivers, the municipality organised the children's party. The army had been giving

sweets to the children in the main park with little success when they heard that the municipality was organising its party near the river. When the soldiers realised what was happening they immediately moved near the river and joined the party organised by the municipality.

The Lieutenant Colonel appeared with fifteen soldiers and a flag that said "*Brigada Móvil número uno por la paz en Cundinamarca*" (for the peace in Cundinamarca). The Lieutenant Colonel gave sweets to the children personally and participated with some soldiers in the organisation of children's "*rondas*" (ring around the roses.) He clapped his hands and sang as any other participant in the games.

The organisers created a committee to give prizes to the best dressed-up children. The Lieutenant Colonel, and also the Mayor and his wife, formed part of this committee. The children dressed up as pirates, princesses, gypsies, and priests, but seven of them were dressed up as soldiers. The soldiers offered them their own caps and painted the children's faces in black as the commandos used to do. The military paraphernalia attracted the children more than any other fantasy.

The Lieutenant Colonel asked his soldiers to take a picture of him with the seven children who were dressed up as soldiers. The children proudly made the military salute. Some of the parents of these children dressed up as military were frightened about any possible guerrilla retaliation because of their friendly attitude towards the military.

Claudia Garcia who dreamed about becoming a member of the armed forces used the opportunity to talk with the Lieutenant Colonel. She asked him questions about how to apply to join the army and also to write a reference letter for her.

Apparently, the organiser of the event was the Mayor's wife but again the Lieutenant Colonel used a popular event for his own purposes. Another authority,

who was in charge of one of the schools, was extremely worried after the event for being seen in the company of the army when the purpose of the organisers was completely different.

Doña Luz was very angry with the Lieutenant Colonel expressing that:

*"he is constantly putting his nose in every event. The Lieutenant Colonel had nothing to do with the children's party. Why was he giving sweets to the children? I hope he is not going to be present during the "bazaar" if not he is going to ruin it, nobody will come."*  
(The *bazaar* was a little fair that was organised to obtain money for the acquisition of a house for old people).

## 2. 5 The Bazaar

The army did not intervene actively in the organisation of the "*bazaar*." Some informants said that the committee that organised it asked the Mayor to mediate in order not to have the Lieutenant Colonel involved in it; nonetheless, the army was in charge of keeping order during the event.

Many people, as is usual on these occasions, got drunk. A group of five young peasants led by Juan Montana started a discussion with four soldiers. Juan was a member of a Communist family. Juan's father had gone to prison a year before for giving shelter to a wounded guerrilla. Juan's brother was assassinated four years ago during a confuse episode. In the middle of the discussion the soldiers got angry and took Juan Montana out of the square and started to beat him with the back of their guns. Montana's sister immediately called a member of the municipality who managed to intervene on his behalf and to convince the soldiers to let Juan go free.



## 2. 6 Christmas cards

At Christmas, the Lieutenant Colonel and some soldiers went from house to house greeting the villagers. They gave us a photocopied sheet of paper that expressed the military's best wishes of *paz para los hombres de buena voluntad* (peace for the people of good will).

Ruben, the guy who works in the butcher shop told me:

*“This gesture is at least one good thing coming from them. They are only useful in making our life more difficult. They stopped us and asked: Where are you going? What are you doing? What do you have there? And they never left us in peace. When we do military service we learn everything about the milicia (militia) but in this village we learn everything about the malicia (malice)”*.

## 2. 7 A military mayor

Once, a Lieutenant started a conversation with Presentación Choachi and asked her opinion about the possibility of having a military Mayor for the town of Nomeque. She answered him that this only happened in villages that were considered *terminadas* (literally finished, that there is nothing you can do about them).

Presentación also reminded him that the village was once governed by the military. During Rojas Pinilla's dictatorship a sergeant was appointed the Mayor of the town. There are several stories regarding this character who was, apparently, not very well prepared for the job and incredibly tough. In one of these stories, the Sergeant-Mayor whipped some thieves and made them carry advertisements that said, *Soy un ladrón* (I am a thief). In another one, the Sergeant-Mayor was remembered as a completely ignorant and incapable of understanding the proper meaning of a term in an official document.

Presentación told me the Lieutenant got red with anger at her suggestion that

a military person could be badly prepared for the job of Mayor. He replied to her saying that in Nomeque the Mayor had no authority at all and that a military Mayor would change the situation for the better<sup>50</sup>. Presentación argued that there were things that the Mayors knew how to do and the military did not. She also said that this Mayor was popularly elected and because of that he had to be respected. Presentación added that she had nothing against the military but that it would be a mistake to make the situation worse. The Lieutenant said finally that she had nothing to worry about and that the conversation was to be kept confidential between the two of them. *The two of us and the four soldiers that were also present*, Presentación told me later on.

## 2. 8 Surviving in the Paramo

Don Demóstenes Riquelme told me that ten soldiers and a Lieutenant had passed by his *finca* in the paramo a week ago. The Lieutenant asked him if he had seen the guerrillas they were pursuing. He added, *“well why I am asking this question if none of you are going to tell me anything”*. Don Demóstenes told me he had answered:

*“Lieutenant, it is the same as if I with my workers were to attack you with our ploughs, you would kill us immediately. Well, the same could happen to us with the guerrillas, we have to deal with them. If they ask me for some potatoes I will give them potatoes, if they ask me for rice I will give them rice and so on. And what are you doing here alone in the Paramo? If the guerrillas are going to attack you it is just because they will know they can kill you. You have to be at the borders with Venezuela, a country that wants to create problems with Colombia”*.

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<sup>50</sup> In *El Tiempo* (a Colombian newspaper) in the edition of the 18th of January 1996 there is an item published by the Ministry of Interior that says that every Mayor killed by the guerrillas will be replaced by a military one.

The Lieutenant answered, in Don Demóstenes' narrative, that if the high command would listen to him they would not have to be there making senseless rounds.

Don Demóstenes continued talking about the army and the Paramo.

*“Nowadays it is very difficult to work in the Paramo. People get scared and don't want to work anymore. The soldiers after rounds and rounds in the Paramo found a peasant and they killed him. Then they said it was a member of the guerrillas who offered resistance. That was what happened in Salvador (a vereda in the Paramo) two years ago. A young boy of a good family saw the Army. He probably got scared, ran away and the soldiers shot him dead. Then the soldiers told us the boy was escaping from them. That's the reason the people don't want to work in the Paramo anymore, they are frightened that the army los bombardee “(will bomb them).*

Don Demóstenes' wife, who heard the conversation with a sad expression on her face added, *“Poor mothers of the guerrillas and mothers of the soldiers! Only a mother can understand what they are suffering”.*

## **2. 9 Courting the enemy**

I have seen soldiers chatting and joking with girls of the town. Girls were quite cautious in this respect and, although interested in establishing communication with the soldiers they did not want to be identified as the soldiers' girlfriends. However, the relationship between girls from the community and soldiers was somehow tolerated. Marta is a veterinarian who was originally from a very unsettled town in the *Llanos Orientales*, the Oriental plains, an area disputed between the army and the guerrillas. In her opinion the relation between soldiers and girls was too open in Nomeque and would not be allowed in the Llanos where, very recently, three girls had been killed by the ELP for being too familiar with three soldiers. Apparently FARC guerrillas in the

area of Sumapaz are more tolerant of these relationships, probably because they consider them under their control.

## **2. 10 The ambiguous perception of the army**

During my fieldwork people expressed not only their anger against the army but also their ambiguity towards it. The armed forces as an institution are regarded as an integral part of the Colombian nation. This identification with the nation is present in the discourses of Horacio Carrasco, a former sailor of the Navy, and of Demostenes Riquelme a peasant. This identification of the army with the nation makes a clear distinction between the perception people have of the army and the almost completely negative perception of the police. However, it is important to refer to the increasing autonomy that the Colombian army has from the rest of the state (Leal Buitrago, 1984: 263). The army takes autonomous decisions regarding their war against the guerrillas no matter what the Colombian Government decides. This political autonomy from the control of the state shows that the fragmented perception of the state does not only originate in peasant's minds.

Many peasants did their military service years ago and remembered those days with nostalgia. They called it "*estar bajo bandera*" (to be under the national flag.) Claudia Garcia thought of the army as an escape from her difficulties and Horacio Carrasco was proud of his past in the Navy. During the band's festival, all the participants loved the musical bands and their military-like parades. Even the guerrillas made a distinction between the army and the police. But, when the army acted against the community, people rejected it and avoided any contact with it. It is also true that the rejection of the army by the community was not completely spontaneous. In order to obtain a total control over the population, the guerrillas had

to carry out some selected killings. While the army is perceived by the peasants as a male hierarchical domain, and their notions of courage and maleness give this perception a positive connotation, its outsider character makes their reception by the community unsuccessful.

### 3. The police in Nomeque

A study on the perception of the police in Nomeque is a study about the perception of an absence. As I have already explained, the guerrillas destroyed the police station several times and the authorities decided, at least for a while, to maintain the village without police.

For almost all the people of Nomeque, including the peasants, small shopkeepers and the local authorities, the absence of the police was welcome. The police as an institution had a bad reputation which was associated with cattle robbing and petty crime; with ill treatment of the peasants in particular and the poor in general; with expropriation and re-selling of privately owned guns, and with drug trafficking. The police were considered arrogant, corrupt and greedy. The peasants often used the verb "*esculcar*" (to search someone touching him) to refer to an unpleasant, humiliating action of which they are the constant victims. The police in their opinion were always trying to find something illegal to obtain a bribe from it. I did not find anyone in Nomeque interested in making a career in the national police (in contrast see Krohn-Hansen, 1990: 213).

### 3.1 The police and the people

During one of the guerrillas' attacks on the police station in Nomeque a bus full of students that was going from Sutagao to the village was stopped by the police in the middle of the road. After engaging in some shooting with the guerrillas the police officers decided to go up the hill hiding behind the bus, thereby using the students as a human shield.

One police officer was injured by the guerrillas, and the officers asked the driver of the bus to go to the place where the injured police left his walkie-talkie so he could pick it up. Someone angrily asked the police officers: *why don't you do it yourself?* The police officers answered that nothing would happen to the poor driver because the guerrillas were not going to shoot a civilian.

This story is a clear example of the differences in the perception of the police and the guerrillas. Even the police considered that the guerrillas were not going to shoot civilians and therefore the police had no hesitation in using the civilians as human shields.

### 3.2 Reconstruction and resistance

The local government received high pressure from the national government to rebuild the police station. Almost all the people of Nomeque were against it. One of the members of the local council told me:

*"If we rebuild the police station the guerrillas will come again and will destroy it again. And, by the way, what is the use of having only four police officers in the village? While two are resting, one is in the police station and only one is patrolling around."*

After some doubts, and more than a year of discussions, the government finally decided to rebuild it.

At the end of my fieldwork, an elite group of police officers arrived in the village and placed a pole and hoisted the Colombian flag where the police station used to be. After that event, and with the purpose of rebuilding the police station, a lorry arrived in the village carrying construction materials. When the people of the village realised what were the materials for, they were furious and did not let the lorry unload the materials. They argued with the driver, and told him that if he left the materials there they would disappear immediately. The driver, with difficulty, managed to explain to the mob that the rebuilding of the police station was not his business and that he was just a worker. The driver agreed not to leave the materials on the ruins of the station only if the people would agree in signing a memorial (petition) explaining why he was not able to do it. More than two hundred people signed the paper.

Margarita Riquelme was very proud of how the people's attitude had impeded the rebuilding of the police station. She interpreted this action as an option against the police and in favour of the guerrillas. However, we have to take into account that the opposition to the reconstruction of the police station was very much related to the fears of a new guerrilla attack. We have to remember that the last attack destroyed and damaged several civilian houses and buildings around the police station.

#### **4. The justice system in the town of Nomeque**

I have already explained in several chapters that the national system of justice was ineffective in solving the community's own conflicts. Moreover, most of the disputes of the community were solved outside the system. However, it would not be accurate to talk of the absence of the national justice system since it was organised and placed

in the area. In Nomeque there was a judge whose only jurisdiction was in relation to petty crime. A judge from Sutagao was responsible for the more serious criminal offences, such as the crime of murder. Although the judge of the community had no jurisdiction over murders and over the main crimes she had jurisdiction over *abigeato* (cattle robbery) and over injuries. She told me that in most of the cases, people preferred to arrange these issues their own way without the authorities.

#### 4. 1 The Inspector

Another important judicial authority in the village was the Inspector. The Inspector was in charge of the judicial procedures to start an inquiry. She was, for example, the one who took pictures of a corpse and opened a file after a murder. The nomination of a female inspector was, at the beginning, a success. As a woman she was treated with respect and was not perceived as a threat to the authority of the guerrillas. However this initial perception changed dramatically as a consequence of a possible misunderstanding.

During my fieldwork, in the absence of the police, the Inspector had serious difficulties fulfilling her job. One death and its different interpretations cost her her job. On one occasion she went alone with her assistant to a far away *vereda* where a peasant was found dead in suspicious circumstances. Apparently, he was killed by an explosion and from the collected data it seems that he had been working with powder, probably for the guerrillas.

The Inspector decided to go *in situ* to see what had really happened. In doing so, she entered in a territory completely controlled by the guerrillas assuming in herself the action of the state. Her action was a challenge to the authority of the guerrillas and not surprisingly it was considered almost a declaration of war. In the



place where the accident took place the Inspector found more than thirty males surrounding the corpse who were obviously members of the guerrillas dressed as peasants. Those present made some rude and nasty jokes about her and her assistant but, apart from that, they let them work in peace. After that, the Inspector was very scared and she decided to use the help of the army for her next inspections. She received threats to her life, almost daily. Once, she visited me and nervously looked through the window scared about the presence of an unrecognised rider quite far away. After a month she left the office.

#### **4. 2 Risk and gender**

The judge and most of the Inspectors that passed through the village during my fieldwork were females. This could be explained by the fact that the guerrillas would prefer not to kill women. However, all the Inspectors who were in charge during my fieldwork left the village and gave up their jobs after being threatened with death by the guerrillas. So, even if it was more risky for a man to be in the job and taking into account that during the fieldwork no women were killed by the guerrillas, the women who were in charge were nevertheless in great danger.

#### **5. The Town Hall**

The Mayor of the village, as referred to previously, has his authority constantly eroded by the action of more powerful forces that fight for the control of the community. The Mayor's role is more one of a mediator between conflicting groups in a very unstable situation, than an agent who effectively exercises his local power.

The Mayor of the town of Nomeque has to be constantly negotiating with changing social actors who, depending on the circumstances, become the most

powerful in Nomeque, at least for a number of days.

We have seen how the Mayor was unable to act when the drug lords occupied the first place in the coronation of Nomeque's Potato Queen. And in this chapter, I describe how the Lieutenant Colonel took control of the microphone and occupied the first place in two important events which were transformed into acts of political propaganda in favour of the military. On both occasions his role as mediator turned the Mayor into the equivalent of a diplomat.

To be a successful mediator is not an easy task as was shown by the former Mayor of Sutagao who was killed by the guerrillas because of his arrogant and macho defiance of their power. His car was stopped at a guerrilla blockade of the road to Bogotá and, when he complained about it, he was shot dead.

The army, the guerrillas, and the drug lords are all social actors that have to be treated with caution. The Mayor of Nomeque has difficulty in exercising autonomous power. If he rashly decided to take sides in favour of one of these powerful groups he knows that he would be the immediate object of the enmity of the others.

This particular situation is stressed in the language used by the Mayor who is always cautious, he never says a word that could be misinterpreted.

## **6. The education system in Nomeque**

The education system in Nomeque is positively perceived and even defended by the community. In Nomeque, there is one school in every vereda and two secondary schools in town. Almost all the children begin school when they are five years old. Only sixty per cent remain in the system after the fourth grade. Many male students start to repeat third grade again and after a while they abandon the system.

Rural schools have only five years of studies, and after them the parents who want their children to continue studying have to send them to the village. A clever boy in his third year of studies told me he was going to finish his school in the fifth year (like many males). And what do your parents think about it? I asked him, "*I don't know*", he answered me.

In the *veredas* the schools have one room where all the students of different levels are present. I observed a teacher in a rural school. She taught students from different grades, going from one table to another giving them different tasks to fulfil. In many distant *veredas* the schools have very few students, in one case only nine. Those schools are coming under increasing pressure from the national authorities to close down.

People of the rural areas are especially concerned about the quality of the education given to their children. The scholar system is still considered a way of social climbing. This is particularly the case in the education of women and it is directly related to the possibility of becoming teachers studying at the Escuela Normal.

A teacher from a far away *vereda* was not doing her job properly. She was absent for several days and, apparently, did not care very much about it. Many parents decided to move their children from that school to another in a nearby *vereda*. Knowing what was going on, the guerrillas advised the teacher to quit her job. She was apparently convinced by the guerrillas' arguments and, after her resignation, she was replaced by a more conscientious teacher.

Once, I met two teachers of a very distant *vereda* and they told me that the guerrillas respected and protected them.

*“If you are doing your job well there is nothing to be frightened of. We see the **amigos** (guerrillas) often and they always say hello to us and try to help us. Only if you don't work properly you could have some problems. Sometimes the guerrillas can be very tough with the teachers that not do their duty, they can even threaten them, particularly if they receive complains from their parents”.*<sup>51</sup>

Teachers are respected although many peasants complained saying that some years ago the teachers deserved more respect than at present. They were better dressed, with suits and ties, and had more authority. Teachers even used to beat their students when they did not behave properly. As Pablo Lanza told me:

*“Then a teacher was a very important person, who could marry the richest women in town. Instead, nowadays, many of them have no shame, get drunk in the village and have affairs with their students”.*

## **7. The agrarian bank**

As we have already seen, Nomeque has a local branch of the "*Caja Agraria*", a bank specialising in rural development. The bank is in a great financial crisis. The times of subsidised credits for peasants have long ago gone. People tended to associate those idle times with the director of Nomeque's office at that time, Guillermo Sidonia. The informal ways of obtaining a credit contributed to this process of individualisation. Moreover, several differences were perceived in the attainment of new credits that were related to political influence. During the fieldwork most of the peasants who

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Gose in *Deathly Waters and Hungry Mountains* relates the origin of Peruvian Sendero guerrillas with the importance of school teaching, *The origins of Sendero in the school system are evident in many ways, some of which connect with this ethnography. For example, the red flag rituals that Sendero militants perform in jail would be at home in any rural school and, above all, in the Fiestas Patrias... The ritualized, formulaic quality of Gonzalo thought, the ideology that Sendero presents as the science of the armed struggle, also reflects the rote learning and unquestioned deference to the teacher that prevail in most rural schools. Stylistically and organizationally, Sendero is a direct outgrowth of the rural education system and, by extension, of notable culture in small Andean towns* (Gose, 1996: 252).

were in debt blamed the director of the *Caja Agraria* and the Liberals for the interest rates being too high for their loans. The guerrillas suggested the peasants should not pay their loans back.

## 8. Summary

The people of Nomeque have a strong feeling of national identity. However, the national state in the community analysed is not perceived as a unified entity. People have fragmentary perceptions of it. There was an independent social perception of the police, the army, the education system, all seen as diverse institutions with few things in common.

The army is perceived in a particularly ambiguous way both as an enemy who jeopardises the “peaceful” life in the village obliging the guerrillas to action and directly related to people's patriotic ideas of Nation. It is also connected with order and hierarchy in Colombian national society.

The police, instead, were always and unanimously seen as a negative institution that acted against the will of the community. The national legal system was also perceived as an alien institution. Any peasant who goes to the legal system searching for justice is breaking the customary law of the community that forces them to solve these problems within it.

The Mayor of the community of Nomeque has no effective power and is forced to act as a mediator between the real powers and the community. His language is cautious and his profile low.

The education system has a very positive image. This section of the Colombian State is paradoxically protected and “promoted” by the action of the guerrillas, apparently concerned with the improvement of the educational standards.

The services provided by the *Caja Agraria* are perceived as personal relations between the director and the peasants. This perception is helped by the fact that political and personal relations are necessary to obtain a good loan. The fragmentation of the state leaves a vacuum for the proliferation of competing social forces.



A Lieutenant Colonel distributing sweets among children in Nomeque

## Chapter nine: Religious beliefs and practices in Nomeque

### Introduction

The religious beliefs and practices of the community of Nomeque are discussed below in relation to an ethos and a social practice of violence and to the construction of particular masculinities and femininities.

Social and political conflicts, like the agrarian rebellion and the breakdown of the *hacienda* system, affected the values of the community, and therefore its religious ideas. This chapter explores religious changes in the area with particular reference to the way conversion to Protestantism affects family values.

In order to understand the process of religious mutation it is essential to describe the changes in the authority and influence of the Catholic Church within the community. Catholicism still is the religion of the great majority of the people of Nomeque (although I shall describe later the growing importance of Protestant sects) (see Pecault, 1992: 225; Gonzalez, 1993: 40-41). Since the Catholic Church is made up of different and contrasting groups and individuals, most of the contrasts and contradictions that affect the community may also be identified within this institution.

Some of the contradictions that affect Catholicism in the community are particularly obvious in the personalities of the local priests who have often been caught in the middle of the political and social turmoil that have affected the region. To highlight their changing position in the community, I will compare the activities of two different Catholic priests. They were in charge of the parish of the village in different periods. They also have very different and contrasting personalities.

I will explore the special relations observed between the Catholic Church



and the Communist Party. Communists can at the same time be fervent Catholics and as such they are opposed to the propagation of Protestantism. Both Catholicism and Communism provide the community with values of social solidarity. I will also describe the cult of the saints and the Virgin Mary, particularly in the religiosity of the drug lords (see Whiteford, 1976: 112).

Nowadays, the previously unchallenged hegemony of the Catholic Church has had to face the intense proselytising activity of the new "*Evangelic*" Churches. I describe their rapid development and their principal religious practices (see Lehmann, 1996:3).

People converted to "*Protestantismo*" try to find their way out of the endless circle of violence and try to construct a different family pattern presided over by the authority of the father who is also involved and feels responsible for his nuclear family. The Protestant churches offer to the converted a rigid system of values that have to be effectively practised (Deiros, 1991: 172). However, I have found that this inflexibility does not impede the local transformation and adaptation of Protestant beliefs.

A degree of autonomy is exercised by the converted, particularly in their free reading and interpretation of the scriptures. I will show that despite the controlling efforts of the Protestant Churches people of the village perceived fundamentalist Evangelism in their own way. In a case study explaining the way members of the community adapt Protestant ideas to their own culture, I compare the rigid approach to Protestantism of a pastor of the *Cuadrangular* Church to that of Don Pedro Subachoque, a baker of Nomeque and a Protestant free thinker.

## 1. Believing and practising Catholicism

This section will analyse the different ways people believe and practice Catholicism. I discovered a conflict between the teachings of the Catholic Church and the practice of Catholicism. The Church constantly teaches the practice of its moral doctrine ("avoiding living in sin" as Father Melquiades would say) which is inspired by the Catholic Church's national, regional, and international policies. Its preachings are not to kill, not to commit adultery, to get married, to attend to mass etc. This conflicts with people's special relations with a Saint or a Virgin, with the practice of going to Church but not to mass, and the interest in obtaining the blessing from the priest but not necessarily a sacrament etc. These practices imply the use of what Weber defined as "*magic means for salvation*" (Weber, 1969:124).

I was told that people in the village believe less in God than in a virgin or a Saint (see Whiteford, 1976: 112). The virgin of *El Carmen*, and *Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación*, (the patron of Nomeque) *el Divino Niño*, *San Judas Tadeo* are the main objects of devotion of the community.

Catholics in the village do not have a clear idea of the Trinity. In fact the two most important elements of their Cosmology are Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit is vaguely recognised and is not an object of special devotion among Catholics.

In a trip by car to the village, an old peasant woman listened patiently to a long discussion between two peasants. One of them, a Protestant, was trying to deny Catholicism and to convince the other that *Protestantism* was the right religion. The old peasant woman stopped and ended the discussion saying, "*The only thing we are certain of is the existence of our Lord Jesus Christ and of Nuestra Señora (our Lady) the Virgin Mary*. Jesus and the Virgin are real, acting directly in the world and

their presence can be constantly perceived. Both produce miracles that are the eruption of the sacred in everyday life. God the father, instead, is perceived as an abstract being without any action in the world.

The Virgin of "*El Carmen*" is very popular among drug lords and bus and taxi drivers. The Virgin is known for protecting people with dangerous and risky professions and activities. She protects drivers from the risks and dangers of the road (that are especially high in Colombia) as well as drug lords from the risks of their infamous business. There is a strong relation between the Virgin and the drivers that is expressed in a popular song that says "*me regaló el carro la virgen, me lo regaló la virgen del Carmen*" (my car was a gift from the Virgin Mary, a gift from the virgin of *El Carmen*). When they have a new car they go to Carmen de Apicalá to have it blessed by the priest. Practically all of them have little images of the Virgin in "*escapularios*", scapulars, hanging on the mirrors of their cars or on their necks, and often a picture of the Virgin may also decorate their cars or their homes. Every year they celebrate *El Carmen's* day with a mass at the church. After the mass they form a caravan of cars making a lot of noise with their horns.

The Virgin of "*El Carmen*" is not only venerated by bus or truck drivers, but also by many people personally devoted to her. She is also popular with drug lords and "*sicarios*" (mercenary killers) who have an "*escapulario*" of the Virgin with them. These cults are particularly performed by people who live risky lives. As Michael Whiteford assesses:

*"The protection of supernatural powers is regarded as one of the few ways in which an individual can attempt to defend himself and his family and thus provides Tulcaneses with some means of dealing with life's unpredictable events"*(Whiteford, 1976: 115).

As many informants told me, it is possible to pray for revenge or to kill an enemy. The Sacristan of the village told me, that *"people are very ignorant and believe that they can pray to the Virgin to do something wrong"*.

A Protestant informant told me:

*"In Nomeque, and in all Colombia, some people are pagans. They think they are Christians but they are wrong. People even pray for others to be killed. They have to seek revenge, so they pray to obtain the might to do so. But this is not God but the devil that gives them energy. The devil has power and when people are praying for help in the exercise of violence they are talking to the devil but not to God.*

*"For example, look at the "bears" (the Ramirez, described above). When the Castros had killed their father and their sister one of them, they said, made a vow in the tomb promising that he was going to kill them all."*

One of the most popular images venerated in Nomeque is that of the *"Divino Niño"* (Divine Child). It is an image of the Child Jesus. There is a shrine of the *Divino Niño* by the road half way between Sutagao and Nomeque. This image was made by an engineer who works and lives in Bogotá but has a small farm in Nomeque. He told me of his great devotion for the *Divino Niño* and how his devotion protected him during the most important moments of his life.

I found in the narrative of this engineer and in many other people devoted to the *Divino Niño* the idea of the purity and harmless expression of the *Divino Niño* in contrast to the aggression and violence of the world. In this peaceful atmosphere, full of innocence and purity attributed to the *Divino Niño*, devotees find a reference to their infancy that, in these cases, is also perceived as pure and as a lost paradise. It is this association that makes him so popular. There is also an image of the *"Divino Niño de Praga"* in the church of Nomeque, it is a reproduction of the image that exists in Prague.

The *Divino Niño* is especially venerated in Colombia during Christmas

time. During the "*Nochebuena*" (Christmas Eve) there is a special set of prayers called "*novena del Divino Niño*" that is read by all the members of the family and is interrupted by songs. According to these prayers you can ask the *Divino Niño* any favour and he will provide it because of the merits of his infancy. It is his sanctity and pure infancy, his immaculate innocence, which is the source of his might in the fulfilment of people's wishes.

Saint Judas Tadeo is also the object of special cult. In one of the prayers I found below his altar it was written that since people often confuse Judas Tadeo with Judas the traitor, very few people ask for his favours. For this reason he is very powerful and will listen to every person asking for his help

The religious practice is perceived as a personal relation between the believer and a Virgin or a Saint. This relationship implies the fulfilment of promises and vows but has nothing to do with the exercise of a constant practice of an ethic. In the Colombian region of Antioquia there is an idiom that says "*el que peca y reza, empata*" (he who sins and afterwards prays is back to zero again). Sins can be withdrawn by the power of the prayers without the necessity of changing lives dramatically or stopping committing the same sins.

### **1.1 The importance of pilgrimage**

Pilgrimages are an essential part of people's participation in religious activities. Many people go, at least once in their lives, on a pilgrimage to a sanctuary. A pilgrimage is part of the special relation established with a chosen Saint or Virgin and one of the ways people use to obtain purification and pardon. The people of Nomeque go to different sacred places: the sanctuary of the virgin of Chiquinquirá in the nearby department of Boyacá; Carmen de Apicalá, where there is an image of the virgin of

"*El Carmen*"; The Christ of Monserrate situated at the top of a mountain peak above the city of Bogotá; and also to the far away sanctuary of the "*Cristo de los milagros de Buga*" (the miraculous Christ of Buga) in the Cauca Valley, near Cali.

During my fieldwork Gilberto Castillo, the sacristan of Nomeque, organised a pilgrimage by bus to Chiquinquirá. It was not the first time he organised it, he used to go there almost every year for the celebration of Chiquinquirá's day. Forty peasants filed up outside the old bus at the very convenient departing hour of 4 am. Most of the peasants started to drink *aguardiente* (sugar cane liquor) very early on in the journey.

At 11 am we arrived at Chiquinquirá. By that time, some of our companions were already completely drunk. The mass was about to start. Because thirty thousand people had crowded into the town the mass was celebrated on the main square in front of the church. The bishop spoke in his homily about the violence and the chaos of Colombia. He talked of the importance of order, discipline, and peace. Some members of the Colombian Armed Forces read the sacred texts and remained behind the priest for the rest of the mass.

It was difficult to say if he was backed by the Armed Forces or if he was giving them his support. Afterwards, an image of the Virgin that was previously shown outside was solemnly brought back into the church in the procession. Then the multitude dispersed.

Afterwards, we formed a long queue to see the old image of the Virgin of Chiquinquirá. When we were in front of it we kneeled down and most of my companions respectfully talked to the virgin for some minutes and prayed. Then we went around the town to find something to eat or to visit other churches and chapels. There was a market around the square where religious relics and souvenirs as well as

clothes and, surprisingly, guns were sold. People act and behave quite freely during these pilgrimages, without any solemnity. The purification is in the trip and in the visit to the Virgin and in the personal relation established with her.

On another occasion, the Choachi, an upwardly mobile middle class family invited us to visit the sanctuary of the Miraculous Christ of Buga in the Cauca Valley quite a distance from the Cundinamarca Plateau. It is important to explain that the Choachi family does not live in Nomeque any more but in Sutagao, the nearest city, although many of them continue to work in the town.

The Choachi are seven single sisters with ages ranging from thirty to early fifties. The only exception is Rebecca who used to be married and is now divorced. Rebecca has one son, Augusto (an engineer) and one daughter Gabriela (studying advertising at a university in Bogotá). Presentación has one daughter too (Josefa, finishing her high school) but has not married.

Augusto, the only male nephew, had a terrible car accident. He was miraculously unhurt after the complete destruction of the car. When his car was going to crash he asked the "*Cristo de los milagros*" for help. As he was saved he decided to go to Buga to give thanks.

We went to Buga in three cars. The sanctuary is constantly visited by thousands of pilgrims, some of them coming from the nearby city of Cali, but the majority of them coming from all over Colombia.

The temple is a very big basilica constructed at the beginning of this century by a French order of priests. The Order is not only in charge of the sanctuary but also administers a hotel for pilgrims. There was no room there but they told us it was quite inexpensive and nice.

After every mass the priest gives his blessing to any religious object people

bring there with them to be blessed. You can buy an enormous amount of religious paraphernalia in the market in front of the basilica to have it blessed in the temple. Not only Catholic relics can be found in the market but also magic, astrologic and esoteric items. In some cases the distinction and classification of the different objects is rather difficult.

The classical Frazerian separation between Religion and Magic is difficult to establish in this market in the case, for example, of a glass pyramid that has an image of the *Divino Niño* in its centre and that could be, at the same time, both a source of energy and a shrine.

We also went several times to the sanctuary of the Christ of Monserrate, above the city of Bogotá. Thousands of pilgrims and tourists visit the sanctuary, especially during the weekend. Many people walk up the mountain from Bogotá to Monserrate (approximately three hours). Some of them enter the temple climbing the stone stairs on their knees to keep their vows. Around the temple there are many shops, some of them with food others selling all kinds of religious paraphernalia.

Pablo Lanza, a veterinarian and liberal politician does not consider himself a man of faith. In fact he likes to be considered as a rather agnostic character. Nonetheless he makes one exception: *"I am very much devoted to the Christ of Monserrate"*. Every time he thinks it necessary he climbs up the mountain from Bogotá showing his gratefulness for the favours he has received.

Another aspect I would like to point out is the way in which the popular version of Catholicism is related to attitudes towards gaining and accumulating wealth. In this respect, there is a *"vallenato"* song which is very popular in the region written by Calixto Ochoa, called *"La Plata"* (the silver, in this context the money)<sup>52</sup> that

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<sup>52</sup> You can find it in a Diomedes Diaz version. Sony, 1994



synthesises quite correctly these values. It says:

*Si la vida fuera estable todo el tiempo*  
 (If life were stable all the time (eternal))  
*yo no bebería ni malgastaría la plata*  
 (I would not drink and spend my money senselessly)  
*Pero me doy cuenta que la vida es un sueño*  
 (But I realise that life is a dream)  
*y antes de morir es mejor aprovecharla*  
 (and before dying it is better to profit out of it)  
*por eso la plata que cae en mis manos*  
 (for that reason the money that come to my hands)  
*la gasto en mujeres, bebida y bailando*  
 (I spend it on women, drinking and dancing)  
*Todo el mundo pelea si dejo una herencia*  
 (everyone fights if I leave an inheritance)  
*si guardo un tesoro no lo gozo yo*  
 (if I hide a treasure I am not going to be the one who will get  
 pleasure from it)  
*se apodera el diablo de aquella riqueza*  
 (the devil obtains the property of that richness)  
*entonces no voy a la gloria de Dios.*  
 (so I am not going to the glory of God) (Ochoa, 1994).

We can see here an idea of wealth very common in peasant's perception of Catholicism. The money has to be spent for, if it is kept, even for family, it is in the devil's hands (see Taussig, 1980: 133). We will find a completely different ethical approach to wealth among the Protestants of Nomeque.

## 2. The land

When I started my fieldwork I was interested in people's religious perceptions of the land. Throughout the whole Andean region cults of the mother-land express the peasant's special relation to the land. Knowing that I was going to study a Spanish speaking mestizo community I was wondering how this Andean conception of the world would fit in Nomeque. To investigate this, I formulated hundreds of questions in the field regarding this topic. I was disappointed by the answers because I did not

find any sacralised relation with the land among the peasants of the community analysed. Instead I discovered in the peasants of Nomeque a very practical, even materialistic, attitude to the land as a source of income (see Gudeman, 1990: 24-28). Nature has to be violently dominated in order to extract our wealth from it.

### **3. On witches and devils**

Another point I want to make regards the lack of relevance of witchcraft in the community of Nomeque. After constant and insistent inquiry I found some members of the community who believed in witches and sorcery. This belief was never related to the present and it never expressed relevant social consequences in the community. No one in the community identified any woman as a witch, although they did mention, in one particular case, that the dead grandmother of a living family was regarded as a witch.

On another occasion, Claudia Garcia, of whom I talked in the third chapter, told me that she and her mother had been scared one night because there were noises in the roof of their house as if a big bird was there, probably a witch, she added. Finally the bird ended up to be a big cat that was walking on the roof during the night. The way the story concluded, with an explanation in accordance with a western rationale, shows us the limits of their beliefs in witchcraft. In fact, those beliefs have little relevance in their social lives.

I found a strong belief in the existence of evil and in the figure of Satan present in numerous stories along this work (see chapter four and this same chapter, cf. Taussig, 1980: 133). This belief, that comes from the peasant culture was surprisingly stronger amongst the members of the Protestant churches, than amongst

the Catholics. As we will see soon see, Protestantism, is practised mixed with their own folk ideas and beliefs.

#### 4. The Catholic Priests

The people of the community of Nomeque, who so often disagree in their opinions, unanimously agree that the activity and authority of the Catholic Church in the region has changed dramatically during the last years. A generation ago, priests were considered the most important leaders of the community and their activities encompassed far more than just addressing the spiritual needs of their flock. They were the authors or the instigators of most of the social and economic development of the village.

The Catholic Church has practised an essential role throughout all the history of Colombia (Shaw, 1994: 577-613). Catholic priests, even with their political preferences (mostly favouring the Conservatives over the Liberals) were the only respected arbitrators in the period of *La Violencia* when the community was divided in opposed political factions (Gonzalez, 1993: 40). David Martin says:

*... in a rather ambiguous manner, (the clergy) have stood between the poor and the exploitative zeal of the upper classes. Though they have generally supported the centralizing ideology of the right, they have at the same time sometimes tactically retired into a federalist viewpoint when wanting to defend their provincial strongholds* (Martin, 1990: 80).

Daniel Pecault notes that, after the violence, during the period of the National Front:

*“Anxious to confer on the political system a normative substructure, the Liberals are just as eager as the Conservatives to sing the Church’s praises. As it enters the last third of the twentieth century, Colombia is thus one of the few Latin American countries where the Church still has such an institutional presence”* (Pecault, 1992: 225).

In Fernán Gonzalez's opinion, the Catholic church, together with the two traditional parties, replace the national state in three dimensions: they give a collective identity in a country where the national identity is partly constructed (I disagree with the last part of this point), they construct elements that connect the local communities with the Colombian society and with the national state and they are present in all the territory where the national state is not (Gonzalez, 1993: 40-41.)

The changes shown in the role of the priest can be highlighted by a comparison between the charismatic figure of the former parishioner of Nomeque and the Father in charge of the parish during my fieldwork. Father Santana was born in an aristocratic family of Medellín. He was the priest of Nomeque for almost twenty-five years. He arrived to the village in 1958, ten years after the beginning of *La Violencia*. At that time, the government was interested in pacifying the region of Sumapaz, a constant focus of rebellion at the entrance to Bogotá.

Then, it was not difficult for Father Santana to become the main mediator between the government and the community of Nomeque. He was constantly asking the authorities to invest in the community. Father Santana started under his own initiative the creation of the "*Escuela Normal*", a high school whose main objective was to provide the Sumapaz area with elementary school teachers. Elementary education was considered a possible key to the end of violence. It was difficult then, to find teachers interested in working in such a problematic area. Starting a school that would provide teachers from Sumapaz itself was therefore a very good idea. Another high school was created also by the Father's help, he gave the Government the building where the "*Escuela Hogar*" was placed. The "*Escuela Hogar*" instead of preparing teachers like the *Escuela Normal*, was, in its origins, a place where peasant women were taught crafts and domestic management.

In fact the Government was at the time quite worried about the destroyed homes that *La Violencia* had left in its wake. For that reason, they wanted to improve the administration and subsistence of the households. The "*Escuela Hogar*" was later transformed into the "*Instituto de Promoción Social*", a social promotion Institute. It is still a High School without very well defined objectives.

Father Santana was not only interested in the school system, he was an amateur fan of Archaeology too. The area was populated early and many peasants discovered pottery and even some gold pieces in their fields. In 1969 Father Santana started to collect the pieces people found in the region and also to buy pieces from other areas of Colombia. He organised a small but impressive archaeological museum with more than three thousand artefacts. One of the most emblematic pieces of the Gold Museum of Bogotá comes from Nomeque. It was discovered by a peasant and Father Santana helped the peasant contact the authorities of the Gold Museum. The help that he gave saved an incomparable piece that would probably have been melted or at best sold to a private collector but it caused him many problems. The peasant who discovered the piece was not content with what he received from the museum and was always saying that Father Santana had made a lot of money from it.

Until the end of the seventies the village was only connected to the world by a dirt road. During the wet season it was often impossible to drive to the village. Father Santana managed to convince the Governor of Cundinamarca of the importance of building a paved road. To support that the Father put on a School play that in a funny way made subtle and not so subtle allusions to the unfulfilled governmental promises of constructing a paved road. The Governor finally kept his promise and by the mid seventies the road was constructed.

Father Santana was a Conservative and as such personally knew and was

in contact with the principal leaders of that party. Nonetheless he established important links and personal relations with the Communist agrarian leaders, in particular with Juan de la Cruz Varela who was the main organiser of the guerrilla movement in the area, and was later elected a member of the Colombian Congress to represent the Communist Party. I had the chance to read one of the numerous letters the peasant leader had sent to Father Santana and I was impressed by the extremely respectful way he treated him, which comes from Varela's peasant culture. In it, the priest was the object of great deference, but it also evidenced a deep and old friendship.

In a letter dated in November 1981, Varela thanks Father Santana for his political advice. He finishes the letter saying:

*"Agradeciéndole su bendición apostólica y su buen deseo por el mejoramiento de mi salud, reciba mi respetuoso saludo, junto con mis votos porque Dios y la Virgen lo conserve (sic) por muchos años mas de vida, Atentamente, Juan de la Cruz Varela".* (Thanking you for your apostolic blessing and your best wishes for the improvement of my health, receive my respectful greeting with my wishes that God and the Virgin will keep you for many more years, Yours, Juan de la Cruz Varela).

According to Father Santana's account, their friendship started when he provided Juan de la Cruz Varela with a book from his library. The Father had a huge library which was very unusual and disproportionate with the place, with first editions of Colombian's nineteenth century classics, and where it was possible to find many diverse topics and works from Political Science to Religion and from Archaeology to Astronomy. The library was probably the only one in the area thirty years ago and is still a rarity. Father Santana continued to provide Varela with books, in some cases writing to his book shop in Bogota and buying them out of his own pocket to give them to Varela. In one of the letters from Varela to the Father he made reference to

books he wanted to read.

Father Santana was intensive in his extra- religious activities in the community and no one was indifferent to his actions. Father Santana was loved, respected or feared by the villagers and he had friends and enemies but his authority over the community was always respected during the time he was in charge of the parish.

However, when he retired and attempted to move part of his collection from Nomeque, there was a conflict with a young new Mayor. This conflict reveals, more than any other, the tensions between the local political authorities that, during the late seventies and eighties, wanted to occupy the political space once occupied by the priest in the community.

Father Santana wanted to leave Nomeque when he retired as the parishioner, he also wanted to move part of his library to Medellin where he was born, and was thinking of making a donation to the Medellin library of the most important books in his collection.

Father Santana was not in Nomeque and for that reason did not manage to explain what he wanted to do, and rumours started to circulate that he wanted to close down the Museum and move it to Medellin. Some people still say that the Father also wanted to move the archaeological collection (his own property) out of the village.

The Mayor stopped the van that was moving the books alleging that they were Nomeque's property, something obviously incorrect. Some people were organised to protest against Father Santana's decision saying that he wanted to leave Nomeque not only without the library or part of it, but also without the museum. Finally, the truck was authorised to move and with it, the most precious books of

Father Santana's collection were moved to Medellin. The archaeological museum remained in Nomeque.

Father Santana was deeply hurt by this incident at the end of his life in Nomeque, and he thought that many people he used to think loved and respected him had betrayed him. The young Mayor did not respect his authority.

As Father Santana was such an exceptional character, a comparison with the new priest could be considered unequal and unjust. However, it is important to take into account that we are not only analysing what Father Santana had done but also what the community allowed him to do. And, as we have seen at the end of his activity in the parish the situation had already changed.

Father Melquíades was in charge of Nomeque's parish during my fieldwork. Instead of the aristocratic origin of Father Santana, Father Melquíades was the son of a peasant in the area of Sumapaz. In some way his character could not be more different than Father Santana's, Father Melquíades organised his work in a completely different way. He was shy and reserved and he never got directly involved in political activities. He always said he was only interested in fulfilling his spiritual duties.

Compared to Father Santana, Father Melquíades was not particularly interested in the promotion of Nomeque's economic development. His principal aim was to fight from the pulpit against the immoral customs of modernity, and also against the heretic advance of the Protestant Sects. He was famous for being severe and very tough with sinners. Some people in Nomeque waited until Father Santana, who had retired in Bogotá, visited the village to ask for confession. I have seen many young women, worried about confessing their sins to Father Melquíades, searching for Father Santana while he was in Nomeque.



The power Father Melquíades exercised was always inside the church. Outside the walls of the church he was only seen in missionary activities in the distant *veredas* talking to the people, celebrating mass in the open and organising circles of prayers. In other ways, his participation in the life of the village was always circumscribed to the activity directly related to the exercise of his cult.

This separation of a religious domain from the rest of the community life was not only a consequence of his personal decision. After the appearance of priests seriously involved in the Liberation Theology Movement, the principal aim of the hierarchy of the Church was to reduce the participation of priests in the political sphere. The advances of the Protestant Churches are a challenge to the Catholic Church and produced the necessity of reducing the pastoral activities to the spiritual needs of the community.

### **5. A Communist version of Catholicism**

The title of this section could also be a Catholic version of Communism. Our own categories can become blurred in a different context. What interested me in the relation between Communism and Catholicism is that Communism was not related to any revolutionary version of Catholicism. On the contrary the priests in charge of the parish have always been very orthodox in their opinions and actions. Catholicism and Communism are perceived in the community stressing the values of fraternity and solidarity present in both of them.

The following anecdote will help to understand the strong relations the guerrilla and the Communist Party have with the Catholic Church. Simultaneously, it reasserts the importance of the social memory of the leaders of the Peasant rebellion. Both Catholicism and Communism appear together in their common remembrance of

the egalitarian struggle for the land when the community was united before the power of the landowners. They both gave support to peasant ideas of solidarity and fraternity.

On a sunny Sunday in September, the leaders of the *Unión Patriótica* (a political front with the hegemony of the Communist party and in which the FARC were also represented) organised a homage in honour of the leaders of the agrarian struggle for the land. The ceremony took place in a school in a distant *vereda*, some ten kilometres from the village, up in the mountains. About six hundred people arrived at the school. The celebration started with a Catholic mass in memory of the peasant leaders. The mass was performed by Father Santana and Father Melquíades. The priests made an improvised altar over a table that was covered with a Communist red flag with its hammer and its sickle.

Father Santana gave a sermon remembering the peasant leaders, all of whom he knew personally at the time of the rebellion. He even remembered one important leader, a Gonzalez, whose name was not on the list. He referred to anecdotes of his relations with them in which both would agree to do something together for the community.

Afterwards, political leaders made speeches remembering the leaders and the struggles of the peasant movement. When the priests and the principal authorities returned to the village, a platoon of twenty guerrillas, dressed in green and made up of men and women, arrived with all their weapons and distributed political propaganda. They also danced and mixed with the community. The orchestra played traditional music of the region.

Communists and guerrillas do not trust the Protestant sects, considering them as part of the USA's intervention in Colombia. Some particular sects have been

obliged to leave the country, as its members were accused of being CIA agents and received death threats. The guerrillas also think that Protestant churches divide the community. Instead, they espouse the sense of unity and community expressed by the Catholic Church.

Father Melquíades was, as I already acknowledged, considered extremely severe by the people of the village. One guerrilla member was very upset about Father Melquíades' attitude. He told me that once a peasant family asked Father Melquíades to conduct a mass for them and in his sermon he treated them harshly as sinners.

*"Because of Father Melquiades' severity, people are leaving the Catholic Church and more people are joining these Protestant sects; the USA is behind them."*

## **6. The Protestants**

With the word Protestant I am binding together a number of diverse and different groups. American evangelic sects, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostalists and Adventists, are all actively trying to propagate their faith in the region. They are all called *Protestantes* (Protestants) or *Evangélicos* (Evangelists) by the people of Nomeque and that is the principal reason why I am going to treat them together calling them by the same term (see Lehmann, 1996:3).

The word Protestant refers, in the region, to any person who forms part of the myriad of religious groups and organisations that have some Christian roots. Protestant is, in this context, anyone who is not a Catholic. The same people who are called Protestant, marginalised and stigmatised by the rest, consider themselves to have a sense of solidarity with members of other cults and sects.

The members of these Protestant churches are quite important in their numbers and influence in the Sumapaz region, but they are still only a tiny minority in

Nomeque. However, they are very active in the village and several churches are interested in the development of their cults in Nomeque.

Two different Protestant services take place every Sunday in the village. Not more than fifty people attend them altogether. Both services are performed using the same pattern. Loud songs sung together by every member of the Church are frequently interrupted by prayers to the Holy Spirit and with readings and comment on passages of the Bible. As David Lehmann notes:

*“...music contributes to the ritual atmosphere. Apart from supporting the preacher’s management of emotional expression, music also provides a vehicle for the expression of collective unity...”*(Lehmann, 1996: 188)

Most of the churches that operate in the region are Evangelical charismatic communities with a base in the USA. The more successful churches among the people of the region have millenarian and apocalyptic ideas about the near future. We can perceive two apparently contrasting elements in Protestant beliefs. On the one hand, most of the Protestant groups that operate in the area have apocalyptic ideas and are waiting for the very near end of the world. On the other hand, the people of the village perceive Protestantism in a very Weberian way. Protestants are considered hard workers and people who give the money they earned to the household economy. In accordance with Weber’s ideas about a Protestant ethic, Protestants in the village had a dynamic impulse to accumulate wealth but not to dissipate it (M. Weber, 1930: 216). This is in agreement with Deiros who thinks that Protestantism in Latin America successfully provides its members with a work ethic more adapted to the capitalist economy (cf. Deiros, 1991: 172). Lehman also points out in relation to Protestants that:

*“whereas the men talk of achieving self-control or self-discipline, women talk of bringing their men under control, implying that there*

*are demonic forces which at once control their men and put them out of control*“(Lehman, 1996:197).

People have noticed that Protestants do not drink. We have seen that drinking alcohol is one of men’s more important social activities in Nomeque. Men in the village spend most of their money outside the household. Protestants spend less money and time outside the household and give more to their families.

Being out of the circles of solidarity among drinking friends, Protestants avoid being involved in the conflicts and competition with other men. Elisabeth Brusco notes that males usually spend from twenty to forty percent of the family’s budget on alcohol (Brusco, 1995:97). On the other hand, by spending their money inside the household Protestants display a stronger concern for their wives and offspring (see Greenberg, 1989: 102-104, Brusco, 1995: 97, Lehmann, 1996: 225).

David Lehmann finds the same pattern but expresses it in a rather sceptical way:

*“The effort to control female sexuality expresses a desire both to re-establish, or perhaps simply establish, the nuclear family as a stable unit*“(1996: 225).

Conversion to Protestantism often implies a more responsible assumption of the paternal duties. Protestant families in the community were always father-headed households. By avoiding drinking Protestants often reduce wider circles of solidarity to the household, making the nuclear family central. They also have strong fraternal links with the other members of the cult. Protestantism could be, for some men, a way of getting out of the circle of violence and constructing a paternal authority inside the family which is not based on *patronazgo* values.

A Catholic peasant told me the story of a peasant who was constantly drunk and used to beat his wife. His conversion to Evangelism changed his behaviour completely. He became a good and responsible father and husband. This coincides

with Elisabeth Brusco's central assumption, that Protestantism in Latin America assists in the *domestication* of men, making them better husbands and fathers and keeping them from aggression and drinking. In her opinion, women used conversion to Protestantism as a strategy to change men's lives and redirect their energies (Brusco, 1995: 149)<sup>53</sup>. Protestantism in Nomeque, constitutes a third discourse opposed both to *patronazgo* and *madrazgo*. Unlike *patronazgo*, it stresses the paternal involvement in the nuclear family. This paternal involvement is different from a patriarchal one based less on domination and more, as Brusco points out, on a *domestication* of men (Brusco, 1995: 149). Unlike *madrazgo*, Protestantism stresses individualism instead of social solidarity. This explains the strong opposition of the guerrillas to the proliferation of these sects.

For most of the people of Nomeque Protestants did not enjoy life and could not be trusted as friends because they did not drink. This latter fact put the Protestants at the margins of the network of social relations established in the village. In fact, there was much pressure from the community against being Protestant. As a Protestant told me "*In Nomeque people don't like real Christians, Father Melquiades is always praying against us. Here people are not open to hear the word of God*".

Children do not always want to continue with their parents' practices particularly during their adolescence when they often prefer to live a free and less rigorous life. Protestants have the tendency to practice their commandments of chastity before marriage. In the village, Catholicism is not related to those practices.

The same Protestant told me:

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<sup>53</sup> However, I do not agree with Brusco's unclear use of the term *machismo* and what she calls *the machismo complex in Latin America* (1995: 5). This is because I found that Latin America is too diverse for such generalisation and I do not think that Protestantism is the only set of values that opposes *machismo* in Colombian society.

*“My children, some years ago, lived in fear of the word of the Lord. But, since they are adolescents they are not living as God told us to do. Maybe because they don't want to lose the pleasures of the world, the sin. Or they don't want to be isolated from others. And also because the Evangelicals are perceived as the scum of the world. God said to the apostles that they were the scum of the earth. Who knows? Maybe in some years my children will return to the faith”.*

Solidarity among believers is strong but it is further reinforced by the financial help offered by Protestant churches. These churches often lend money to their believers allowing them to start a shop or any kind of small business. It is a way of helping the members of the Church but is also a way of strengthening their ties to religion and obliging them to maintain their links with the Church. A spiritual debt becomes also an economic one.

Pastor Moran, is a member of the "*Cuadrangular*" (Quadrangular) church, whose central church is in Los Angeles, California. The pastor opened a food store with a loan he obtained from the church. The store was well provided with more products than the average one and stayed open until late.

From a poor and difficult background, the Protestant pastor explained to me the deep change of his life after his conversion to "*Cristianismo*" (Christianity). The pastor, like many Evangelical Protestants, does not consider Catholics to be real Christians. Before his conversion he used to be an aggressive and undisciplined soldier. Then, he told me, he entered into the drug dealing business. In it, greedy for money, he became violent and even cruel (although he did not describe to me his crimes in more details). He was hurting himself and hurting the people he loved. His life was empty, and he was full of anger and hate. He was feeling desolate and miserable when he discovered God and converted to "*Cristianismo*" (Christianity), thus obtaining peace of mind. Religion had changed his life. He got married, became a good worker, a good father and a good husband.

Pastor Moran said all these things in a passionate and almost aggressive way. The aggressive past he was talking about seemed very tangible; in the language he chose and in his gestures I was able to perceive that his past was not still completely behind him. His way of talking was not very attractive or spiritually stimulating. That was the possible reason why he was not very successful in converting others, and some Protestants preferred to pray with their families inside their homes rather than to join him.

I asked the Pastor of the *Cuadrangular* Church about the other Protestant groups that were operating in the village and he said that they were the same, that they were all brothers. However, it was obvious that they were not members of the same church and that they were competing. I asked him again about them and he recognised differences and conflicts between different groups, but he told me that:

*"We are all Christians anyway." "And what about the Catholics?" I asked him, "Why are not they Christians? "Because they don't practice the commandments and they are idolaters. They believe in idols like the saints or the images of the virgin and they pray to them".*

Another Protestant complaint about Catholicism is that their religion has no influence on their behaviour. As a Protestant told me:

*"They go to church (Catholics) but they beat their wives, they get drunk and can also kill. That is because Catholics pray to images, to "puppets" not to the real God. If they talk to an image they do not talk to God but to the devil."*

Most of the works about the emergence of Protestant sects in Latin America stress their fundamentalism and their conservative and capitalistic views as opposed both to the revolutionary progressivism of Liberation Theology and to the hierarchical traditional organisation of the Catholic Church (Martin, 1990: 272; Deiros, 1991: 160.) Pablo Deiros associates the spread of Pentecostalism to social change:



*“...the Pentecostal churches are class-based organisations and are often protest movements against the existing class structure (Deiros, 1991: 160). However, Deiros also notes that, “It is certainly true that Latin American fundamentalists for over a generation were prepared by North American missionaries to accept the linkage between conservative, anti-marxist policies and the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (Deiros, 1991: 178).*

David Martin assesses that:

*“... the personality it nourishes will be one with a new sense of individuality and individual worth and, therefore, possessed of a potential for assessing its own proper activity, in which will be included activity in the economic realm” (Martin, 1990: 232).*

Although I accept that most of the new Protestant movements acting in Latin America have a conservative ideology and they provide their members with a capitalistic work ethic, a comparison between Pastor Moran of the *Cuadrangular Church* and Pedro Subachoque, an independent Protestant will highlight substantial differences in the way in which the converted interpret Protestantism. My assertion is that there is more space for autonomy and that Latin Americans converted into Protestantism can interpret it in their own way.

## **7. The story of Pedro Subachoque**

In Nomeque, Protestantism appears as a third alternative to the *patronazgo* and *madrazgo* set of values. This alternative is constructed by a process of appropriation and rejection of bits and pieces of Protestantism. Curiously enough this process can be better appreciated in the analysis of the life story of a baker not particularly influenced by a capitalistic ethic: Pedro Subachoque an autonomous, individualistic,

and somewhat lazy story teller and free thinker<sup>54</sup>. In his story it is possible to see how Protestantism is transformed and adapted into the culture of the community to become a social and religious alternative.

It was difficult to find anthropological or historical studies on autonomous characters or heretical individuals where these individuals did not manage to organise a community of believers. In this respect I recognise the influence and importance that Carlo Ginzburg's historical work in the archives of the Holy Office (Ginzburg, 1980) has on this section.

Cultural autonomy in a religion conceived in a constant process of adaptation is at the centre of what I want to demonstrate. My encounter with Don Pedro had mutual implications because it was not only me who wanted to write about him but also he who wanted to be written about. The following example will enable me to discuss the transformations that exist in adapting a religious tradition to a particular culture. More than illustrating religious changes it suggests that change is an essential aspect of religion and culture.

I am not going to make use of the term syncretism to describe this interactive religious process. The term syncretism, as it was discussed by Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart (1994: 577-613), appears to me as somewhat mechanistic and static. Religion involves constant transformation and adaptation and syncretism stresses the idea of synthesis between two or more systems of values. This synthesis captures just one moment in the religious process and, like a photograph, has difficulties in observing the constant movement.

Resistance is a concept that has been used to describe unequal situations

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<sup>54</sup> Cornelia Butler Flora in her study in Valle del Cauca concluded that Pentecostalism does not provide its members with a new work ethic (Butler Flora, 1976: 227).

where Western hegemonic thoughts and practices are contested (Taussig, 1980: 197). Resistance stresses the subversion but not the appropriation or promotion of these thoughts and practices. In the case set out below we can perceive the persistence of a Christian identity and a conversion into a more "pure" way of Christianity clean of any "superstition"(Weber, 1930: 197). Studies on Christian conversion have the limitation of understanding Protestantism mainly as a sociological phenomenon concentrating on the experience of the converted (Harding, 1987:167- 181). Although I am describing one particular person, this is not a study on the subjectivity of individuals under the process of conversion. I register the importance of conversion for the individual experience but also the ambiguities of such "liminal" moment in the process of a life.

Pedro Subachoque is a baker in the village of Nomeque in his mid fifties. He rents a poor shop in a peripheral area of the village and has a poor house in front of the market where he sells bread, soft drinks and beer. He has a wife and three children, a boy and two girls who are now in their twenties.

Don Pedro comes from the Colombian *departamento* (region) of Tolima. The region suffered political cleansing during the period of "*la Violencia*" (1948-62) when complete families were killed and Don Pedro was then in his infancy. He arrived at Nomeque after a long pilgrimage around numerous villages and towns that started when he was very young, nine years old, after his mother was killed and his family dispersed. *"My mother was killed in Rio Seco, Tolima, the "chusma" stabbed her twelve times till she died. We went together to a well for water and they killed her on the road"*. "*Chusma*" was the name by which vagrant gangs who identify with one or the other political forces (Conservatives or Liberals) were known. They attacked the lives and properties of their political enemies.

Don Pedro never told me the political identity of the killers of his mother, although some of Don Pedro's political opinions make me think that she was killed by a Conservative mob.

*"I ran away from that place and started working in a farm, it was a terrible time. I was only nine years old and the owner, who left the place, put me in charge of the farm with lots of animals. I stood in that house alone for several days and no one came. Finally a black man appeared. I was very scared because it was the first black man I had ever seen. At the beginning I thought he was a dwarf because someone told me that blacks were dwarfs. But we ate a chicken and before eating he prayed and I realised that he was a good person".* In Don Pedro's narration the black man became human when he prayed.

*"Antonio, that was his name, was also very scared".* Don Pedro continued, *"He was originally from the region of Choco (where most of the population is of African origin) but the owner of a farm gave him a job in Tolima and he moved to that region. He saw how the "chusma" killed all the people that were with him at that farm. But, fortunately, he was left free, probably because he was black and the murderers did not consider him as part of that war. We stayed together for a month or more but then he decided to go to the city because he thought that the "chusma" would return and kill both of us. For a while I continued living alone until two men came by. They told me they were going to sell some horses in the city. They asked me what I was going to do there alone and I finally decided to join them in their trip. It was the very first time I went to a city. I saw a car and I asked what it was. They wanted to tease me so they told me that cars were dragons, but I saw people getting into them, I realised that men were driving them and I didn't believe in their joke. Then I asked about a light bulb, it was the first time I saw electricity. They told me it was a fruit from the tree of light. They made a lot of fun of me.*

*Afterwards, I found a job on a farm that had two very big dogs. They scared me, but, finally, I managed to pass by them without fear. The owner of the farm, Ospina was his surname, asked me what was my name. I told him my name was Pedro Subachoque and then he asked me who was my father. I told him that my father was Jose Subachoque Bobadilla and he told me that my father was his Godfather. Is he the one that has a farm in Rio Seco? He asked me. Yes, I told him, I escaped from that place because my mother was killed. After a time they found a brother of mine and he took me to my father who was with my elder brothers and we met each other after a long time. He was very sad, he had lost almost everything in "la violencia", he had nothing. After the encounter we said goodbye and I hardly met him again. (It is interesting to pointing out that his father's role in his life was almost non-existent and this makes perfect sense with what we have already stated in reference with family organisation). I stayed in the Ospina farm because they loved me very*

*much. But one day I went to hunt pigeons in the nearest forest, meanwhile the guerrillas appeared and entered the house; I got very scared and ran away. I went to La Dorada Caldas where I worked in a bakery shop and learned the job".*

Don Pedro spent a surprisingly short period with his father after his encounter. This is quite common in a society where the main affective relation in the family is established with the mother.

### 7.1 Being a Christian

Pedro Subachoque considers himself an "*Evangélico*" (Evangelical) but he is not a member of any specific church. "*It doesn't matter. We are all Evangélicos (Evangelicals), real Christians who suffer persecution*". He picks up teachings from most of the missionaries that have passed through Nomeque and from the books he reads everything that comes from different sources.

Don Pedro used to participate in the Evangelical Church while he was living in San Bernardo, but, since he arrived in Nomeque he prefers to pray alone. He receives every person that proclaims the word of the Lord with attention.

*"You must always listen to the ones that propagate the word of God. If someone comes in the name of the Lord you have to listen to him at least for five minutes. If you do so they will take your impurity with them and your house is going to be purified. If you don't the Gospels say that they will clean the dust off their feet and leave and their impurity will stay with you".*

Don Pedro told me he lost his faith in Catholicism some thirty years ago. The image of his mother being stabbed to death, and the emergence of a violent world where Christians killed each other, made Don Pedro reflect on the defects and anomalies of Catholicism. An Adventist missionary converted him to "*Evangelismo*" (Evangelicalism). After the conversion he settled down and raised a family.

*"I respect the "curas" (Catholic priests) because they are ministers of God, but, at home my poor mother only taught me to pray the rosary and to depend on the priests. That's the reason why they want people to confess. No one taught me to read the Bible, the word of God, by myself. Catholics consider it a sin to read the Bible by yourself. Many Christians were burned in the past for doing so".*

Catholic priests look with suspicion at Don Pedro's opinions but the Protestant groups established in Nomeque don't like his heterodoxy, autonomy and independence. *"He is not practising his Christianity"* the pastor of the *"Iglesia Cuadrangular"*(Quadrangular Church) told me. *"He says he is a real Christian but he is acting like any Catholic."* On the other hand Don Pedro does not like the Protestant pastor either: *"He is arrogant and ignorant"*, he said.

## **7.2 A charismatic leader without disciples**

Most of the villagers considered Don Pedro as a somewhat weird character and often made fun of him. Nonetheless he had his sympathisers. He was not interested, as far as I could see, in creating a new Church, a specific cult, or in forming a group of disciples. Instead, some people who were particularly influenced by his opinions visited him seeking his advice in religious matters. Who were these people? They were mainly male peasants from the highlands who were either illiterate or, more often, semi-literate. They consulted him asking questions in which they expressed their doubts about the meaning of life, the existence of evil in the world, the sins or the Virgin Mary, among other issues. He often complained about his own family, particularly his children, who did not practise the religion.

### 7. 3 Religion and superstition

Don Pedro makes a sharp distinction between religion and superstition. For him, the Virgin and the Saints are superstitions. These superstitions are illusory in his opinion. They do not have any power unless they are used by evil spirits to confuse Christians. If the Virgin or the Saints are illusions, devils and witches instead are real and form part of his cosmology. In it evil is an entity and witches exist because there is evil in the world. This stress in the existence of evil comes, in Taussig's opinion, from the construction of a hierarchical dualism between good and evil as a consequence of the conquest (Taussig, 1980: 169-180). Protestant fundamentalism stresses this dualism to include in it the Catholic cults they consider superstition. Don Pedro has a Manichaeian division of the cosmos but he prefers to think of these Catholic cults as illusions:

*"I am against the cult of the Virgin Mary. In a book of the Jehovah's Witnesses I read that there were three virgins: Isis, then a black virgin and another one whose name I can't remember. They were three and existed in different places of the world before Christianity. So, the people who adore the virgin are pagans. The world is full of idolatry. People have faith in the "muñeco" (literally doll, idol) and not in God.*

It is certainly interesting to note Don Pedro's reference to *el muñeco* (the doll) a figure clearly associated by Taussig with the devil contracts performed by agrarian workers: *"A small anthropomorphic figurine, referred to as a muñeco (doll), is prepared, usually from flour, and spells are casts"* (Taussig, 1980: 95).

Don Pedro continued his story:

*"Once when I was living in San Bernardo there were some evangelic guys that were returning home at night after a meeting in the Evangelical temple. They passed through the image of the Virgin Mary. I mean the one that its placed at the entrance of the town. They saw how the eyes of the virgin were lit up. But I don't think that's the work of God but rather the work of the devil, because God is not going to put an angel there but rather it's the people who project their own energy and then the devil appears and takes profit from it. There*

*is an old man, Ramirez, who used to live here but is now in Bogota, who had seen an image of the Sacred Heart crying. He called the people to show them what was happening. Now there are hundreds of people that go to that place in Bogota to pray. You probably know Ramirez, some three days ago he was here".*

#### **7. 4 The books and the Apocalypse**

Pedro spoke with the charisma of a person who believed passionately that he had reached God after a personal search. Showing me a book with some illustrations that made reference to natural catastrophes he said:

*"These are signs of the time, the end of the world is near and God is giving us his signals. The signals of God have to do with the pouring of seven mugs as it is predicted in the Apocalypse. One of them could be the AIDS disease, another the earthquakes, another the pollution. Because there was a battle in the sky between Michael the archangel and the devil, after the combat the devil went down to the earth to sow hate and lies. All these earthquakes, storms and famines, the increase in violence and murders is telling us that we must be prepared".*

When he talked, the sacred scriptures, as often happens in history, lost their abstract significance and obtained a direct connection with the present. Don Pedro has, in his bakery, two books that he treats with devotion. When he has no customers he is always trying to read them. He reads with difficulty word by word. In his stories about himself there are a lot of references to his childhood but none to any school experience. It is obvious that if he had some schooling it was for a very short period. The two books he was always keeping with him were an unidentified edition of the Bible he had bought from an Evangelical missionary and an explanation of the Apocalypse he obtained from the Jehovah's Witnesses. The latter is illustrated with drawings that represent, with people dressed in a modern style, the near future as predicted by John of Patmos and interpreted by the Jehovah's Witnesses.



As I already mentioned Don Pedro had millenarian and apocalyptic ideas about the near future. There were signs of the time that indicated to us that the end of the world was near. These signs had already been prophesied in the Bible, especially in the Apocalypse. The increase in violence, AIDS, earthquakes, ecological disasters were all God's signals to the mortals. In spite of these signals however, we cannot be precise about the end of the world.

*"Anyway," Don Pedro said, "no one, not even the saints, know the day and the hour. But we have signs. Do you remember what happened in Armero?" (Armero was a Colombian town in Tolima that was destroyed by the eruption of a volcano <sup>1</sup>. "There was a lot of evil in Armero. There are places where the evil concentrates and so the devil puts his tail there. In those places there is more evil than in other places because there are more witches, sorcerers, fortune-tellers that are asking for the coming of the evil forces. It is a bad energy that attracted and produced the catastrophe in Armero. People there were living in sin. It seems that during the Violencia the people castrated and then killed a priest who made a curse against the town. Then, what obviously was going to happen happened. And it's also a sign of the times, a sign that the times are near. It was a warning to all of us".*

I asked him why he believed that the end of the world was near. He told me that the "*Spiritual Science*", that is different from the human sciences is certain of it because of the signs that exist in the world these days. Which signs? I asked him.

*"For example, he told me, "the situation of man in places like India where very few take the lands from the rest, Armero, the wars, the storms, the hurricanes. My father lived in the violence of the machete and the guns, now we have the violence of the guerrilla, when Jesus was on earth it was the violence against Christians and the land was owned by the people in power. But now we can see that what the science is predicting is happening. The sign of the Antichrist, everything that is going on, everything".*

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<sup>55</sup> Armero was a prosperous town of 25.000 inhabitants until 13 November 1885, when the eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz caused a mud slide that covered it completely, about 20.000 people lost their lives in one of the worst national catastrophes of Colombian history).

## 7.5 Orality

Don Pedro was combining oral and written culture in his head. He could easily be defined as a story-teller. He learned to read and write with little help from the formal education system. He loves the stories of the "*Arabian nights*":

*"There was a man who married a woman without knowing her condition. Once, he realised that while he was sleeping she had woken up and gone out. The next night he pretended to be asleep and when she went out he followed her.*

*She went to the cemetery where she met other women and they all together started to take out corpses from the tombs and to eat them. He was terrorised by what he had seen and became paralysed, so she easily discovered him and changed him into a dog. As a dog he was very badly treated. One day he managed to run away and to get on a ship. A merchant who became his new master gave him food and shelter. Afterwards, he met two white witches who helped him recover his human form. They told him that those who treated him so badly were terrible black witches. He returned home with a magic potion and when he entered the house he found his former wife sleeping. He threw the potion at the witch changing her into a mare. Every morning he used to ride the mare and treated her badly. The prince of that kingdom called him to the court to explain why he was treating that horse so badly. When he arrived at the court there was also a man with four dogs..". (At that moment someone entered the shop and the story finished).*

Don Pedro also told me he saw on television a story of "Grip" (probably the Grimm brothers in an old English film called "*The red shoes*"). "*The devil captured a girl and obliged her to dance until her shoes were destroyed*". His interest in the Grimm brothers stories he saw on television puzzled me. Why did he never ever tell me about other television programmes? Why did he select these stories from hundreds of options?

The Arabian Nights tales he remembered made me think about a link between orality and written or filmed stories that come from an oral tradition. Why were all these texts, full of ambiguities and obscure meaning, so successful in Don Pedro's mind? These texts are successful precisely because of their ambiguity and

obscurity.

The problem posed by Sperber about why some representations are successful can also be formulated in this context (Sperber, 1984: 73-89). The ambiguities of the texts, and their obscurity allow them to be easily modified by readers. They can be easily reinterpreted, adding elements of a person's own culture in them. Don Pedro combined his evangelical opinions with a fascination for devils, witches and sorcerers that came from his peasant culture (Michael Taussig, 1980: 174-178). The oral character which some stories have lends them to be orally re-told to others, introducing elements of an oral peasant tradition in them.

## **8. Summary**

In the community analysed Catholicism encompasses contrasting and sometimes contradictory visions. Taking into account that the great majority of the population of Nomeque is Catholic and that the area has been the object of endemic conflict it is not surprising that different people perceive Catholicism in different ways.

Many Catholics in Nomeque, despite the effort of the Ecclesiastic authorities, establish a personal relation with a Virgin or a Saint which does not necessarily imply a constant effort directed towards the fulfilment of the commandments. The influence of the Catholic priest in the community has been changing dramatically in the last years. The arrival of new cults diversified the ways and modes the community practised religion. Catholicism or Protestantism are adapted interpreted and transformed in different ways by different actors. As we have seen, a good Communist could be simultaneously a good and respectful Catholic. Communism and Catholicism provide the community with an ideological support to social solidarity.

Protestantism promotes a different family organisation based on a paternal

figure with responsibilities to his offspring and wife. Protestants are concerned with accumulating wealth, getting out of the circle of external consumption, but nevertheless creating economic networks of solidarity among the members of particular churches.

Don Pedro Subachoque's case shows how religion is in a constant dialectical process of change. In Highland Colombia just as the Protestant Churches produced religious changes through their proselitising activities, villagers interpreted Protestant tenets to suit their own social purposes. In fact, Don Pedro was transforming Protestant ideas to construct answers to the questions his own reality posed.

His story is not only related to religion, but to the culture of violence that was present in Don Pedro's life since infancy. It is also connected to the relations of power and knowledge in the community of Nomeque. Several times I asked myself why Don Pedro's character interested me. The only explanation I can find is that I was fascinated by his stubborn intention to find an order and an explanation to what he, and many Colombians, had experienced. Don Pedro as a child lived through "*La Violencia*" a period when the traditional order, on which Colombian society was based, was broken into fragments. Was Don Pedro's personal effort an attempt to put together new and old cultural pieces to create a new order? His eclectic religious beliefs combined Protestantism with peasant culture to provide explanations for a world that was turned upside down. Don Pedro attempted to construct order in a world perceived as chaotic, a world with no hierarchy and where boundaries were defined by the indiscriminate use of violence. However, this effort produced a paradox: he constructs unity by putting together a broken mosaic of unrelated and somehow contradictory fragments. More than a new order he tries to explain chaos creating a world where a natural catastrophe could be part of God's plan. In fact, his

construction is an attempt to stop the reproduction of violence and represents, more than any other, the Colombian social reality it tries to understand.



Don Pedro, baker and religious free thinker.



Chiquinquirá, a popular pilgrimage destination for the people of Nomeque the altar of the open air mass where you can see the Bishop surrounded by soldiers/policemen (below)





Nomeque men launching fireworks, an essential component of all religious festivities, on Easter Sunday at the entrance of the church.



Men and boys disguised as devils beat up villagers on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December.

## **Chapter ten: Conclusions, Articulating the fragments**

### **The relationship between internally and externally generated violence in an Andean Mestizo Colombian community**

#### **Introduction**

How does the relationship between internally and externally generated violence in an Andean Mestizo Colombian community operate? In Nomeque, power is disputed through diverse forms and chronic manifestations of violence<sup>56</sup>. Its persistence is constituted by multiple discourses and actions that are expressed within the local level. In these conclusions I am going to explain the links and to discuss the interactions of the different manifestations of violence in order to provide a general explanation of these phenomena.

It is necessary to make two preliminary points before elaborating on the central argument. The first one concerns the articulation of the diverse types of violence. I will deal with how these different types of violence relate to each other. The second point relates to how these different types of violence reinforce each other to generate and reproduce a vicious circle of violence. I will examine how internally and externally generated violence feed into one another

#### **1. A historical struggle**

Since colonial times a dominant set of hierarchical values and practices I have called *patronazgo* emerged in the community. Nonetheless there have always been moments of resistance from within the dominating system. The history of the Sumapaz region



and of the village of Nomeque in particular shows the organisation and disorganisation of contrasting social forms that are related to different historical periods.

Before the arrival of the Spaniards the region was occupied by small- scale settlements constantly fighting one another. The Spaniards imposed a hierarchical model of social organisation (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968: 132); this model is based on a specific set of values I call *patronazgo*. The myth of Zoratama shows the connection between the patriarchal figure of the Spanish conqueror and the hierarchical political order of the conquest. It expresses the merging of the political sphere with a particular ideology of masculinity. In the analysis of the myth there is an affirmation of the values of *patronazgo* in the figure of the Spanish conqueror Lazaro Fonte (Velandia, 1978: 1897). Since then, *patronazgo* values have become dominant in the community. However, through the history of the region, it is possible to perceive strong resistance and opposition to the aforementioned values.

During the whole colonial period the community of Nomeque managed to subsist as a *resguardo* (Indian reservation). After Independence, during the Republican period there was a process of development and consolidation of the *hacienda* system (Zamosc, 1986: 9). Nomeque was divided into large land holdings and landowners became central figures in local and national society (Londoño, 1994: 58-59). By the beginning of this century the *hacienda* system became increasingly contested by the peasants and the landowners' hierarchical order was abolished after a long period of social confrontation (E. Marulanda, 1991: 35-71). In the process of organisation and distribution of the land the peasants acted not only independently

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<sup>56</sup> Fernán Gonzalez mentions the existence of *múltiples violencias* (multiple violences) in the Colombian case (Gonzalez, 1993: 45).

from the state but also against it. The rebellious peasants organised *independent republics* where a contesting legality that confronted that of the nation state was created (Oquist, 1978: 15; Legrand, 1986: 163). An egalitarian sense of community, provided by Communist ideas combined with local Catholicism, seems to be the consequence of this confrontation in which peasants resist both the power of the *patrones* and the power of the nation state.

## **2. The persistence of patronazgo values**

Values of hierarchy and male assertiveness have survived the collapse of the *hacienda* system. After the triumph of the rebellion, the land was not divided equally.

Individuality and family interest prevailed above peasant solidarity and produced conflicts in the community that were expressed between individuals through violence.

In these conflicts there is very little involvement from the state; as a consequence, peasant egalitarianism and social solidarity are limited by deep peasant individualism (Legrand, 1986: 28). If the land were distributed by the use of force, it is not difficult to imagine that the moment of the egalitarian rebellion coincided with an affirmation of the masculinity of the oppressed. In that context, where the land was disputed metre by metre, men expressed their masculinity in a much more aggressive manner.

## **3. The reconstruction of hierarchy**

Drug barons, enacting the values of aggressive masculinity, are successfully attempting to reconstruct hierarchy and to impose their power over the community.

These drug lords, or *Narcos*, are peasants who, by extreme aggression, have obtained power and a better, though risky, living. The knowledge that death can come at any moment is an essential element of a *Narco*'s life.

*Mythic* power roles exist in the field of status. Horses, land, and women are obtained and consumed by the *Narcos* as a way of demonstrating their newly acquired status. These status symbols can only be obtained with excessive amounts of money making it necessary to resort to illegal means to procure it. By acquiring horses and land the *Narcos* are following the example of the traditional landowners, thus assuming their social position.

In the field I found two competing models of political economy with their own associated moral justifications and rhetoric: the moral economy of the *hacienda* and drug lords and the moral economy of the matrifocal family. Drug lords need to launder money. One of the ways of doing so is to give money to other people to start a legal business, or, to buy a piece of land. By doing this the *Narcos* not only launder their money but also create links of complicity and solidarity among peasants. This social strategy allows drug lords to construct hierarchy in a comparable way to a feudal lord who imposes his power over peasants through feudal contracts and agreements. In this way, *Narcos* construct links of subordination and dependence with the peasants.

#### **4. The defence and representation of the community**

The guerrillas express values of peasant solidarity against the external world, protecting the poorest peasants from the risks of the Colombian State and even from the economic forces that threaten their existence.

In the community of Nomeque the nation state has to fight for the control of the social order against other social actors. It is not perceived as a unified entity, people have fragmentary perceptions of it just as families, brothers, or step fathers and sons fight for control in their social settings. There is an independent perception

of the police, the army, and the education system, all seen as diverse institutions with few things in common. The state and its institutions thus have a transitory, not totalizing, identity and discourse in the community, which enables other legalities and discourses to compete (see Pitt Rivers, 1954: 202-210). In fact, in the community, most of the institutions seem to exist with the threat of being transitory, including extended family ties.

### 5. Hierarchy resisted

The non-egalitarian organisation of society was periodically threatened by egalitarian uprisings. There is a continuous struggle between dominant hierarchical forms of social organisation and contesting forms of resistance. I found this constant conflict between dominant non-egalitarian forms of social organisation and egalitarian ones comparable with Edmund Leach's (1954: 9) study on the Kachin of the highlands of Burma. Leach's study proposes movement and change in a system of unstable equilibrium that oscillates between an egalitarian society, the *gumlao*, and a non-egalitarian one, the *gumsa*. When the Kachin become increasingly hierarchical imitating the Shan hierarchical society, there is a re-affirmation of egalitarian values in the community and afterwards a rebellion and a re-establishment of the former egalitarian order. Immediately afterwards, the community starts to reconstruct hierarchy again (Leach, 1954: 197). Leach has an ambiguous approach, on the one hand he considers *gumsa* and *gumlao* as resources that every individual can use to legitimate his actions, on the other hand, Leach describes *gumsa* and *gumlao* as types of social organisation on the ground.

*...individuals may change from one category into another. Kachins speak of people 'becoming gumlao' or 'becoming Shan'. This implies that the Kachin themselves think of the difference between Shan and*

*gumsa Kachin as being a difference of ideal, and not, as the ethnologist would have us believe, a difference of ethnic, cultural or racial type.*

*It also implies that Kachins of the gumsa persuasion can conceptualise fairly clearly other ways of living. The gumsa ritual organisation provides, for a gumsa Kachin, a model society to which he imagines his own real society conforms. But he is also aware of other possible stereotype models, gumlao and Shan, against which his own society can be compared.*

*The stereotype or model version of each of these three societies is fairly precise, but the application of these categories to actual communities is decidedly flexible. Although the ideal types are quite distinct, the practical types overlap” (Leach, 1954: 285- 286).*

Similarly, in the community of Nomeque there is a struggle between a hierarchical pattern of social organisation and a contesting pattern and this struggle is directly connected with the action of external forces. *Patronazgo* and *madrazgo* are unequal, since *patronazgo* is the dominant pattern. In Nomeque, patterns are constantly changing in a dialectical fashion, there is a constant evolution towards new and different social forms. The community- based organisation of the Chibcha Indians is not the same as the peasant community that was formed after the egalitarian distribution of the land during the agrarian rebellion neither are the people involved directly related. The *hacienda* system dominated by the latifundium of the *patrones* is not equal, although connected, to the hierarchical organisation some *Narcos* try to establish and consolidate in Nomeque. *Patronazgo* and *madrazgo* are also ideal patterns that can be used as resources by individuals in particular circumstances. I found particularly relevant in Leach’s work, and directly connected with the principal arguments of my thesis, that when he is talking about political systems he is dealing with discourses which are used *ad hoc* in particular circumstances.

## 6. *Patronazgo* and *madrazgo*

*Patronazgo* is the dominant ideology with hierarchical implications. Men acting out these principles subordinate women and other men whilst asserting their freedom, dominance and individualism. What are the different elements that compose the set of values and practices I have referred to as *patronazgo*? The patriarchal pattern related to a politic of conquest imposed by the Spaniards; the myth of Zoratama that expresses the current interpretation and persistence of those patriarchal values in the community; the *hacienda* system and the figure of the *patron* or landowner; the drug lords' values and practices related to the acquisition of land, horses, and women as a current re-interpretation of *hacienda* values; the extreme ideal of masculinity that is performed by aggressive peasants who want to be respected by the community. All these elements are connected. The Myth of Zoratama shows that the members of the community establish a relation with the Spanish colonial past that is present in their understanding of the myth. The *hacienda* system is present in the everyday actions of the drug lords and peasants try to perform the masculinity ideal epitomised by them.

Both sets, *patronazgo* and *madronazgo* coincide in the same idea of male, the difference is that, in the *patronazgo* case, people are able to link masculinity with politics. A real man must be a successful one, that is a man who is able to become a politically dominant person. That explains why *hacendados* have such a good image in spite of the fact that an agrarian rebellion has taken place.

*Madrazgo*, the contesting set of practices and values, is composed of disorganised idioms. More than an ideology, *madrazgo* can be defined as an alliance of resistance. The agrarian reform, local Communism, some aspects of Catholicism, the guerrillas, poor and frustrated men, matrifocality and egalitarianism are all loosely related to poverty. For poor men humiliated due to their powerlessness, egalitarianism

appears as a plausible alternative. If you are at the bottom of the system you are in contradiction because, on the one hand, you might wish to become a landlord, but on the other hand, you are fighting against people who have succeeded in being *patrones*, and by doing that you appeal to ideas of equality. Choosing egalitarianism has no contradiction with the idea of masculinity contained in *patronazgo*. In a paradoxical way, it is masculinity that connects poor men to *madrazgo*. Their ideas of masculinity make poor peasants be against *hacendados* and drug lords. During the agrarian rebellion peasants united and fought together against the landlords, only to continue fighting amongst themselves immediately afterwards. Popkin argues that "...peasants focused on local goals and goods with immediate payoffs" (Popkin, 1979: 263). After the agrarian rebellion poor men were competing against each other and they did not succeed in creating lasting solidarity and equality. This is what their feuds were all about. The real political problem linked to masculinity is not so much about the nature of men but about a particular form of masculinity which can only be fulfilled with a particular kind of political organisation and when it is frustrated it leads to continual petty fighting. Poor men have very few options: they can become leaders of peasants' revolts or members of the guerrillas linking their anger to egalitarian movements; they can just go away, or they can abandon their masculinity ideal and become Protestants; they can become Protestant heads of families because this is not the same kind of head of family anymore.

The inability to become a successful patriarch also means that poor men give up trying to be fathers. Frustrated poor men are in an impossible position and therefore they become peripheral and wanderers. In this way the system for the poor creates female-headed households. Women are left in charge and dominate the domestic sphere. Men in matrifocal households are present as dependant sons but not

as dominant husbands. *Madrazgo* becomes an alliance between a woman- dominated world and frustrated men. They come from the same background but women are operating in a different way based on a non- competitive egalitarian form. In this place of coincidences Communist and Catholic values give ideological support. These ideologies contain intrinsic ideas of solidarity and fraternity but also these are the ideas that positively feed back to the community and are picked up by it. This convergence creates another type of violence: that of the guerrillas. We are in the presence of a loose alliance and *madrazgo* is not a unitary system at all. Communism and Catholicism are expressing in the community values of fraternity and egalitarianism. These values are assumed by the guerrillas and by the lowest strata of local society. Matrifocality is particularly relevant among the poorest families. Men in poor families have an impossible task: they always try to become real men but they cannot because of their poverty. They have no access to wealth or political power. Poor males express uncontrolled aggression because they are a failure as men: they cannot have a large household in which they control women and subordinated men. Drug lords in contrast do not need to express their aggression at every time. They have more control over their violence because there is no contradiction between their ideas about masculinity and their way of life. They are the fulfilment of an ideal of masculinity. This extreme masculinity, when performed by frustrated men, leads to the escalation of peasant's internal conflicts in feuds.

### **7. From inside to outside**

Tensions inside the family show that there is a struggle for the control of the household. Mothers, especially in the poorest strata of the population, are placed at the centre of the family (cf. Whiteford, 1976: 38-39). A successful woman manages



to exercise effective control over her husband, daughters, sons, and sons in law. In the wealthier or more formally educated families paternal involvement in the household is more frequent. As several ethnographies on matrifocality suggest, this phenomenon is related to poverty and to domestic violence (cf. Stolcke, 1984: 292; Lewis, 1977: 30; Valentine, 1968: 138- 139). However, this research also acknowledges the connection between these internal problems and national and international politics.

Drinking alcohol with their friends and living outside are important elements of men's lives that create and maintain links of solidarity among them. The consumption of alcohol is directly related to domestic violence and aggression (see Harvey, 1994: 67, also Babb, 1989: 138). At the same time, aggression and competition are present as central elements of the social construction of masculinity. Strong tensions between the sexes are perceived as a consequence of the contrast between *madrazgo* and *patronazgo* values. Relations between mothers-in-law and sons-in-law tend to be tense with the struggle for the domination of the households being fought sometimes aggressively (Gutierrez de Pineda, 1968:245-248). Sons often have violent disputes with their fathers defending their mothers (see chapter three, page 87).

In the community there are tensions inside the family. The conclusions record the connection of internal conflicts with external forces that recycle back into the community. There is sustained violence in the community, in which a circle of violence reproduces itself.

Blood feuds express deep conflicts between and within peasant families. They originate in disputes about land boundaries, money, and women (Fals Borda, 1955: 211). On the one hand, blood feuds are a consequence of the egalitarian rebellion and

the distribution of the land and the subsequent lack of established internal stratification. As we have seen, the division of the land into individual plots and the lack of a central organisation implied the necessary use of violence to define conflicts between families. On the other hand, feuds function as an attempt to assert a new hierarchy. They arise in egalitarian settings but impose the authority and superiority of one of the factions involved. Feuds are the consequence of people's violence and aggression in the process of trying to be men; they are unresolved attempts of becoming *patrones*. Even after the agrarian rebellion poor males were competing against each other and their values of solidarity and equality did not succeed in stopping violence.

Feuds can reinforce solidarity among relatives. In the feuds family ties are strengthened and, at the same time, relations with outsiders are weakened. When a member of a family is killed and there is open conflict the families will try to kill any male member of the other one. By killing all male members they reduce the possibility of further revenge (Hobsbawm, 1983: 270). In most of the cases, the extended family is the minimal group that expresses social solidarity and actively participates in the retaliation "*for an injury inflicted upon one of its members*" (Black-Michaud, 1980: 41; cf. Fals Borda, 1955: 209). However, in some particular cases, not even the family solidarity is able to prevent competition between men and individualism and male competition can produce splits in the same family.

The families who are involved in feuds have problems with their neighbours and establish a social relation of hatred with their enemies (cf. Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961:195). They are composed of an important number of male brothers or first cousins, they are feared and respected by the community. All the families present a conflict-ridden internal pattern. The conflict-ridden family unit is the basis of

understanding the internal violence that provides a key to the understanding of the relation between the external forces and the community. There is an escalation of family feuds into political competition and the cultural idiom of the family is transformed into wider political idioms.

### **8. External forces and legitimacy**

The community of Nomeque is influenced by external forces that seek to impose their power in the community. Drug lords, guerrillas, and the national state fight for pre-eminence in the area. External forces successfully interact with local ones which can be attributed to the correspondence between external ideals and the values and social representations existent inside the community. These social actors also have members who are part of the community and, obviously, interact with it. Moreover, different external forces interplay with and relate to different representations of the community.

When the concept of legitimacy was analysed in the Introduction to this work, it was asserted that different *legalities* were competing in the community. Recognising that actions performed by different social actors were accepted or even socially approved, I found that the activities of the guerrillas or the drug lords might be legitimised by the community. This legitimisation would have been unthinkable if some of the values of the community had not coincided with the values of the guerrillas or the drug lords. Drug lords, as former peasants, express ideas directly related with *patronazgo* values. The *Narcos* want to assume the position that the landowners used to occupy before the agrarian rebellion. But, notably, without exploiting local peasants and even in some cases helping them. The guerrillas, on the other hand, want to place themselves in the community as defenders of the poor and of the society constructed as a consequence of the agrarian reform (Molano, 1992:

205). This analysis highlights the antagonistic nature of the relationship between the guerrillas and drug lords. It becomes apparent that they give positive feedback to two different and contrasting sets of values in the community. Drug lords represent a reconstruction of a hierarchical patriarchal ideal, while guerrillas express values of resistance, equality and social solidarity.

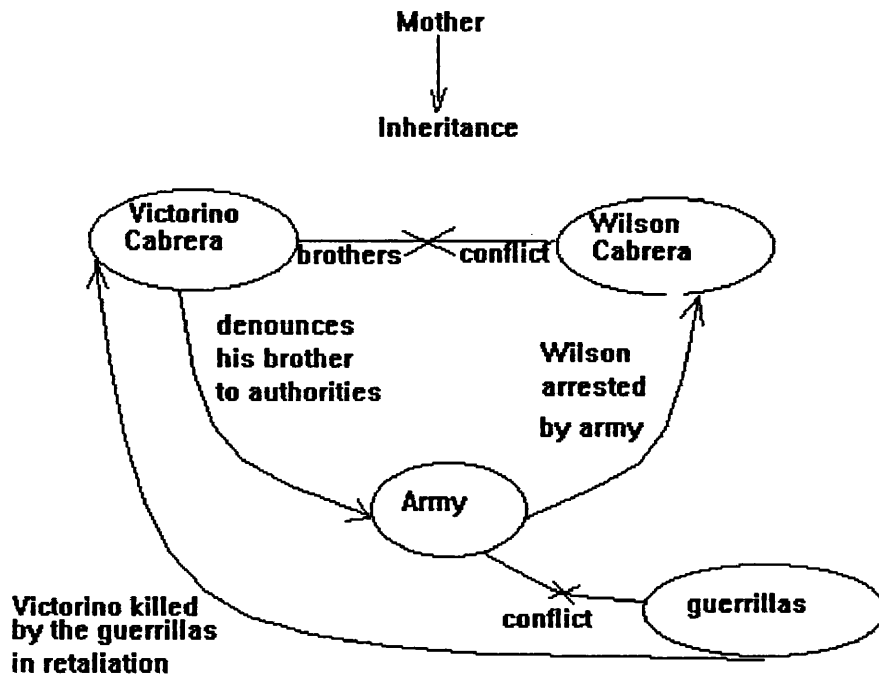
Instead of the breakdown of the nation state, there are competing states that want to impose their social control over the community. The national army and the police appear as the most alien of the interacting forces. However, the army expresses Colombian national values to which the villagers feel attached to a certain point. It is important to remember that the army is a male domain, and that its male's values relate to ideas about male values and identity among the peasants. The army, nonetheless, appears as an outsider and an invader and its identification with peasants' values is only partially successful. In fact, I am tempted to say that the least legitimate social force in the community is the nation state, particularly its police force.

In spite of the efforts of the ecclesiastic authorities, husbands and fathers in general have no involvement in the life of the family. Protestants instead are successful in incorporating the paternal figure into the family (Brusco, 1995: 149). Non-drinking Protestants stay out of the male circles of solidarity. These circles produce patron-client relations and in them the more generous males, the drug lords, prevail. Instead, Protestants have their own religious network of economic help and solidarity among members of the same church (cf. Deiros, 1991: 172). Protestants head of families are intrinsically different from the others because with conversion they abandon their aggressive ideal of masculinity.

## 9. The circle of violence

In this work it is possible to find abundant examples of the articulation and connection between external forces and internal conflicts in the community. The borders between feud and regional politics and also between family and social conflicts have been crossed a more than one occasion. This persistent violation of any analytical frame shows us not only that different forms and manifestations of violence are linked in complex ways but also that they are feeding of each other.

In the seventh chapter of this research, the conflict between the Cabrera brothers was described. Wilson and Victorino Cabrera provide a perfect example of competition between matrifocal siblings for scarce goods (Lewis, 1970: 72). This competition finally produced a schism in the family. Victorino Cabrera starting his dispute with his brother over their mother's inheritance became an Army informant denouncing his brother as a member of the guerrillas. In fact the army, who put Wilson Cabrera in jail, was used as an instrument for the pursuit of Victorino Cabrera's own goals. The guerrillas reacted by viewing Victorino Cabrera as an informant of the army. For this reason they killed him, thus becoming an instrument in Wilson Cabrera's revenge.



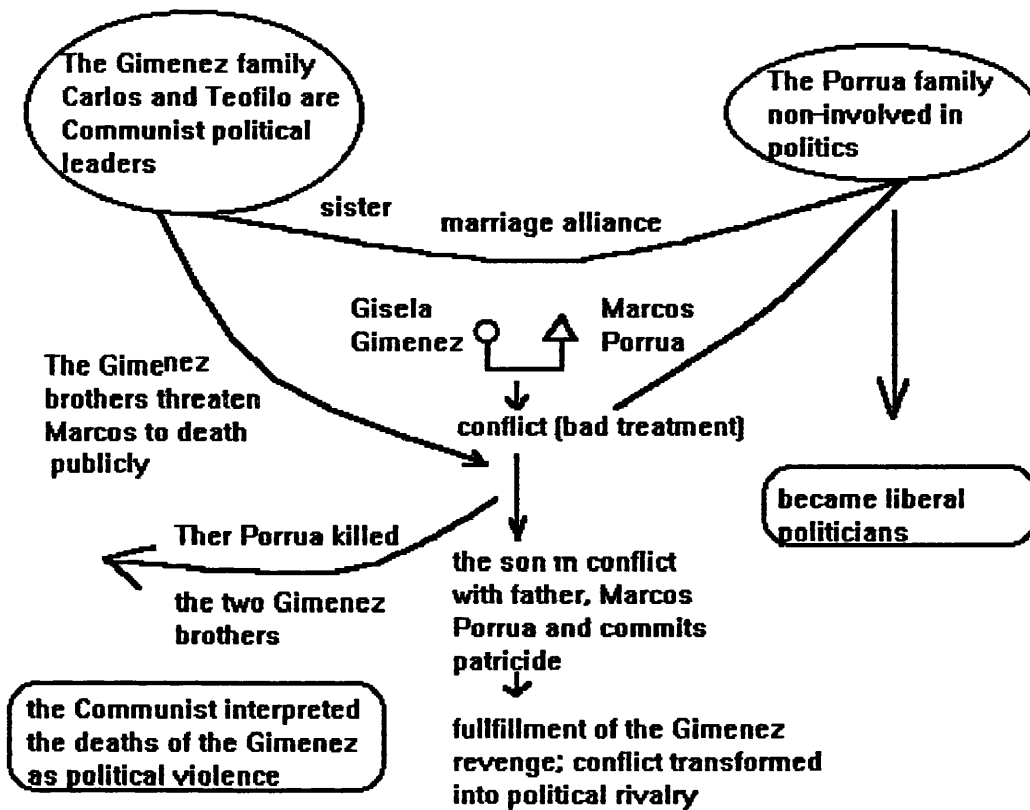
### ***The conflict between the Cabrera brothers***

Victorino Cabrera tried to manipulate the army on his own behalf. However, the forces he called in to help were beyond his control. He unintentionally magnified the conflict until it inevitably escalated. Turning to external forces for help he got involved in a conflict he could not control and these forces produced his death and a definitive schism in the family. The guerrillas killed him because he was a traitor and a thief. Denouncing his brother, Victorino Cabrera also betrayed an ideology of solidarity. He did so because he wanted to obtain more property, he wanted to become a larger landowner. His conflict with the guerrillas is also a clash of contrasting values. Their families inherited a relationship based on hatred and political opposition. Is it possible that the two new segments of the split Cabrera family will continue the feud? It is more than possible, particularly if we look at what happened in the following case.

In the fourth chapter it is possible to analyse an extremely complex series of conflicts involving the Gimenez and the Porrúa families. In it, we can see on the one hand, how hostility between families can be related to the construction of political opposition and rivalry. On the other hand, there is an internal family conflict between Marcos Porrúa and his wife Gisella Gimenez and the son of both. This conflict led to the killing of the father and the son's mother being a Gimenez, to the fulfilment of the revenge and the continuation of the feud.

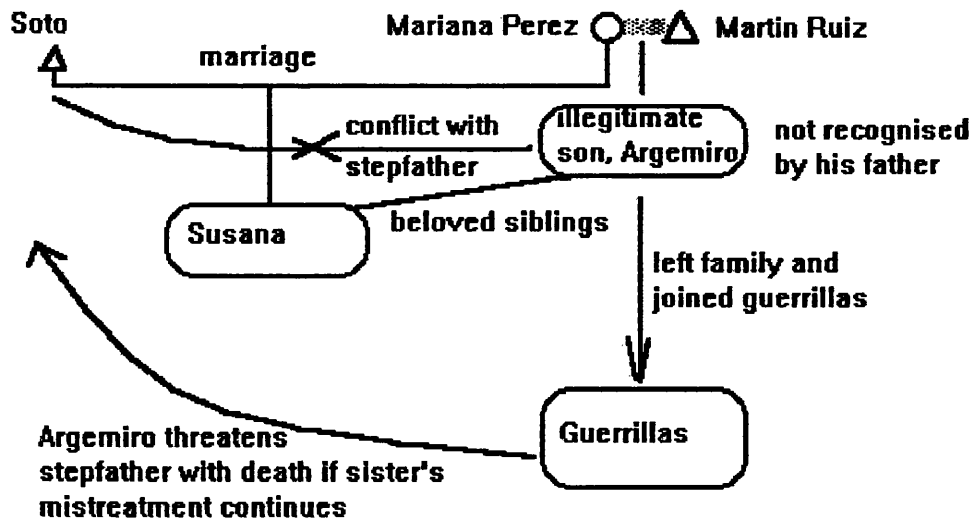
The Gimenez, members of the Communist party and leaders of the agrarian rebellion are shown as involved in a feud with the Porrúa. The latter were not involved in politics but, after their feud with the Gimenez began, they became an enthusiastic Liberal family. In this case, political allegiance was a strategy used to continue a feud by different means. Violent political factionalism is directly related to the solution of intra- familial conflicts. After the tragic events, the members of both families continue to be opposed in local politics. This permits the survival of the old rivalry that would continue being constantly present in the everyday life of the members of both families.

The killing of his own father by the Porrúa-Gimenez son shows the connection between internal domestic violence and violence directed towards other families. The beaten wife, whose brothers have been killed by her husband and his family, was finally vindicated by her eldest son.



I have shown in the seventh chapter how a young man, Argemiro (another eldest son) after a serious conflict with his stepfather left his mother's house to find shelter with the guerrillas among whom he became a *comandante*. In this case the conflicts inside the household provoke the decision to joining the guerrillas. As a *comandante* he was involved in a violent struggle against the nation state's armed forces and the police but he was also able to exercise control over his family. He threatened his step-father with death if, by any means, the step-father mistreated Argemiro's beloved sister. He has the power to decide over life and death of people in the town, but he was probably cautious in the exercise of this power.





### *Argemiro's conflict*

All these examples show how the external forces interact and articulate with internal conflicts in the community. The interaction is not neutral. The articulation between internal and external violence has the dramatic effect of increasing both. A "positive" feedback exists in which violence is reproduced and the peasants interact with wider social frameworks through these mechanisms.

Peasants influenced by *patronazgo* values, are attracted by the ideal provided by drug lords and try to enact an image of masculine authority in their everyday life. To do so they have to impose their authority over their own household when they try to dominate their families they clash with *madrazgo* values leading in turn to increased domestic violence; most of the peasants are not as successful as the drug barons and the violence exercised becomes out of control. Domestic violence involves the conflict between the eldest brother and the absent father. Conflict-ridden households, on the other hand, tend to express their internal conflict outside the family by involving themselves in feuds. Another source of feuds between families

also comes from males enacting *patronazgo* values: the aggressive competition between men. All these conflicts have political echoes from the past that reverberate in the present. The conflict in the household can also convince an abandoned eldest son to join the guerrillas. The drug barons want to become the new owners of the land. They want to become the new *hacendados* reconstructing the hierarchical values of the *hacienda* system. The guerrillas are, in contrast, connected to the agrarian revolt and involved in the egalitarian struggle for the land. Every household hears some echo of these struggles that reverberates in every individual.

#### **10. Out of violence**

In three different cases violence is not reproduced: the case of the wife who commits suicide, the homosexual men, and the conversion to Protestantism. In the case of the suicide (see chapter five, page 149) there is clearly no possible reproduction of violence. The woman committed suicide after suffering physical aggression at the hands of her husband, and humiliations and insults from her mother-in-law (see Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1961: 405). Committing suicide is a way of accusing her in-laws of maltreatment. However, violence is only exercised against herself and there is no possible revenge. Only women can challenge the dominant interpretation of her death stressing her place in the community.

In the case shown in the third chapter of this thesis (see pages 95-96) homosexual men whose brothers were famous for being extremely aggressive placed themselves outside the power game. These individuals assumed a non-dominant discourse that, as Henrietta Moore has noted, provided them with individual satisfaction, allowing them to resist the dominant discourse but at the expense of diminished social power and social approval (Moore, 1994:150).

In Don Pedro's religious conversion to *Evangelicalism* (see point seven of chapter nine) we can see an attempt to stop the reproduction of violence. As a child, he saw his mother killed by a Conservative mob. Afterwards he also had to deal with the extreme indifference of his father. During *La Violencia*, he saw how the traditional order was inverted and turned into chaos. His conversion to Evangelism allowed him to transform chaos into a new order where he fitted together elements of his peasant culture with elements he picked up from many different religious Sects. As a consequence of this conversion he was proud of his paternal involvement in the family. His attitude towards his wife and children show that there was no reproduction of the cycle of violence. Protestant involvement in the family is based in the abandonment of the aggressive ideal of masculinity. Don Pedro is a successful head of a family because his paternal role is completely different from the one provided by *patronazgo*. In this context, poverty and paternal involvement in the family can coexist.

### **11. The culture of violence**

In the region forms of violence are neither abstract ideas nor forces contesting legitimacy. They are already legitimised through various discourses and social axioms. Violence is constructed and perceived through different *lenses* of legitimacy, i.e. *patronazgo* hierarchical values or *madrazgo* values of egalitarianism. Thus the use of violence in this region is not just a method to enforce the people's ideas or beliefs, but rather it is constructed along particular cultural and axiomatic lines which already legitimise and validate its usage. Does this mean that there is no other alternative but the subsistence and increase of violence in the community? I have shown that Protestantism is perceived and re-created in Nomeque as an ideology that stops the

reproduction of violence. Why is it, however, that its success can only be seen in isolated cases? The enormous success of the guerrilla's and Narco's ways of living may have shown the community that violence pays off. Drug lord's performance of an aggressive man is generously rewarded by the drug business. The guerrillas have shown that by violence they can defend and protect themselves from the threat of the state and capitalism. These are the main reasons why I think, somewhat pessimistically, that violence will continue reproducing itself in the community if external conditions promote the maintenance of an internal ideology of aggression. I suggest that in Nomeque the internal conflict between two different sets of values and practices operates in interaction with external forces producing a vicious circle of violence. In fact, this effect can be called a "*culture*" of violence, a particular environment in which violence is inherent in social and cultural forms, it exists, subsists (violence becomes chronic) and reproduces. All the different elements analysed interact producing a concatenation and making the violence in the community more severe.

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