Supernatural Bulletproof Men: An Ethnography of Sorcery and Paramilitary Power in Colombian Eastern Plains

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I, Johanna Perez, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of *cruzados* - men who turned to sorcery to become bulletproof. Such practice was popular among paramilitary groups during their expansion in the Colombian Eastern Plains throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Based on 13 months of fieldwork in a former paramilitary stronghold, this study asks what *cruzados* reveal about paramilitary power. It does so by analysing the ritual to become *cruzados* – a process through which bulletproof powers are created by producing "unhuman" bodies. I explore how the "unhuman" become at the same time "de-humanised" and "inhumane" through paramilitary war. *Cruzados* engender mystical and physical terror, producing paramilitary power as something residing in the combatants' bodies. The thesis shows that sorcery is not merely a tool consciously deployed by paramilitaries to legitimate their authority but is constitutive of their *de facto* power as armed organisations. Ultimately, *cruzados* expose the "inhumane" essence of these unstable organisations that multiply by turning human bodies into weapons of war.

Impact Statement

By studying violence through the prism of sorcery, this thesis constitutes a novel approach to understanding the paramilitary groups who lend their violent know-how to holders of economic and political power in Colombia. It provides a new understanding of Colombian armed violence and the country's social, economic and political transformation over recent decades. This offers lessons to scholars working on Colombia's recent history, social scientists interested in irregular armed groups from a cultural perspective, and practitioners seeking to understand the endurance of extremely violent organisations like paramilitary groups.

The thesis offers an engaging account of the sorcery that produces supernatural, bulletproof men, popular among paramilitary lines. Analytical choices to study sorcery in contexts of violence often 'exoticize' armed groups by depicting their members as "peculiar" individuals using secretive knowledge. A lesson offered in this thesis is that studying sorcery must consider its importance for people's everyday lives in places like Colombia. Representations of armed actors as people who have been acquainted with sorcery in their everyday lives before joining the groups shift the focus from the "exotic" practice of sorcery to the "unnatural" and "otherworldly" feature of armed violence. The thesis shows how sorcery elaborates the "unhuman" life in the lowest ranks of these armed organisations and the "inhumanity" with which these operated. This perspective offers a counterpoint to the normalisation of this type of violence. It counters the exaltation of drug lords, armed violence and criminal life offered by popular culture.

The thesis furthers research agendas in the anthropology of sorcery, history, power and war, by showing how sorcery offers a vantage point to study the transcendental viscerality of armed conflict. Likewise, it contributes to the study of violence as an example of how armed organisations can be studied ethnographically by understanding the differential experiences of their members. This perspective adds to an understanding of unstable armed groups like paramilitaries and the phenomena of 'mercenaryism'.

Aspects of this research have already been disseminated in conference papers at the Latin American Anthropology Seminar Series, the UCL Americas Research Network, the Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS), the Centre for Religion, Conflict and Globalisation (CRCG, University of Groningen), the Conference on Religion & Spirituality in Society, and the National University of Colombia. Beyond academia, I have drawn on this research to talk on the *Colombia Calling* podcast, an English-language production about contemporary issues of social relevance in Colombia. In the short term, I plan to publish articles in peer-reviewed journals in Spanish and English. In the long term, I have plans to produce a visual (documentary or photographic) work in collaboration with artists. I would like to take this production to institutions working with ex-combatants and populations at risk of being recruited by armed organisations.

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LIST OF IMAGES

NOTE ON TRANSLATION

All interviews were conducted in Spanish, and the quotes presented in the thesis are my translation. Citations from institutional reports, court sentences, press accounts, and literary and academic works in Spanish are my own unless specified to the contrary. In cases when colloquial or intricate language made an exact translation difficult, I put the original Spanish version in footnotes so that the reader with some knowledge of the language can assess the translation. .

NOTE OF USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

The thesis contains 21 photographic images, 13 of which belong to my personal archive. For Colombian artist Paulo Licona and El Tiempo newspaper photographs, I have obtained explicit permission for their reproduction for academic purposes. The other pictures are properly referenced to their sources.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Autodefensas Campesinas de Casanare. *Peasants Self-Defences of Casanare.*
ACCU	Autodefensas campesinas de Córdoba y Urabá. *Peasant Self- defense of Cordoba and Urabá.*
ACMV	Autodefensas Campesinas de Meta y Vichada (también llamados Carranceros). *Self-defence of Meta and Vichada also called Carranceros*.
ACR	Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegración, Colombian. *Agency for Reintegration (subsequently ARN)*
ARN	Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización. *Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation (formerly ACR)*
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia. *Unite Self-Defense of Colombia.*
CNMH	Centro de Memoria Historica. *Centre of Historical Memory.*
DAV	Dirección de Acuerdos de la Verdad. *Direction of truth agreements.*
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional. *National Liberation Army.*

ERPAC	Ejército Revolucionario Antisubversivo de Colombia. *Revolutionary Popular Antisubversive Army.*
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. *Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia*
JEP	Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz. *Special Jurisdiction for Peace.*
GAPD	Grupos Armados Desmobilizados. *Post- Demobilisation Armed Groups*

Introduction

This thesis examines sorcery to acquire bulletproof powers used by paramilitary groups - right-wing armed organisations - in the Colombian Eastern Plains region. *Cruzados*, as the recipients of this sorcery are called in the region, became popular during the 1990s and into the 2000s during paramilitary violent expansion across the country. What does this outbreak of sorcery during paramilitary expansion means?

I started fieldwork with the most obvious ethnographic task: to enquire about the meaning of *cruzados*. On several occasions, I asked people in the Plains - or *llaneros* - why supernatural bulletproof paramilitaries were called *cruzados*. One of the three priests I interviewed, Father Norberto, conjectured that the term *cruzados* came from using the "Cross" in the rituals to forge supernatural humans. Other *llaneros* ventured that the term derived from the infamous fighters of the Catholic military campaigns in Europe, "the Crusades". However, most *llaneros* thought that mine was an irrelevant question, the word being somehow self-evident: a *cruzado* was a man who resorted to sorcery to become bulletproof.

Cruzado is a Spanish word meaning "crossed", i.e., lay across or pierced. After a while in the field, I learnt that people in the Plains use it to refer to "crossbreed" or "hybrid" animals, plants, and, more often, to mixed-race people, also called in *mestizos* in Colombia.[1] When referring to *mestizos*, the word *cruzado* frequently indicates the descendants of indigenous peoples and "white" settlers. This knowledge was a starting point for the analysis develop in the thesis: *cruzados* constantly refer to the presence of the paramilitary in terms of racial, moral, and mystical "otherness".

The meaning of *cruzado* as "hybrids" is crucial to understanding the supernatural bulletproof men blooming during paramilitarism's expansion in the Plains. The semiotics of *cruzados* is the departing point of a journey through the ritual actions that produced them, the experiences of the supernatural bulletproof men and those of the people who lived and endured their presence. My "ethnos" is the social field in which *cruzados* acquire

1 *Mestizos* is a term used in Colombia and Latin America to refer to the Spanish, indigenous and African mix of peoples and cultures. I will come back to this term in chapter One.

meaning, which involves ex-paramilitaries, *llaneros* and sorcerers. I argue that the significance of this sorcery can only be grasped in the social field that came together under paramilitary expansion. What can the irruption of supernatural bulletproof men tell us about paramilitary war and armed conflict in general? Equally, what can be learnt about sorcery and its relationship to conflict and war?

The Problem: Sorcery, Power and Violence

Anthropologists have amply studied sorcery and witchcraft and their entrenched connection with power and politics. The classic example is the work of Evans-Pritchard *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* ([1937] 1976) (1931), which explores the rationality underlying witchcraft beliefs and their critical role in the functioning of Azande society. In Evans-Pritchard's view, witchcraft conveys the forces of jealousy, envy and hatred and works as a cultural mechanism channelling the potentially disruptive behaviour that originated in those feelings. The model unveils witchcraft as "micro-politics", an elaboration of aggression that ultimately functions to preserve social equilibrium. This line of work has studied the relationship between power and sorcery at the village level (Geschiere 1997), mainly in the African continent (Stephen 1987).

Although I will be recalling it, the thesis analysis departs from Evans-Pritchard theory of witchcraft focused on the sociology of witchcraft suspicious and accusations. As others have suggested, such focus diverts attention from cosmological, religious and ritual dimensions of sorcery (Stephen 1987 et. al.). These dimensions are vital to understanding sorcery - *brujeria* in Spanish - in the context of study, which comprises a variety of practices emerging throughout the progressive fusion of Hispanic, indigenous and African magic and healing techniques, concepts, symbols and materials. The provenance and impact of *brujeria* as a mix of practices and worldviews evolving since colonisation (Geschiere 1997: 231), are essential to approach the different ritual elements intervening to produce the supernatural bulletproof men. Crucially, this sorcery doesn't pertain to one magical tradition or community and cannot be understood only through accusations or the affectivity of envy and hatred.

Another strand of literature of Africanist inspiration frames witchcraft as a vantage entrance point to study violence and social conflict. This line of argument claims that violence disrupts the social fabric and triggers alterations of power (Geschiere 2013), prompting an increase in witchcraft "aggressions". This argument lay witchcraft as an instrument distilling the broad forces causing violence, such as inequality and disempowerment, in the language of affect and intimacy. This argument takes the "micro-politics" of Evans Pritchard out of the village, so to speak, and proposes that witchcraft and sorcery provide a vantage point of view to understand the local effects of wider socio-economic processes precisely because they are graphed upon family and community sodalities (Geschiere 1997, Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, Niehaus 2012, Meyer 1999 Meyer and Pels 2003).

In *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, Geschiere (1997) further this argument addressing witchcraft as a "political discourse" registering the effects of the expansion of global capitalism. His study examines people's experiences of the new inequalities introduced by the State and the market in Cameroon. The surging of new regional and national elites, the increasing divide between urban and rural peoples and other effects of the expansion of global capitalism eroding long-standing local solidarities, rocketed the use of witchcraft, a discourse explaining the new inequalities. Geschiere argues that witchcraft bridges the gap between the impersonal processes allowing unprecedented enrichment and destitution, and the intimate realities of the domestic community (Geschiere 2013). He claims that witchcraft registers alterations of power shaking kinship relations, acting as a force opposing inequalities arising in the domain of kinship, and simultaneously, as a force for amassing great wealth (*ibid*. 10). Precisely because it acts as a "levelling" and "accumulative" force, witchcraft discourse is so applicable to explains the inequality, the gross accumulation of wealth and the contradictions of modern politics that come with the neoliberal restructuring of late capitalism *(ibid*. 203).

"Modernity and Witchcraft" arguments verse over the themes outlined by Geschiere (c.f. Geschiere 2016). Niehaus (2012), for example, explores how the imposition of modern *Bantustan* reserves in South Africa led to the rising of witchcraft attacks and witch-hunt violence. He shows the connection between the drastic transformation of natives' modes

of subsistence under the Reserve and the subsequent escalation of poverty, triggering the mounting of witchcraft and the violence tearing apart the villages. Meyer (1999) argues that the all too present worries of *Ewe* people in Ghana with the devil evidence their struggle with embracing modern forms of personhood following conversion to Christianism. She contends that the devil's pervasive presence expresses the struggles of attempting to leave behind "traditional" forms of personhood and identity based on lineages and clans' relations to embrace modern forms of moral individualism linked to the nuclear family and the nation. These works show that witchcraft allows us to understand the local effects of broad social and economic processes, like the introduction of institutional arrangements or the spread of Christianity.

A landmark in this theoretical perspective is the work of Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) which tackles how witchcraft embodies “all the contradictions of the experience of modernity itself, of its inescapable enticements, its self-consuming passions, its discriminatory tactics, its devastating social costs" (*ibid*. xxix). *Modernity and its Malcontents* tackles the rising fears of "witchcraft running wild" in Africa as new forms of consciousness expressing discontent with the twisted outcomes of modernity. The authors argue that witchcraft constitutes a local effort to grasp modernity and the intensification of capitalism: the working of mysterious forces enabling the enrichment of few at the expense of the masses’ bodies (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 283).

Considerations of this type are important insofar as the paramilitary inextricably relate to wide economic and political processes fuelling armed violence in Colombia (See next apart). However, this perspective is insufficient to address *cruzado*s, whose sorcery is not directly concerned with the interpersonal conflicts caused by inequality or the struggles to become “modern”. The supernatural bulletproof men uphold a close relation to warfare and the intensification of armed violence. Although related to the wider economic process, this violence differs from the systemic violence causing dispossession.

Academic works addressing the relation between actual armed conflict and sorcery have developed alongside "modernity and witchcraft" arguments. Two influential works in this vein are *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* by David Lan (1985),

which demonstrates the central role of mediumship in the triumph of ZANLA guerrillas in Zimbabwe; and *Mask of Anarchy (…)* where historian Stephen Ellis (1999) analyses the widespread use of "mystical weapons" by Liberian politicians during one of African bloodiest civil wars (Ellis 2001:232). These works proved that instead of being artefacts of African "tradition", the forms of authority embedded in the institution of mediumship in Zimbabwe and rituals of blood sacrifice in Liberia have resonance in armed struggle and modern national politics.

These works focus on the forms of sorcery practices that confer authority to the armed groups. Lan (1985) describes how ZANLA guerrillas secured the grace of their royal ancestors *mhondoro* that would assure their movement's success: "The door to legitimate political authority was opened wide. With the spirit mediums mounting a guard of honour, the guerrillas marched in and took hold of the symbols of their new power" (*ibid*. 170). A point restated by Stephen Ellis' (2001) who demonstrates how native practices - formerly highly regulated by taboos and applied to ratify status - were used indiscriminately by Liberian politicians during the war to legitimise themselves as political authorities in rural areas (*ibid*. 232). Ellis stresses that politicians understood sorcery's importance for securing political power in Liberia.

The tone set by these works recurs in numerous studies of sorcery used by armed groups- from Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka (Roberts 2014) to Javanese soldiers (De Grave 2014, Smith 2004).[2] Their central idea is that armed groups using sorcery are participating from an "idiom of accountability" (Smith 2004: 441) that give them the legitimacy and popularity the State does not have in some postcolonial settings. These studies explain sorcery used in armed conflicts as "war magic" (Ferrer 2014), practices concerned with spiritual innovation in relation to violence and politics, which "add[s] legitimacy to groups and organisations struggling to revive, redefine, transform, or maintain cultures threatened by rapid social change and instability" (Ferrer 2014: 19). According to Ferrer, "war magic" comprises:

2 Smith's work (2004) on the vigilante group Bakassi Boys in Nigeria, argues that the armed group mystical warfare implied taking part in witch hunts, a widespread "idiom of accountability" that gave them legitimacy and popularity that neither the police nor any other law enforcement agents had

> The organisation of ritual practices to harness magical, spiritual, and social-psycho-logical forces that result in an opponent's misfortune, disease, destruction, or death (…) and the use of special formulas and amulets designed or utilised for spiritual protection (Ferrer 2014: 4).

"War magic" emphasis on legitimacy diverts from questioning sorcery relationship to the "rapid changes" that armed violence produces itself. Although the supernatural bulletproof men could be considered a 'special formula designed for spiritual protection', they are not linked to a traditional institution and - as I will explain in chapter two and three - neither constitute the signature move of one paramilitary group. *Cruzados* pose questions about power and armed violence that are not necessarily concerned with the legitimacy of armed groups. They challenge the notion of "war magic" by constantly referring to the supernatural presence of men for war, in other words, the existential and transcendental dimensions of heavily armed men.

Contrasting with much of the literature from the African continent, sorcery in South America has been studied in relation to the cultural construction of illness (Suarez y Pinzon 1992, Cordoba 2011), folk religiosity (Losonczy 2001), mourning and trauma (Villa 2001, Pelaez 2001) and shamanism (Whitehead & Wright 2004, Santos Granero 1986, Wright 2004, Vidal and Whitehead 2004, Taussig 1987). This literature focuses on the sorcery deployed by indigenous and African-descendant communities. Vidal and Whitehead (2004) argue that shamanic knowledge and African-derived magical practices such as *Obeah, Voudoun* and *Candomblé* provide South American politics with an idiom of magical warfare since anticolonial struggle that has strong political associations as expressions of communities' power. Demonstrating knowledge of this idiom - they explain - is critical for elite relationships and modern politics in South America, where "the political has become firmly entwined in broader cultures of spiritual significance" (*ibid.* 76). While sorcerous practices in indigenous communities and their political import have been documented (c.f. Losonczy 2013), there are not many studies about sorcery that concerns armed groups in South America.

Like other types of sorcery deployed by armed groups around the world, the sorcery of *cruzados* hasn't been fully analysed in relation to the dynamics of armed violence. However, similar rituals to acquire bulletproof powers have been documented in

Colombia. According to Garcia (2016), guerrillas and paramilitaries are the most common clients for this sorcery in the Cauca region (*ibid*. 139). In Urabá, the North Coast of the country, anthropologist Carolina Lozano (2009) documented the conjured amulets called *aseguranzas*,[3] given to paramilitaries by *Zenues* indigenous *curanderos* or shamans to make them bulletproof. Although documented, this sorcery is usually framed in the margins of studies focusing on religion and violence, making "only the occasional ethnographic guest appearance, usually being relegated to parentheses, a footnote, or an aside" (Ferrer 2014:10). This research places the sorcery of *cruzados* at the forefront of the ethnographic arena. It interrogates its relation – not to one specific community – but to the exuberance of armed violence in a society increasingly dominated by criminal organisations.

I frame my interrogation in the reflections of Michael Taussig (1987) about the intrinsic relationship between violence and sorcery. Taussig suggests that magic or sorcery comprises the experiential appropriation of the violent history of conquest. Sorcery is a kind of "implicit social knowledge",[4] non-discursive knowing of social relationality produced and producing imagery objectifying violent historical events, traced to conquering and colonisation, yet reactivated in moments of crisis, like the rubber economy he studied, or, as I suggest, the violent expansion of paramilitarism. As Taussig contends and the *cruzados* prove, sorcery proliferates in the "cultures of terror" encompassing civilising projects: the social formations where unspeakable violence is used to subjugate peoples in the name of progress. This perspective is crucial to comprehending the sorcery of *cruzados* as a part of a genealogy of the imagery of violence that took shape during the brutalities of colonialism.

"The mark of the modern is violence" - states Neil Whitehead (2011: 3), arguing that, although war and violence have probably always existed, it was the onset of European

3 The translation is "assurances".

4 Taussig develops this notion in his book examining the rubber economy flourishing in the Colombian Putumayo region in the early XX century. He starts his book by examining the reports about rubber barons' violence against indigenous populations, atrocities committed to advancing the rubber economy and rationalised in terms of "conquering" the land and people. By reactivating the language of "conquest", rubber barons and the beneficiaries of these economies, accounted for the excesses of violence and torture. The rationality behind the excess of torture against indigenous people under the rubber economy, cruelty only matched by the Spaniards' violent saga of conquest and colonisation, is described by the author as an "economy of terror" (1987: 51-74). According to Taussig, magic as we know it today - *brujeria* or shamanism the same- is the outcome of the mode of production of reality in this economy. Magic comprises the imagery resulting from the mimesis of the savagery attributed to indigenous peoples by colonists and the savagery perpetrated by colonists in the name of civilisation.

colonialism where a whole set of social relationships was opened by means of war. He claims modernity begins with the rationalisation of violence as the axis of social exchange during colonialism. Whitehead contends that war and violence legitimated 'as the price of progress', became itself a mode of economic production: "increasingly, it seems that all socially significant meaning can only be produced through the agon of war" (*ibid*.). The moral of such production is one where humans are dispensable "killable" bodies and where the market has acquired the divine status -earlier held by kings- to decide over life and death. The author invokes the image of a "cannibal war machine" to convey the unnatural and anti-human aspect of violent global capitalism that has made "expendable bodies" of entire populations. The "cannibal war machine" denotes a world of horrifying violence leading to vast profits, the invention of new forms and technologies for violence and the obscure forms of agency behind the production of "killable bodies" that become the machine's sustenance or fuel (Whitehead 2011: 15).

The supernatural bulletproof men could be described as a bright image of the "cannibal war machine". However, they were people, combatants who were not only the images but the actual "killable bodies" forming the paramilitary "war machine". Along this thesis, I explore a transversal tension between the sorcery and violence producing *cruzados* and the violence and images that *cruzados* produce (c.f. Richards 2006).

The work of Shaw in "The production of witchcraft and witchcraft as production" (1997) could be useful to understand *cruzados* fundamental tension. Shaw demonstrates that witchcraft was produced in the slave-making practices for the slave trade. Convicted witches and their kin were sold as slaves by African Mane raiders to European slave traders. Understandings of witchcraft were inscribed in this new form of "producing witches" for the slave trade and flooded with images of Europeans and African elites "eating" African souls and bodies:

> The development of witch-finding as the ritual production of slaves for the Atlantic trade and as the source of particular kinds of knowledge and subjectivity about witchcraft is, then, only part of this story of witchcraft and the slave trade. Like Taussig's powerful account of Putumayo torture stories as a "colonial mirror that reflects onto the colonists the barbarity of their own social relations" (1992:164), the very imagery of witchcraft as the wrongful "eating" of people provided counter-representations through which those who profited from the ritual conviction of witches

> were implicitly recognised as the biggest witches of all. Although power may produce knowledge, it does not necessarily determine consciousness (Shaw 1997:869)

Shaw (1997) contends that witchcraft in Sierra Leone was produced through the actual dynamics of violence of the slave trade and actualised in the successive destabilisations caused by European-driven trade in natural resources. Witch-finding rituals were more than 'ways of knowing, local idioms to grasp the realities of the slave trade, but forms of producing slaves, hence, practices actively contributing to the continuous exploitation of African peoples—i.e. 'witchcraft's production' (*ibid*. 869). Concurrently, witchcraft produced images, stories and rumours that reversed the direction of witchcraft accusations onto those benefiting in the trade: African and European elites depicted as consumers of human life and suspects of being witches, i.e. 'production of witchcraft' (*ibid*. 869).

Shaw's analysis of witchcraft as "product/production" is useful to understand the relation of this sorcery to the dynamics of armed violence, that is, the paradoxical relation between the powers of the supernatural bulletproof men that become the "killable bodies" and the "war machine" that they powered.

The perspective on sorcery that I develop throughout the thesis brings up the literature on its relation to interpersonal conflicts, capitalism and modernity, but seeks to advance an understanding of sorcery, focusing on the ways in which supernatural bulletproof men embody the fractal forms of paramilitary "presence". It departs from the "micropolitics" of aggression and "modernity and witchcraft" arguments, discussing the reduction of *cruzados* to discourse or poetics, and placing them in relation to the creativity of rituals, their viscerality, the existential struggles of *cruzados* and the ways in which people in the Plains constantly elaborate their prolonged presence in the region.

The Context: Colombian Paramilitaries

This section provides some elements for understanding the paramilitaries and their context: the intricate history of armed conflict in Colombia. Before I turn to the paramilitaries directly, it is necessary to understand this long-standing conflict. After that,

I will describe the development of paramilitarism and discuss what it entails to study these phenomena from an anthropological perspective.

The Colombian Armed Conflict

Some authors trace the roots of Colombian armed violence to the ruthless methods of colonial times (Hristov 2009); however, for the present purposes, I will briefly refer to the conflict's origins in the formation of the Colombian Republic.

In the Republic's first years, violent clashes occurred between Conservative political forces pushing for a centralised, unitary state versus a liberal, federalised one. Centralism finally predominated, yet violence continued. The Liberal Party's insurrection broke into the Thousand Days' war (1889-1902), where Conservatives standing for a pro-clerical and centralised state confronted the Liberals' federalism and secularism in open warfare that cost more than a hundred thousand lives (Hristov 2009: 6).

The war between Conservatives and Liberals re-emerged in the 1940s, carried out by armed groups associated with each political party (Hristov 2009: 6). "The Violence", as this conflict was known, was a civil war fought from 1948 to 1958 and is a defining moment in modern Colombian history. Democracy returned to Colombia during the "National Front" (1958-1974) after a government-backed amnesty of the Liberal guerrillas. During the "National Front", the Liberal and Conservative parties agreed to alternate government every four years. "The Violence" left between 2.000-3.000 people dead (Hristov 2009: 6) and soon evolved into a new period of political violence from the 1960s onwards. The successive governments were uncapable of fulfil the “National Front” promises of agrarian reform designed to change the land-tenure system regime that benefitted large landowners. This sparked revolts throughout Colombia. Peasant, indigenous, student and workers' social movements emerged and were met with violent repression by those in power (Gill 2016, Hristov 2009). This new period of political violence is identified as the origins of Colombian armed conflict.

By 1960 some territories were declared "independent republics" across the country. By 1964, with U.S. military aid seeking to prevent the expansion of communism after the Cuban revolution, the Colombian government decided to destroy the "republics". This included "the independent republic of Marquetalia", a radicalised peasant enclave of former Liberal guerrillas bombed by the Colombian army with U.S. military assistance (Hristov 2009). Marquetalia rebels escaped to the Plains and later established the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in 1966. Other guerrilla groups followed.[5] In many rural areas the FARC enjoyed wide popular support throughout the 1970s. This support allowed them to repel the attacks of "self-defence" groups, U.S.-backed counterinsurgency strategy adopted by the Colombian governments to train the conservative militias remaining from "the Violence" (Rausch 1999; Romero 2003, Hristov 2009). These counterinsurgency groups, openly supported by large landowners until 1988, are frequently referred to as the origins of the paramilitaries.[6]

A defining moment in the armed conflict was the introduction of marijuana and coca crops by the end of the 1970s (Rausch 1999), which led to the emergence of powerful drug cartels. During the 1980s, guerrillas and paramilitaries accessed the vast financial resources of these illicit economies. Colombian governments, supported by U.S. administrations, increased military efforts against the guerrillas and drug traffickers during the 1980s and 1990s, leading to a record number of human rights violations (Borda 2012: 43). Meanwhile, paramilitary groups waged wars against guerrillas for the control of the territories and drug trafficking business, an expansion that cost countless human lives and caused mass forced displacement.[7] This violence ran parallel to the adoption of neoliberal economic models in the 1990s, which were further conducive to concentrating wealth and decision-making power in the regional elites, thus, intensifying poverty and dispossession across Colombia (Hristov 2009: 7).

5 The ELN or National Liberation Army (1964), which still exists; the EPL or People's Liberation Army, formed in 1967; M19 Movement, formed in 1970; PRT Revolutionary Workers' Party, formed in 1982; and the Quintín Lame indigenous guerrilla, formed in 1984, that entered into peace negotiations in the 1990s and demobilised.

6 Another historical landmark for paramilitarism is a decree under Law 48 of 1968 in which "self-defence" groups were legalised and promoted under the patronage of Colombian Armed Forces to provide security in areas where there was little State presence (Garzon 2005:52). Law 48 was overturned and "self-defence" groups declared illegal in 1989.

7 According to the UARIV (Unidad para la Atencion y Reparacion Integral a las Victimas, Unit for Comprehensive Care and Reparation for Victims), until January 31 2022, it is estimated that at least 8.219.403 people have been forcibly displaced due to the armed forces. See: "Registro Único de Victimas" https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394 (Last access January 31 2022). In 2010 the number of displaced people in Villavicencio (the main city in the Plains) was 65,988, 60% of the Meta department's total population. El Tiempo, "En diferentes barrios de Villavicencio viven los desplazados" February 2010, http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-7307929.

Although there were previous political efforts to put an end to the conflict, it was only until the signing of the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC, the largest guerrilla group in the country, that a serious peace building process took place in Colombia.[8] This historic agreement seeking to end the fifty years of armed conflict has fierce opponents among those who capitalised politically during decades from a militaristic and anti-communist discourse. Particularly, the political and economic forces allied with paramilitarism, a phenomenon that continues driving violence across the country, undermining the many efforts to forge a peaceful nation.

Paramilitarism

> Paramilitary groups have been a constant feature throughout Colombian history since its independence in the nineteenth century. Through decades, such groups have appeared in different shapes and with different names, operated employing kidnapping, disappearance, torture, selective killings, and massacres, fueling the desires and fantasies of a variety of interests: the desire for powers by individuals and groups, the greed of businessmen, the aspiration of politicians and their political parties, the ambitions of the Army military campaigns, and, for the past thirty years, the ever-spreading influence of drug cartels (Civico 2016: 1).

It is a commonplace in the literature on the Colombian armed conflict to explain the origins of paramilitarism in the counterinsurgency strategy of regional economic elites and the Colombian State that were losing terrain to communist guerrillas in the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, as anthropologist Civico highlights in the quote above, "paramilitary groups have been a constant feature throughout Colombian history" (*ibid*., c.f. Taussig 2005: x). According to Hristov (2009), paramilitarism's roots lie deep in the country's history of violence "employed by those with economic and political power over the working majority and the poor in order to acquire control over resources, forcefully recruit labour and suppress or eliminate dissent" (*ibid.* 3). It follows that paramilitarism as a socio-political process, goes beyond the counterinsurgency groups.

8 According to figures from the government, approximately 14.025 FARC members were demobilised after peace agreements. See: "ARN en Cifras Cort January 31, 2022, see on the website of the ARN (Agencia para la Reincorporación y la Normalización, Agency for Reincorporation and Normalisation). January 31, 2022.
https://www.reincorporacion.gov.co/es/agencia/Documentos%20de%20ARN%20en%20Cifras/ARN_en_Cifras_corte_Enero_2022.pdf

As Civico suggests, paramilitarism is “a process, mechanism, and political and economic project of domination” (*ibid*. 144). While some Anglophone scholars eschew the term translated from the Colombian *paramilitarismo*, throughout my work, I use 'paramilitarism' – a coinage used widely by NGOs and Colombian scholars writing about the armed conflict to emphasise semantically the idea of a widespread 'project of domination' extending beyond specific groups. This understanding of paramilitarism is important in approaching the supernatural bulletproof men, whose sorcery is not used by one specific group.

To paraphrase Civico, it is difficult to pinpoint armed organisations that appear in "different shapes and with different names" throughout Colombian history. This difficulty pertains to the nature of the paramilitaries, as a purveyor of armed violence deployed to "secure the grip of the dominant groups in power" (Hristov 2009: 9), as well as to their varied military manifestations, such as "self-defence" groups, death squads and irregular armies[9] (Kalyvas and Arjona 2005). The difficulty also resides in the complexity of the paramilitaries' "ideology a posteriori" (Cubides 1998: 88) – that is, the counterinsurgency rhetoric through which the diverse groups transfigured their private interests into public narratives.[10] The paramilitaries certainly renovated ideas of “security” and channelled the "anti-communist" sentiment stored under decades of guerrilla war, greatly benefitting from the U.S. counterinsurgency policies in the Americas (Hristov 2009). However, their anti-Communist ideology – the cornerstone of paramilitaries' legitimacy in some territories (like Antioquia, c.f. Estrada Gallego 2001) – masked their accumulation of economic and political power: "by means of kidnapping, disappearance, torture, selective killings, and massacres", to use Civico's words. As a result, when trying to explain paramilitarism, this "ideology a posteriori" seems to work "retroactively".

9 "Death squads", small groups of people who act under a chain of command to carry out selective homicides; the "self-defence groups", formed by groups of settlers operating in a local area as guardians against a foreign threat, usually in active cooperation with State agents; irregular armies are professionally trained in warfare, work under a unified command and engage in combat and open war (Kalyvas and Arjona 2005).

10 Cubides (1998) relates this to what Hobsbawm called the “pre-politic”: bandits that use violence for a personal vendetta and who, in doing so, find a broader scope for it, getting to/reaching the point where they need to find extra individuals’ reasons to their private goal

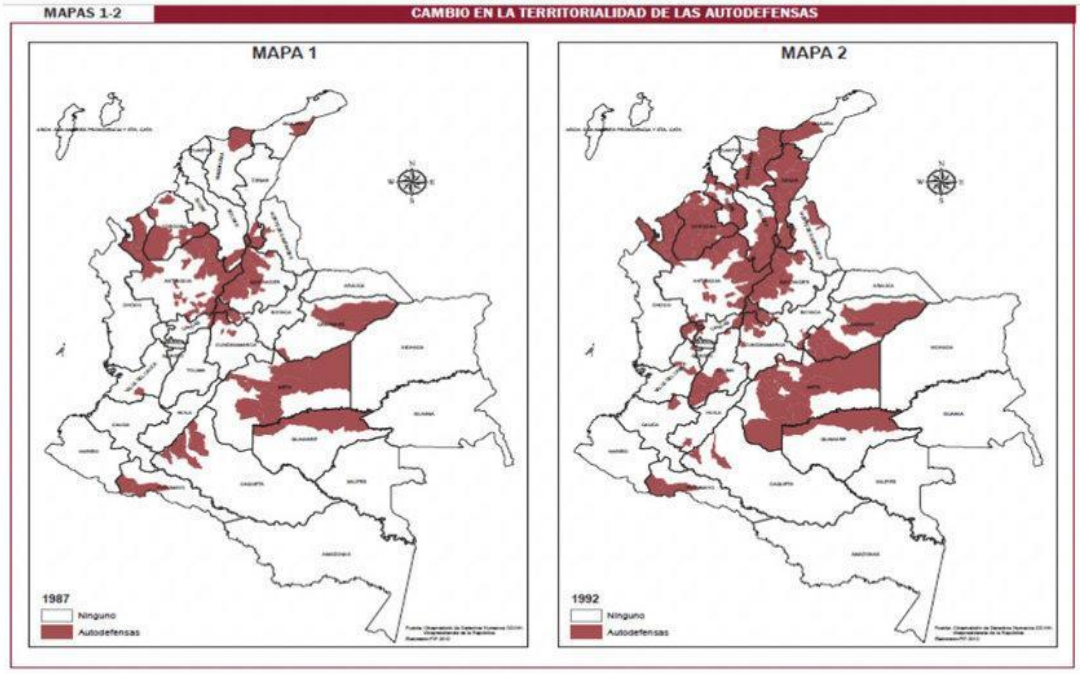
A widespread narrative about paramilitarism defends that the original anti-communist groups "lost" their "rightful" direction when they were corrupted by drug trafficking.[11] (c.f. Medina Gallego 1990, Palacio and Rojas 1990). Closer examination shows that some paramilitaries were created by drug-trafficking money, while others progressively tapped into this funding source, in some cases completely taking over the business (Cubides 2005: 226). These resources enabled them access to better armament and training than any other criminal groups of this nature in Latin America (Pizzaro 2004, Tate 2011). With this funding, irregular paramilitary armies in the 1990s fought the guerrillas, appropriating their territories and accumulating land. They acquired land devaluated by the instability and insecurity they had themselves created, a violent grabbing phenomenon known in the literature under the euphemism of "land recapitalisation" (Cubides 1998, Bejarano 1997, Ballve 2020). Land is the treasure driving the "desires and fantasies of a variety of interests", to use Civico's words once again. Paramilitaries and their frontiersmen sold land to drug lords or national and international business groups advancing agroindustry, stockbreeding and oil ventures (Cubides 1998: 75). The involvement with business groups allowed paramilitaries to infiltrate public institutions and exert political control over the occupied territories (Cubides 2005, Kalyvas and Arjona 2005, Duncan 2006).

Certainly, some groups invested more in constructing a counterinsurgency ideology, while others openly behaved like corporative mercenaries and invested in military operations favouring private corporations' interests (Franco 2002). Regardless of their explicit rhetoric, paramilitaries have been ambassadors of capitalist "development" (c.f. Gill 2016, Torres 2004, Gonzales, Bolivar y Vasquez 2002, Hristov 2009). They plunge their origins in the interests of the regional economic elites, who felt threatened by the guerrillas and by the popularity of left-wing parties competing in democratic elections after the 1991 Constitution (Romero 2004).

The confluence of economic and political interests in the perpetuation of paramilitarism was evident during their expansion in the 1990s and 2000s, a period characterised by the formation of the paramilitary alliance cohering under the “United Self-Defence Forces of

11 The work by Medina Gallego (1990) on the origin of paramilitaries in the Puerto Boyacá region explores the elites' desire to protect the stockbreeding industry from guerrillas; or Palacio and Rojas's analysis (1990), who describes how in fighting the guerrillas, the paramilitaries appropriated land and became "cocaine entrepreneurs".

Colombia" or AUC,[12] a national network of regional paramilitary groups with high levels of military training. The AUC, officially founded in 1998, carried out a military offensive against the guerrillas that ran parallel to the government military campaign backed by the US-sponsored "Plan Colombia" initiated in 2000[13] (Borda 2012: 71, Hristov 2009:9).



Map 1. Paramilitary Occupation of Colombian Territories 1987 and 1992.[14]

At the height of their military power, the AUC and the second largest paramilitary group, "Bolivar Central Block",[15] engaged in negotiations with the government, seizing on the political potential they had gained during their expansion (Cubides 2005: 250). The 2002 negotiations provided new information about paramilitary funding sources beyond drug trafficking, their variety of economic and political alliances, military capabilities and extended use of violence (*ibid*. 226). The AUC's demobilised leaders provided incriminating evidence of paramilitary infiltration in public institutions and details of how they orchestrated the election of 35% of the parliament in 2002 (Lopez-Hernandez 2010). Members of parliament who have received the backing of the paramilitaries for their election were called by the media *parapoliticos* or "parapoliticians". During their time in

12 In Spanish: Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia.
13 It started under the government of Andres Pastrana and was furthered by President Alvaro Uribe under his "Democratic Security" policy.
14 Source: Observatorio de Derechos Humanos DD.HH. Vicepresidencia de la República Elaborado: FIP 2012 in "Narcotráfico: Génesis de los paramilitares y herencia de bandas criminales". See: https://cdn.ideaspaz.org/media/website/document/60c13b3a95b56.pdf
15 In Spanish: El Bloque Central Bolivar.

parliament, they did not advance any reforms, not even around themes they were interested in, like land ownership. They only acted as a unified group for the "Peace and Justice" law approved to minimise the legal liabilities of their illegal counterparts[16] (Garzón 2005: 240).

According to Garzon (2005), paramilitaries' "ideology a posteriori" was invigorated under the AUC and the negotiations leading to their demobilisation. The groups fabricated their ideology by elaborating on nationalist goals, giving to their regional dynamics an appearance of a unified political actor. However, with the information surfacing after demobilisation, the AUC counter-insurgent rationality was rendered a "political myth" rather than a "military reality" (Lopez Hernandez 2010: 47). Although the AUC aimed to exercise an internal control and discipline like that of the guerrillas by establishing a code of conduct and organised military training, the lack of conviction of the basis, multiple tensions among its groups, and other forces at play like the intervention of U.S. military aid, impeded a real process of internal cohesion as unified military and political actors. Cubides (2005) argues that AUC, in practice, was a fictional project. Their relationships with drug cartels were the source of the internal divisions resulting in the final shattering of its structure and the killing of its charismatic leader Carlos Castaño in 2004. According to the Centre for Historical Memory (CMH), the AUC was a loose union of groups whose forms of collective action varied from region to region.[17] Paramilitaries were never unified political actors, ideologically or militarily, not even under the AUC (Garzon 2005). Their existence as a 'process of domination' is evident in the ongoing schismogenesis of the groups and their perpetual internal wars.[18]

Another common explanation of the origin and endurance of paramilitaries is that they originated in a "weak" or "absent" State that failed to provide security for its citizens (Melo 1990, Uprimy and Vargas 1990, Serge 2011). Research has found that paramilitaries were

16 The number of politicians condemned for links with the paramilitary is 259. Most of them are members of the Liberal Party (46), the conservative Party (36), Cambio Radical Party (32), Party Social de Unidad Nacional (31), Convergencia Ciudadana (13), y Colombia Democrática (6). See: "¿Quienes son los congresistas condenados por paramilitarismo?" In El Espectador, July 11th, 2019. https://www.elespectador.com/politica/quienes-son-los-congresistas-condenados-por-paramilitarismo-article-797648/

17 According to CNMH, between 1975 and 2015, the paramilitary groups and the Post- Demobilisation Armed Groups(GAPD) were responsible for 47,09% of the conflicts' deaths (21,044 victims). GAPD carried out 2,518 of these murders during their demobilisation period between 2006 and 2015. See: "La radiografía del fenómeno paramilitar". http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/balances-jep/paramilitarismo.html

18 The paramilitaries began with localised groups, scaling up to a patched national organisation that broke down into many "criminal gangs".

"autonomous" groups, and their relationship with the State was neither oppositional nor organic[19] (Ramirez 2005, Rangel 2005, Garzón 2005, Tjodal 2002, Gutierrez and Baron 2006). The information surfacing during the AUC demobilisation process proved that, while in the territories, the organisations behaved like "local states" (Duncan 2006), at the national level the paramilitary were "captured" by the State. As analyst Luis Jorge Garay (2012) argues, paramilitaries did not "co-opt" the State for their benefit, but instead, politicians, businessmen and the armed forces instrumentalised paramilitary violence to advance their agendas.[20] Garay's "Inverted Capture of the State" (*ibid*.) explains how the paramilitaries "reconfigured" the Colombian political landscape, ending the traditional bipartidism and legitimising a new Mafiosi social class in urban areas and national political arenas (Sanin 2010). In this thesis, unless I refer to a specific paramilitary group, the term paramilitarism refers to both, the armed men and those who benefited from their violence.

The paramilitaries inadvertently achieved in 20 years what the communist guerrillas could not: to become forms of local and national government. As the contributors to the book *And they refunded the homeland: how gangsters and politicians reconfigured the Colombian State*[21] (2010) asserted, although the largest guerrilla, FARC, had access to drug-trafficking money since the 1980s, possessed armaments and were highly organised in a vertical and centralised structure, they lacked paramilitaries' "social capital" and their pro-State approach to producing real impact. The guerrillas had bad relationships with regional politicians, whom they often killed, and inexistent relations with national politicians. In contrast, paramilitaries' organic ties with regional elites and subsequent autonomy, enable them to continue cultivating contacts among the political class and business groups, promoting their own candidates in the regions. Politicians actively sought paramilitary endorsement, and in doing so, they kept reproducing paramilitarism as a process aligned with their private economic ventures.

19 Most literature on paramilitarism discusses the latter's relationship with the State. Authors like Tjodal (2004), Rangel (2005), Garzón (2005) and Ramirez (2005) conclude that paramilitaries do not have organic relationships with State, and that their resources and operations have been kept at the local level and independent from the State institutions. Other authors like Kalyvas and Arjona (2005), and Gutierrez and Baron (2006), emphasise the different forms of paramilitary engagement with the State [and the former internal tensions; Duncan (2006) explains paramilitary as a Mafiosi organisation, increasingly integrated with the State.

20 Until 1995 the armed forces did not report any combat or paramilitary casualties, the complicity of the State was total (Sanin 2010: 10).

21 In Spanish: *Y Refundaron la Patria. De como mafiosos y politicos reconfiguraron* el Estado Colombiano (2010)

Paramilitaries do not exist in opposition to the State or its absence. As Civico (2016) explains, paramilitaries are "intertwined" with State institutions[22] and with large sectors of society.[23] "Intertwinement" is a key concept to understanding how paramilitaries are a "strange hybrid" (Taussig 2005: 10), reproduced as a process in their relationship with the State, corporate business groups, and civil society.[24] Paramilitaries are what Briquet and Favarel-Garrides call (2010: 4) "politico-criminal configurations": fragmented organisations lending violent "know-how" to holders of political and economic power. In other words, producing violence "as a private good" (Kalyvas and Arjona 2005: 29). This form of understanding paramilitarism resonates with a wider trend in the literature on organised crime that suggests that this systemic articulation between the state and groups using extra-legal force is a worldwide phenomenon.[25]

In the last 40 years, academic and journalist works have slowly developed an understanding of paramilitarism. Until the 1989 publication of "The Paramilitary Dossier" in the mainstream Colombian periodical *Semana,*[26] paramilitaries were virtually inexistent in the academic and public sphere (Rodriguez 2007). However, only with the testimonies rendered after the demobilisation of the largest paramilitary armies in 2005, academia became aware of the full dimensions of the paramilitary beast.

"Capitalists of security", "Lords of war", "Protection entrepreneurs" (Cubides 2005, borrowing expressions from Charles Taylor and Diego Gambetta) – paramilitaries are difficult to pin down. In their economic rationale, as in their relationships with the State and political participation, paramilitarism, as a concrete reality, constantly vanishes into thin air. Still, while paramilitaries' short-lived groups fade away, paramilitarism persists as a process that have claimed thousands of human lives and caused suffering of all kinds

22 Cooperation among paramilitaries, armed forces, police and corporations has been amply documented in Colombia. See, for example, the Human Rights Watch 2001 report entitled "The Sixth Division", about the ties between the AUC and the Colombian army, also Reyes Posada (2009) about mining corporations and Gill (2007) discussion of the case of Chiquita Brands and Coca-Cola in funding paramilitary groups in the Urabá region.

23 The notion of "intertwinement" comes from Civico's parallel between paramilitaries and the Italian mafia, also featured in the work of Garay (2012), Cubides (2005) and Duncan (2006), to explain that it is impossible to define where mafia ends, and the State and civil society begins.

24 Throughout the demobilisation negotiations and the subsequent trials, Colombian justice was never interested in prosecuting the businessmen and companies who had funded the paramilitaries, despite multiple testimonies and evidence. "El Cerebro de la Para-economía", Revista Semana, 14 December 2014. http://kavilando.org/index.php/2013-10-13-19-52-10/confllicto-social-y-paz/3193-el-hombre-que-fue-el-cerebro-de-la-paraeconomia\.

25 The collection of studies in Briquet and Favarel-Garrides (2010) shows these "political-criminal configurations" sometimes offer their services as subcontractors in vast accumulation enterprises (c.f. cases in Bulgaria, Belize and Russia) or use force as a political source of legitimacy, becoming progressively integrated into the "legal" elites (cases of Turkey, Indonesia and Corsica). Integration entails extending their network, influencing policies, and controlling small-time criminals, all of which contribute to the legitimisation of State power while simultaneously concealing illegal practices that thrive within it.

26 *El Dossier Paramilitar* Revista Semana, May 11, 1989.

with impunity, weakening Colombian democracy (Hristov 2009). Understanding paramilitarism in this light is important to examine the advent of supernatural bulletproof men in their lines. This sorcery displays the interplay between paramilitarism as a 'process of domination' and the armed individuals who personify it.

Paramilitarism in the Plains

Colombia's fragmented geography partly explains the protracted nature of the armed conflict. As a Colombian, I learnt in school that the country is geographically, politically and culturally fragmented into five distinct regions: the mountainous Andean region, the Caribbean coast, the Pacific coast, the Amazon rainforest, and the Eastern Plains formed along the Orinoco River basin. The fragmented geography has divided the country's populations since colonial times, insofar as neither the colonial regimes nor the republican and modern States have ever achieved domination over the whole territory (Serje 2017).

The fragmented geography is even more important in explaining paramilitarism, as it evolved from alliances with the regional economic and political elites (Duncan 2006, Gonzales, Bolivar & Vasquez 2002). In the Eastern Plains, the region of my fieldwork, the first trace of paramilitary activity can be found in the decades of organised violence against indigenous communities (Rausch 1999: 150, Bjork-James 2015: 110; Duran 2012:207; Gomez 1998). Orchestrated by wealthy ranch owners or *hacendados* in collaboration with local authorities, the organised violence against indigenous peoples is known in regional history as the *Guahibiadas.* These massacres were justified by *hacendados*' "right" to protect and expand cattle ranching (Gomez 1998: 1-5, Bjork-James 2014: 100-117). Posterior paramilitary groups inherited the alliances of the *hacendados* or large landowners, and armed forces forged in the *Guahibiadas*. Thus, paramilitarism developed in the dynamics of the Plains as a "frontier" (Rausch 1999: 3), where disputes for access to land and resources took the form of a clash between "savagery" and "civilisation". [27]

27 Paramilitary violence has disproportionately affected the Plains' indigenous communities, who have been systematically targeted and forcibly displaced. The case of Cumaribo in the Vichada department is most illustrative of the displacement of indigenous people by paramilitary groups seeking to use the territories for coca production. The department has one of the country's highest rates of displaced people, with more than six million (Jimenez 2012: 167). The Plains have endured many paramilitary massacres in this territory. For example September 16, 1987, in Puerto Gaitan, Meta, the paramilitary group "the masetos" killed seven peasants in front of the community. Also, the Centauros block committed several massacres between 2002 and 2004, two of them in the Guaviare department. https://rutasdelconflicto.com/masacres/el-porvenir-puerto-

Although the *Guahibiadas* count as paramilitary activity, paramilitarism' direct precedent is the "self-defence" groups created during "The Violence". These groups emerged from the Conservative militias sponsored by Conservative *hacendados,* groups that continued operating long after Liberal guerrillas surrendered their weapons in 1954. These groups received counter-insurgence training by the Colombian Army, specifically the Vargas battalion from the 7th brigade in Villavicencio, host to the CIA Special Survey Team that first trained Colombian counterinsurgency units in 1962.[28] Newly trained "self-defence" groups combatted the FARC guerrillas that emerged after "The Violence" and that had won popular support in the Plains throughout the 1970s.

"Self-defense" units acquired great autonomy with the influx of money from emerald contraband and drug traffic arriving in the region since the 1970s. The Plains' first paramilitary group was called "Carranceros", private armies of the emerald contrabandists lords who took possession of swathes of land in the Plains in the 1970s. They later joined the Masetos, a group linked with people from the MAS,[29] a death squad created in 1981 by drug traffickers to fight guerrilla extortion. This was the first narco-paramilitary group in the Plains, responsible for growing coca production in the region. The groups multiplied throughout the 1990s in the "Self-defence groups of Meta and Vichada" or AMV, "The True Patriots", the "Stingers", and the "Peasant Self-Defence Forces of Casanare" or "ACC" and "The Victors of Arauca Bloc" (Romero 2003, Cubides 2005).[30] They all benefitted from the drug-trafficking business in the region, which until 2007 produced fifty per cent of the cocaine generated in the country.[31] In 1994, some of these paramilitary groups allied with others from the Antioquia and Urabá regions that later turned into the AUC (United Self-Defences of Colombia). Backed by this alliance, the Plains' groups stricken the guerrillas who, until 1982, had controlled the region (Cubides 2005: 250). In some cases, paramilitaries also extorted the very *hacendados* that initially funded the groups, forcing them to abandon their lands and to become "victims of their own invention" (Lopez

gaitan#:~:text=En%20septiembre%20de%201987%20paramilitares,entregados%20por%20campesinos%20del%20sector. See: https://rutasdelconflicto.com/masacres

28 The Colombian military has been building connections with the U.S. since 1939. In 1961 the U.S. Military Assistance Program for Colombia focused solely on internal security training (Bjork-James 2014:112).

29 In Spanish, MAS stands for Muerte a Secuestradores o "Death to Kidnappers".

30 Respectively in Spanish: Los Verdaderos Patriotas, Aguijones, and Las Autodefensas Campesinas del Casanare.

31 Desmobilización y Reintegración, ODDR, Informe region Orinoquia, 2013: 37

Hernandez 2010: 53). By the late 1990s, the paramilitaries controlled most of coca production in the region (Jimenez 2012: 166).

Alliances among the paramilitary groups in the region were fragile. During the 1990s and 2000s, paramilitaries fought among themselves for territorial control of the Plains and drug trafficking, devastating communities and displacing large numbers of people (Rausch 2006: 158-159). One of the most emblematic conflicts during this expansion was between the AUC Centaurs Bloc and the ACC,–or Peasant Self-Defence Groups of Casanare, popularly known as Buitrago or Buitragueños, for the last name of its founder, Hector Buitrago, a paramilitary trained in the private armies of emerald lords.[32] The bloody war between the paramilitary groups Centaurs and Buitragueños evidences the fictional character of the AUC unity.

The paramilitary expansion in the Plains during the 1990s and 2000s is characterised by the formation and decline of the AUC. It allowed the expansion of drug trafficking, oil and biofuels, transforming the Plains' productive landscape, previously dedicated to extensive cattle ranching. The Plains, formerly only supplying meat to Bogotá, is today a strategic region for positioning Colombia in the global economy[33] (Jimenez 2012: 155-159; Duran 2012:203; Rausch 2008:35). This transformation has occurred in the context of changes in Latin America's economy, which in turn reflects global cycles of capital.[34] However, it was made possible by the same mechanisms used for *llaneros* expansion throughout the previous centuries: violently dispossessing people from their land (Jimenez 2012: 159; Cubides 1998).

Following the demobilisation of the largest four paramilitary structures of the Plains in 2005,[35] many combatants took residence in its towns while others joined the new groups emerging across Colombia. Allegedly, these groups have not reached the organisational levels of previous paramilitary structures, the reason why police and media call them

32 In Spanish: El Bloque Centauros. The "ACC" fought the "Centaurs" for the control of coca cultivation, a war that left more than 1500 dead ('Desmovilización y Reintegración', ODDR, Informe region Orinoquia 2013: 80).
33 Not mentioned in this section but increasingly relevant in the last years, the discovery of coltan mines in the Plains has made it a strategic area for mining (Desmovilización y Reintegración, ODDR, Informe region Orinoquia 2013: 39).
34 Following in Brazil's footsteps, Colombia prioritised biofuels in the development agenda, committing large swathes of land to African palm, which today constitute 40% of Colombian agricultural production. The "Agenda 19" and National Development Programme 2006-2010 expected that the *Llano*s would become South America's leading producer of biodiesel (Jimenez 2012).
35 Annexe 1: Paramilitary structures demobilised in the Eastern Plains.

"criminal gangs".[36] New paramilitaries have been involved in drug trafficking and invested in guaranteeing impunity for the beneficiaries of paramilitary expansion in the 1990s and 2000s. They have turned their violence to impede the implementation of the land restitution law and the implementation of the peace accords with the FARC. [37]

Paramilitarism: An Anthropological Perspective

Most of the literature about paramilitarism presented above comes from political science and history, concerned with analysing paramilitaries' multiple relations with the State, drug trafficking, and political and economic elites. They are important for contextualising paramilitarism and necessary for understanding the implications of the presence of supernatural bulletproof men at certain moments of its development. However, studying this sorcery entails approaching paramilitarism from an anthropological perspective. In this apart I will expand on what this may entails.

Anthropological studies on the paramilitaries have mainly approached the experiences of people who live under their armed control (Taussig 2005; Madarriaga 2006; Campuzano 2013; Cruz, Diaz, and Moreno 2009). These studies seek to understand the quotidian languages and values through which paramilitarism has engendered political projects in the territories, implemented codes of conduct and regulated legal and illegal economies. In other words, this perspective is oriented toward understanding paramilitary forms of governance (Madarriaga 2006: 94; Campuzano 2013; Cruz, Diaz, and Moreno 2009).

Madarriaga (2006), for example, explores the normative order that the paramilitary established after taking control of a town in the Urabá region. She describes how the paramilitaries established curfews, intervened in family disputes and even imposed dress codes for the young. Like other ethnographic descriptions of the social experience of paramilitary control (Campuzano 2013, Civico 2016, Taussig 2005), Madarriaga analyses

36 Some of these "gangs" are dissidents from previous groups, like the "Guaviare Heroes" who split from the "Centaurs Bloc" that in 2008 established "the Revolutionary Counterinsurgent Popular Army of Colombia" or "ERPAC" (Ejercito Popular Antisubversivo de Colombia). The ERPAC, partially demobilised in 2011, established alliances with the FARC, while new "gangs" like the "Private Security of Meta and Vichada" battled other emergent groups such as "The Liberators of the *Llanos*" ("Seguridad Privada del Meta and Vichada" and "Los Libertadores del *Llano*") for the control of drug trafficking. Since 2011 there is also a presence of national paramilitary groups like "the Clan del Golfo", previously known as "the Urabeños" (from Urabá), and "The Black Eagles", who allegedly have a presence across all the national territory ('Desmobilización y Reintegración', ODDR, Informe Región Orinoquía 2013: 86-94).
37 Numerous land restitution claimants have been killed (Lopez Hernandez 2010: 48).

people's use of silence and rumours to circulate anonymous and valuable information for remaining safe (c.f. Nordstrom and Robben 1995). Moreover, the author describes fear-inspired silence as strategic, not only for the population but also for the paramilitaries. Fear silences opinions, even vis-à-vis close friends and family, eroding intimacy and networks of trust. Furthermore, fear silences emotional responses to violence, inhibiting the manifestation of feelings of sadness and anger. She claims that this emotional and moral silence helped normalise violence as a legitimate control mechanism. Taussig (2005) remarks on this attitude in his study in another town under paramilitary control in the Cauca Valley region, a numb silence "punctuated by panic" (*ibid*. 135) that gives the appearance of a total acceptance of the paramilitary project. These studies highlight that amid the fear, people resisted and even used the paramilitaries for their own interests. Certainly, as Taussig (2005) suggests, people not only survive violence but also adapt and respond to it.

Anthropological perspectives on paramilitarism like the developed by Madarriaga, are mostly concerned with what occurs *after* the groups have subjugated a territory, describing values, modes of behaviour and subjectivities (Theidon 2006; Cruz, Diaz and Moreno 2009) that legitimate paramilitarism as a violent system of governance (Civico 2016: 173; Kalyvas and Arjona 2005: 29; Madarriaga 2006: 94). These perspectives are useful for understanding the effects of the paramilitary on the social fabric in my field site. Still, it falls short when addressing the sorcery of bulletproof men. As I will explain, this sorcery concerns the social elaboration of paramilitaries' armed presence and uncanny violence, not only the mechanisms they used for exerting social control over the population.

There has been a prolific production of ethnographies on violence in Colombia,[38] but not many about paramilitaries. Some works have indirectly addressed the topic of violence, the cruelty of the torture and killing techniques used by conservative armies during the violence (Uribe 1990), and by the "*sicarios*" or "hitmen" (Blair 2004). However, the scope of paramilitary violence in Colombia has yet to be studied[39] As Hristov (2009) writes, many

38 See, for example, the important work of Orlando Fals Borda and Eduardo Umaña Luna 2016 [1962] on regional elites' regional developments and participation in "The Violence" and its role in the protracted political conflict.
39 According to CNMH, between 1975 and 2015, the paramilitary groups and the Post- Demobilisation Armed Groups(GAPD) were responsible for 47,09% of the conflicts' deaths (21,044 victims). GAPD carried out 2,518 of these murders during their demobilisation period between 2006 and 2015.See: "La radiografía del fenómeno paramilitar". http://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/micrositios/balances-jep/paramilitarismo.html

European and American, and even Colombian scholars do not comprehend the surreal dimensions of this violence:

> How is it possible that under a twenty-first century (formally) democratic regime, torture has become an art, perhaps surpassing in severity the barbarities used in the eighteenth-century English punishment of so-called vagabonds and those under Latin American dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s, including cutting still alive persons into pieces, or mutilating women's bodies beyond recognition? (*ibid*. 3)

According to Hanna Arendt, violence is distinguished from other phenomena because of its instrumental character: "It is rational to the extent that it is effective in reaching the end which must justify it. And since when we act, we never know with any amount of certainty the eventual consequences of what we are doing, violence can remain rational only if it pursues short-term goals" (1969: 79). A question ensues: what is the end that paramilitaries pursue? Is it merely economic profit as the studies of paramilitarism suggest? Could this end explain the 'rationale' behind paramilitary "surreal" violence?

Over the last two decades, paramilitary violence has been mainly described in the language of human rights. This factual and atomised reporting fails to grasp the historical and social dynamics producing this violence: "one is invited to address the different expressions of dehumanisation without naming the apparatus of dehumanisation itself" (Hristov 2009: 11, c.f. Taussig 2005: 87-88). Although a necessary defensive strategy in the context of terror and repression (Gill 2016), the language human rights forsake the linking of paramilitary violence with the accumulation of capital in Colombia.

In her book *Blood and Capital,* Hristov (2009) describes how paramilitarism is "motivated by the need to protect and advance the wealth and interests of the upper classes and maintain the status quo" (*ibid*. 126). She calls for a deep look at paramilitary violence's successfully backing the implementation of neoliberal policies and the consolidation of agroindustry and mining, among other legal economies across Colombia. As author Leslie Gill describes in her account of the history of popular struggle in the city of

Barrancabermeja, the paramilitaries have been "the midwife of neoliberalism" (*ibid*. 102). Paramilitary violence is inextricably linked with the concentration of land ownership and wealth, the corresponding escalation of poverty and the growth of militaristic and policing capabilities in Colombia (c.f. Serge 2017, Ballve 2020). Paramilitarism has produced a rupture of the social fabric, an atmosphere of heightened mistrust and fear that Gill regards as the highest achievement of this form of "gangster capitalism" (*ibid*. 97).

Thus, paramilitary violence pursues have been mainly economic. Yet, understanding this does not make it easier to grasp. Paramilitaries have accumulated a huge “debt to humanity" (Hristov 2009) by forcefully recruiting people for their groups, torturing, causing forced displacements, carrying out selective murders of members of social movements, trade unionists and human rights organisations, academics, students, politicians, journalists and whomever they deem "undesired" members of society, such as thieves and drug-addicts, or those who happen to be in the way of their economic activities (*ibid*. 103-127). In the words of an expert on paramilitarism: “the devaluation of human life is stark from the easiness with which they describe their actions, it has as its counterpart the description of the economic rationality that has allowed them their consolidation” (Cubides 1998: 73). So, even when acting under an economic rationale, the scope of paramilitary violence defies explanation.

Paramilitary violence is not exactly systemic violence perpetuating inequality (Graeber 2012), insurrectional violence seeking to free a nation (Fanon 1963), or the violence experienced under a totalitarian regime (Arendt 1972). It can be said that it incorporates aspects of these types of violence, yet is this 'un-definition', this understatement of purposes, what makes the paramilitaries so tantalising. As Hristov writes, it is the kind of violence that one may expect in a dictatorship but occurring in a democratic state, brutalities from "other eras" continuously happening right before the government's nose.

Paramilitary violence has often been rationalised as the "necessary evil" to end guerrillas' atavistic violence and bring economic progress to the regions. As Civico (2016: 174) points out, paramilitary violence is justified by delimiting wild and unruly zones that, following Deleuze and Guattari, are an "exteriority" over which the State asserts a right to capture.

Civico (2016) describes how the Colombian military, politicians, and businessmen resorted to this idea to justify the incursion of paramilitary armed forces in an "untamed zone".[40] As Franco (2002) suggests, paramilitary violence has been instrumentalised by many social actors through whom the paramilitaries have accumulated multiple forms of "social capital" and created hybrid forms of co-existence or "intertwinement".

Paramilitaries resemble what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call “war machines” or forms of violent sovereignty unmasking the driving force that lies at the foundation of the State: the liminal space or “state of exception” from where a political order can be constituted. According to Hansen and Stepputat (2006), this violence constitutes a "de facto sovereignty": "a tentative and always emergent form of authority grounded in violence that is performed and designed to generate loyalty, fear, and legitimacy from the neighbourhood to the summit of the state" (*ibid*. 297). “De facto sovereignties” are the legacy of decades of colonial domination, which repeatedly resort to the "the state of exception".

Paramilitaries resembles the “war machine” and its generative violence. As Colombian anthropologist Carlos Paramo notes:

> The paramilitary revolution is more than an expression of the armed right or an appendix of the establishment. As we have interpreted it, it upholds a profound discourse of cultural transformation (…) of very similar nuances to those postulated (in the most rigorous and historiographical sense of the term) by fascism (...) it is, therefore, a civilising discourse that invents tradition (1998: 201).

The supernatural bulletproof men among paramilitary lines, enables an anthropological perspective on paramilitarism that political analysis and human rights reporting on violence fails to grasp. Their sorcery raises questions about the contradictions of paramilitaries’ “civilising quests” - their rationale as forces of capitalist development - and their “surreal” violence. By focusing on the presence of supernatural bulletproof men - the heightened images of heavily armed men - this thesis addresses the "barbaric" paramilitary violence and their "debt to humanity"- to use Hristov expression.

40 He describes the case of La Macarena, a region depicted as "a space inhabited by barbarism and wild men" (ibid. 8). La Macarena, a stronghold of FARC guerrillas for decades, had to be captured and transformed into a space of ‘modernity’ and ‘civilisation’.

Sorcery offers a vantage point of view to examine paramilitary violence as an “state of exception” or "creator of a new order out of chaos” (Paramo 1999: 198). This anthropological perspective on paramilitarism is not directly concerned with paramilitaries' governance, rather with what Paramo calls the mythical dimension of paramilitary violence - which he argues - is their ultimate *raison d'etre:* “the success of the paramilitary project lies to a large extent in the constant reference to that dark side of our possible world which is represented in barbarism” (Paramo 1998: 203).

As I will explain throughout the thesis, the supernatural bulletproof men embody a form of power that resides at once in the combatants' bodies and the "war machine" that contains them. This taken on power differs from prevalent views in anthropology, where it has been explained mainly in terms of relations of domination, resistance and strategy, materialised in discourses and institutions that account for existing power relations in society. These perspectives overshadow the fact that power is, at certain moments, also materialised in concrete individuals, and that these individuals generate tangible realities for others (Hansen and Stepputat 2006).

Studying the supernatural bulletproof men compel a deep look into a paramilitary world that "seems to be fragmentary and unstable in every level, and where humans become obsolete rather too soon" (Sanin: 2010:25). This sorcery launches a perspective on the violence metamorphosing humans into the "obsolete" weapons driving the "war machine".

Brujeria and Paramilitarism: The Research Questions

Considering the insights about the Colombian paramilitary from the previous section is necessary to ask what the supernatural bulletproof men can tell us about paramilitary power that we do not already know.

There are not many anthropological studies about paramilitaries, and certainly none where sorcery is the heart of the ethnographic enquiry. This study builds on literature on sorcery and power to develop an understanding of *brujeria* or sorcery as a prism through which analysing paramilitarism. *Brujeria* can be translated as witchcraft or sorcery in

English, as in the Latin American context such distinction does not exist as in some parts of Africa. Throughout the thesis, I retain the word insofar as it is central to everyday talk about magic and ritual and, more important, is used to talk about the *cruzados*.

Although paramilitaries, like many people in the Plains, resorted to *brujeria* for various matters, like to obtain the powers to attract women, the thesis focus on *cruzados,* the sorcery of supernatural bulletproof men. It does so because it is a practice closely related to paramilitary activity insofar as bulletproof powers are created for warfare and, in general, for armed violence. The thesis first questions the sorcery behind *cruzados*, that is, the ritual actions and narrative devices intervening in the creation of the supernatural bulletproof men. However, it focuses on the circumstances of *cruzados* surge within the paramilitary. In other words, the thesis specifically interrogates *cruzados* as an outbreak of *brujeria* during paramilitary expansion. The line of enquire goes on to ask how and when *cruzados* emerge? How people remember and articulate their presence? What does the supernatural bulletproof men says about being a paramilitary during a time of intensification of war?

By focusing on their surge, the thesis interrogates how *cruzados* acquire meaning, not for one specific community or paramilitary group, but in a social field materialised during the expansion, where paramilitaries and *llanero* society entered into everyday and conflicting relations. The research attempts to unravel the understandings about the paramilitary converging in *cruzados,* and, in turn, it poses questions about what these understandings can tell us about "war machines" in general.

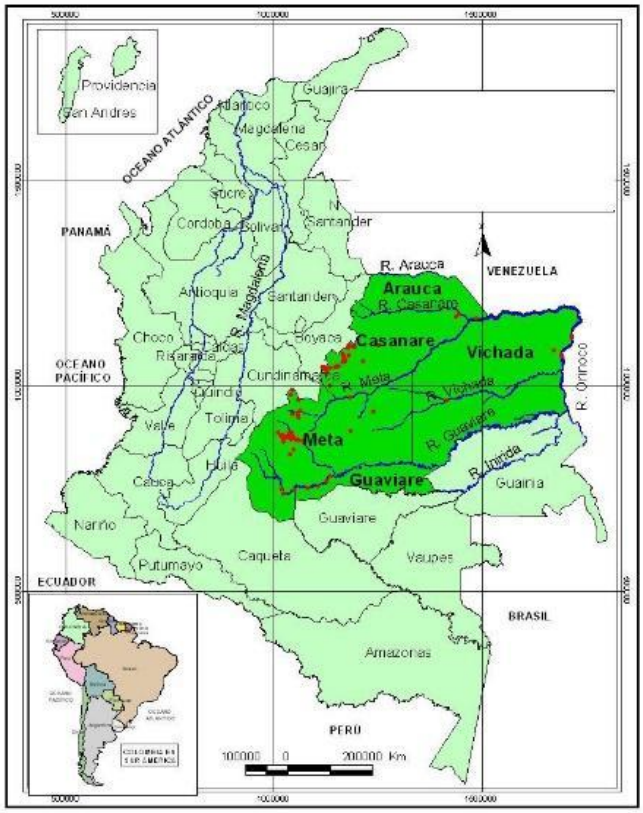
The presence of supernatural bulletproof men is linked to armed violence, and thus, to the events and processes that afford the armed groups to become agents of transformation. Then, the thesis examines how *cruzados* adduce the impact of paramilitarism. *Cruzados* pose questions about the paramilitaries as historical agents and thus moves the ethnographic locus outside the paramilitary lines, towards the communities' active elaboration on the presence of supernatural bulletproof men. Ultimately, the research circles back to sorcery, enquiring for its relationship to violence and historical transformations. The thesis asks for the ways in which sorcery articulates paramilitarism

beyond its economic rationale, as the presence of transcendental forces producing a profound yet ineffable social and cultural transformation.

Methods

As a Colombian anthropologist working with victims of the armed conflict, I had always envisioned an anthropological move toward an understanding of armed violence from the experiences of perpetrators. It was not until I heard of the supernatural bulletproof men or *cruzados,* that I became interested in *brujeria* as a way of approaching such experiences. Although, as a Colombian I was acquainted with stories about *brujeria* used by Mafiosi and politicians – mostly from fictional accounts[41] – it was from the conversations I had while I lived in the Plains prior to my fieldwork (2014-2015) that I came to recognise the salience of *brujeria* in the region and its strong association with the paramilitaries.

The Field Site



41 See: the literary work of Caicedo (2003), the documentary "Paranormal war" by Jaime Escallon (2013), and the film about "hit men" Perro Come Perro by Carlos Moreno (2008)

Map 2. The Eastern Plains Region or the *Llanos Orientales*. The region is a large, tropical grassland area comprising one-fifth Colombian territory and composed of the Meta, Casanare, Vichada and Arauca departments. Specifically, the study was conducted in the area known as San Martin de Los Llanos, located in the Meta department (Google, open source).

My prior knowledge of the region was key to choosing as a field site a town that was the stronghold of paramilitarism. San Martin hosted paramilitary groups since the early 1980s and was their centre of operations in the Plains and the jungle Guaviare Region throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Map 2). From there, the paramilitaries deployed military operatives, administrated cocaine trade routes, organised recruitment, and constructed training camps (Zabala 2009: 34; Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, Clauses 611, 810). Paramilitary leaders lived in San Martin, which was the place where the troops were sent to rest, procure supplies, and organise meetings and gatherings.

San Martin was a strategic location for the paramilitaries as it connected the country's capital Bogotá with the Guaviare rainforest, the open savannas of Meta and Vichada, and the foothills of the Eastern Andes. This location has been used for military campaigns and Christian missions since early colonial times. Founded in 1585, San Martin was the first permanent settlement in the region and housed the missionaries and Spanish settlers who set up the colonisation of the Plains (Rausch 1999: 158-161). As documented by Father Calazans Vela, the descendants of these first settlers were the founders of many other towns in the Plains (Vega and Molano 1988). This is why Sanmartineros consider themselves the "Founding fathers" of the area of the Plains that are now the Meta, Vichada, and Guaviare departments. The town remained the region's epicentre until the founding of the capital Villavicencio in 1905. This history gives Sanmartineros a strong sense of local identity. They think of themselves as the "most civilised *llaneros*", the original descendants of the first Spanish settlers – and the wealthiest. By occupying San Martin, paramilitaries not only established themselves in a strategic location but occupied a site of symbolic importance as the axis of the Plains' colonisation.

Safety concerns were paramount to planning and conducting the research in San Martin. Before entering the town, I approached the regional authorities to enquire about security conditions in the area and corroborated what my contacts there had said: approximately

five years before my research in 2017-2018, San Martin was entirely controlled by paramilitaries, who granted or denied authorisations to enter or leave the town. I was relieved to discover that there was a shared perception that paramilitarism had diminished its grip over town, which was not as dangerous as "before". As my research progressed, I came to understand better those times from "before", corresponding to paramilitary expansion, where the groups waged wars for control of the area and the troops visibly occupied the town's streets, hotels, restaurants, shops, markets, bars, brothels and the town hall.

Figure 1. Plaque in the Neighbourhood's Parish. The neighbourhood was well-known for hosting families of lower-ranking paramilitaries. The parish in my neighbourhood was built with the support of a paramilitary commandant, who provided money and labour for its construction. Until the year of my fieldwork, a commemorative plaque acknowledging the Centaurs' commandant and his wife's efforts, hangs behind a board in the humble parish. The diocese ordered the plaque to be removed, however, the priest fears doing such a thing. The plaque represents the days when paramilitarism gave people of the neighbourhood paid jobs and a church.

By the time of my fieldwork in 2017, paramilitary groups were no longer visible in everyday life. The change from visible to invisible occurred after their demobilisation in 2006 and the subsequent killings and incarcerations of the groups' leaders in 2011. Acting like shadows, as in other parts of Colombia (Campuzano 2013, Madarriaga 2006, Taussig 2005), new paramilitary groups have formed, continuing to control drug trafficking and legal and illegal economies.[42] During my 14 months in town, I noticed paramilitary control by way of curfews and the issuing of pamphlets containing threats against supposed thieves, drug consumers and enemy criminal organisations. Throughout my fieldwork, I witnessed a "ghostly" paramilitary presence (Taussig 2005: xi). This presence was different from the times "before" because there were no troops on constant patrol or killings of people

42 San Martin is distant from the oil extraction corridors (Jimenez 2012), which makes it relatively safe compared to other areas of the Plains, like Puerto Gaitan.

arriving in town without permission.[43] It was soon evident that interrogating the *cruzados' brujeria* was to enquire about the time "before", when supernatural bulletproof men were visible around town. The questions directed towards the "before" times allowed me to conduct research in safety, since I did not express interest in current criminal activity.

I wish to credit the selection of my field site entirely to my knowledge of the region, but what eventually determined my entry into the town was the fortunate circumstance of liaising with a local family through a friend. While I had a network of acquaintances in the Plains, conducting ethnographic fieldwork was only possible thanks to Celina and Mario, who welcomed me into their home and became my protectors in a town where invisible powers oversee people's comings and goings. They helped me to navigate social life, introducing me to the neighbourhood – the first working-class area in town, formerly housing paramilitary troops. Moreover, they introduced me to their extended family in town, all Sanmartineros.

The rapid progress in the consolidation of my relations in the field was partly due to my familiarity with this context as a "native" anthropologist". I am talking about the collective memories of events in politics, sports and even natural disasters, as well as the shared universe of cultural references such as TV shows, national celebrities, popular music, colloquial expressions and deictic gestures that as a Colombian I have with people in San Martin. My linguistic capital as a "native" goes beyond the mastering of the Spanish language. It facilitated communication, multiplying conversations, jokes, and discussion, helping to create a friendly atmosphere at home very quickly. However, being "native" in my case not only refer to being Colombian, but also having a working-class background and had been raised by a very religious mother, just like my host. These elements made easy the adaptation to the house amenities, the neighbourhood environment, and the pack of duties I acquired when accepting living there. I was competent on the social norms to be considered "a decent woman", which included the diligent participation in the house cleaning and cooking chores, mastering forms of sharing food, drink, dressing with modesty and moving across various social circles, skilfully handling gossip, sexists'

43 These cooperatives, or FOAD by their initials in Spanish, were created as part of the demobilisation programme across the country in 2006. They focus on creating economic initiatives, other cooperatives and business enterprises. In San Martin there are ten 'FOADs', out of the existing 18 across the entire region ('Informe sobre las formas Organizativas y asociativas de Desmobilizados', Observatorio de Procesos de Desarme, Desmobilización y Reintegración, 2009:9)

remarks, and delicate conversations. This positionality was key to consolidate my networks and more important, to establish a caring relationship with my host family, which allowed me to explore the town's social world with confidence.

In addition to my host family, I expanded my social circles insofar as people would lead me to what they regarded as "authorities" or direct "witnesses" to the supernatural. In this way, I came to know *criollos*, as people from the Plains call the proper native *llaneros,* and people in positions of authority like cultural agents, politicians, pastors and priests. This social network constitutes my ethnographic universe.

Conducting Ethnography in a "Paramilitarised" Area

Although initially I had planned to work only with demobilised paramilitaries, it became increasingly clear that in this town everyone had been entangled with paramilitarism in one way or another. This has been noticed in other "paramilitarised"[44] areas, where the social fabric, institutions and businesses are all linked to the paramilitaries: they are family members, neighbours, customers, bosses, landlords, friends and, on occasion, State representatives themselves (Taussig 2003, Madarriaga 2006, Campuzano 2013, Civico 2016). Civico (2016) calls it "intertwinement", the pervasive presence of paramilitaries in all circles of social life that makes it impossible to draw a line between them, civil society and the State.

This "intertwinement" has a deeper facet. During the twenty years of full paramilitary territorial control, San Martin's reputation in the Plains became strongly associated with paramilitaries.[45] The town's accommodation of the paramilitaries involved a "progressive assimilation of the perpetrators' cause as a communal one" - as Campuzano (2013: 141) described in her study of paramilitarism in the north of Colombia. She suggests that people in "paramilitarised" areas tend to justify and identify themselves with the groups' discursive constructions of their violence, namely counterinsurgency rhetoric or the defence of neoliberal projects. This is also noted by Madarriaga (2006): "The relationships

44 From the Spanish "paramilitarizado" is a common form to refer to territories "occupied" by paramilitaries.
45 According to many Sanmartineros, demonstrating that this was your place of birth by showing your Colombian ID card was the safe conduct for circulating in the territories dominated by paramilitary groups in the 1990s and 2000s.

that the 'civilian population' establish with the paramilitary authority are, then, complex, polysemic and ambivalent: they combine fear and submission with tolerance and approval" (*ibid*. 26). This is not to say that paramilitaries were never resisted (c.f. Theidon 2006:98). It is to put at the forefront the complexity of their "intertwinement" and "assimilation" in town, where victims and perpetrators are recycled from the same social fabric and where people greatly benefitted from the cash flow that came with the booming illegal economies.

In San Martin the population benefitted from the drug economy while enduring paramilitaries' violent rule. Businesses prospered as paramilitaries came and went, buying food, drinks, clothing and accessories at high prices. Besides, many people in town found a job as construction workers, drivers, plumbers, cleaners, gardeners or cooks and earned more than in any other job they had before and after. Migrant workers, singers, dancers and sex workers also benefitted from the surplus of money. Ambivalent attitudes towards paramilitarism are closely related to the narrative in which horrors of war are well concealed in tales of prosperity.

The ethnographic reality of a "paramilitarised" area compelled me to engage with a social field wider than the life trajectory of ex-combatants. Contrasting with the troops' occupation of the public space "before", by the time of my fieldwork, many ex-combatants had taken residence in San Martin and became taxi drivers, workers on African palms plantations, and bar and restaurant owners. They had become "intertwined" with the influx of migrant workers that came from different regions of Colombia to work with the paramilitary empire. Given the very nature of the paramilitary "intertwinement", I could not reduce *cruzados* exclusively to what ex-paramilitary combatants made of the practice. I worked with at least five ex-combatants, some engaged in reintegration programmes but also with a wide range of people that have worked or met the paramilitaries in other capacities, like drivers, cooks and construction workers.

Conducting fieldwork in the "intertwined" social fabric of San Martin entailed carefully considering my positionality as an ethnographer. Working closely with ex-combatants and people who identify with paramilitary discourses does not imply that I agree with them

but that I have to afford them the same openness that I had with other groups with whom I had worked previously, like indigenous peoples and migrant communities, for example. Following Robben (1996), ethnographic fieldwork demands an awareness of the risks of legitimising our informants' claims to morality at the expense of our critical understanding. Awareness of this "ethnographic seduction" involves not losing sight of the gross paramilitary human rights violations and peoples' responsibility in reproducing discourses legitimising them. Nevertheless, "ethnographic seduction" runs the equal risk of "aversion". As Civico (2016) describes, "aversion" weighs on the ethnographer's hearing of paramilitaries' stories, revealing them as brutal murderers (*ibid* 10-11). Ethnographic work in "paramilitarised" areas demands acute awareness of the movement between "aversion" and "seduction" to avoid dichotomous moral judgements that preclude critical engagement with the intersubjective space enabled by "participant observation".

The challenging positionality of studying in a "paramilitarised" area also demands overcoming the fiction of neutrality. As a Colombian citizen researching my native country, I have political inclinations mediating my understanding of the paramilitaries and the armed conflict. Being a "citizen researcher" (Jimeno 2009) implied an awareness of my position and "lack of objectivity". The academic production resulting from this position entails a particular effort at conceptualising paramilitarism, insofar it is an ongoing phenomenon that continues to have devastating effects across Colombia.

From planning this research to the final results, I made decisions based on safety concerns that impacted the methodology.[46] As Theidon (2001) highlights, methodological challenges in contexts where armed groups exert power go beyond normal concerns of establishing trust. In "paramilitarised" areas, every question and intervention entail potentially gathering knowledge that could be used against others (*ibid*. 20). Participating in the exchange of “dangerous” knowledge is a consequence of conducting ethnographic research in these contexts. To mitigate the potential collection of “dangerous” knowledge, I initially framed my research as an investigation of *brujeria* in general and did not enquire

46 I obtained ethical approval from the Anthropology Department and the UCL Research Ethics Approval. It fully complies with UCL's Research Ethics Framework and other ethical bodies for good research practice (Project Number: 9955/001. The form was approved on 12 December 2016). The application to the Ethical Committee detailed the ethical considerations for conducting research in an area under paramilitary control. Issues regarding confidentiality, consent, and safety are discussed in detail in the form. They pay special attention to the measures safeguarding the protection of informants' identities in the field and to store information, and the strategies to obtain consent, central to ensuring that neither my informants nor myself risk our safety or privacy.

about paramilitarism. This was a necessary explorative phase, for I did not know if it was safe to enquire about *cruzados* and thus, was ready to conduct research about other practices of *brujeria* in town.

As a result of these concerns, I developed an *indirect questioning* technique. The benefit was that I impartially weighed up how *cruzados* and paramilitaries emerged in conversation. My wealth of linguistic capital enabled natural flows of conversation that lead to a multitude of long-multifaceted stories that ultimately lead me to confirm the association of supernatural bulletproof men with the presence of paramilitaries. In addition, I acquired the reputation of a researcher working on *brujeria* and thus, my informants were protected and not linked to "dangerous" talk about paramilitarism. A downside of framing my research topic broadly in this way was that it took me a long time to build a network I trusted to discuss *cruzados* directly.

Investigating the Invisible

There are numerous challenges in working on paramilitarism in a region where armed organisations still exist as a "public secret" (Taussig 2005: 85). The challenges multiply when also working with *brujería* because, even though it is omnipresent in everyday life, it refers to a type of "human action by its very nature related to uncertainty, ambiguity, and hidden dimensions" (Geschiere 1997: 23). This research entails engagement with a double "public secret", two similar "invisible" social phenomena: *brujería* and paramilitarism. To navigate this challenge, I started by asking about *brujeria,* knowing that, as in many parts of Colombia, this is a recurrent topic of conversation. I listened to countless stories and observed attitudes that enabled me to identify the common practices of *brujeria* in the Plains. Alongside this, I paid attention to the *brujeria* associated with the armed conflict. While I did not know if discussing *cruzados* would be possible and safe, I collected information related to *brujeria* used by the paramilitaries to "obtain women" and make pacts with the devil. These forms of *brujeria* are relevant to understanding paramilitary power and will be mentioned to offer perspective on *brujeria* in general. However, this thesis focuses on *cruzados***.** The choice concerns the fact that this form of

brujeria pertains closely to the paramilitaries, while the other forms of *brujeria* have wider usages in social life.

The *indirect questioning* technique paid off in the analysis. Unlike sociological enquiries based on interviews with ex-gang members or leaders of armed groups, ethnography enables us to see beyond the discursive constructions of members of armed or criminal organisations, whereby magic power is often seen as a way of granting legitimacy to the groups (Ferrer 2014: 19). My eyes were fixed on *brujeria*, not just in the stories of people but in the realm of action. I sought out the socially recognised expertise of sorcerers and healers to collect data on rituals, the social exchanges they entail, and their relevance in social life. This knowledge enabled me to go about the *brujeria* of *cruzados* differently than if I were analysing it as a stand-alone practice. This ethnographic take unravels *cruzados'* relation to widespread practices of *brujeria* and the understandings of sociality and "otherness" they comprise. These are important dimensions to understand the presence of supernatural bulletproof men in the paramilitary.

Collecting Information

San Martin municipality is composed of the town and 27 *veredas* or "rural zones" which has 24,670 inhabitants.[47] People constantly move across town and these areas for seasonal jobs (including working with coca crops), visiting relatives, or working in *hatos* or cattle ranches. I soon learnt that to gain a sense of life in San Martin, I had also to move around the town and the rural areas. I divided my fieldwork into three settings: the domestic and neighbourhood space, the activities in the town centre, and the visits to the *hato*.

I organised five long visits to the *hato* of one of my informants and observed the life of rural *llaneros*. I conducted 71 semi-structured interviews with people in town, priests, Pentecostal pastors, cemetery workers, healers called *curanderos*, sorcerers and recognised "authorities" on all things *llanero*, called *criollos*. In addition, I collected two life stories of an experienced sorcerer and an ex-paramilitary. This was complemented by diaries, where I described experiences and observations while participating in the everyday of the settings

47 «Resultados y proyecciones (2005-2020) del censo 2005». From: National Administrative Department of Statistics, DANE.

mentioned earlier and that will be recalled in the different chapters. Importantly, the diaries contain recollections of conversations with people who refused to go on record, like most demobilised paramilitary I met. These recollections allowed me to understand the weight of *brujeria* in people's life and its salience in times of exacerbated paramilitary violence.

I also took photographs but did not integrate these with the research methods from the outset. Some of these images are used in the thesis and serve to amplify information or as illustrations of the proposed discussions. For anonymity, all the names in the thesis are changed, and no photograph shows any faces, even when informants gave me full consent to disclose their identity. Additionally, I have opted to leave the name of the town but took a step further in anonymising the people I met by erasing their family relationships and ties. In the case of the ex-paramilitaries, I fused them into two main characters. Although something could be learned from knowing the actual kinship networks, written in this way, almost nobody will be able to identify who is talking in the text. I have taken these measures because the town, like many regions of Colombia today, is experiencing a surge in paramilitary violence, and even though much information described here is harmless, nobody knows how it can be weaponised in a conflict.

Since the beginning of the fieldwork, I approached the National Centre for Historical Memory or CNMH (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica) and professionals working on demobilisation programmes with ex-paramilitaries, like those directed by the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR). Throughout fieldwork, I maintained a fluid, informal exchange with them, comparing material about *brujeria*. However, as public servants, they could not officially disclose information of this kind. I was directed to reports and public documents like the court-case materials derived from the "Peace and Justice" law created in 2005, containing testimonials of demobilised paramilitaries and some references to *brujeria*. These documents, journalistic accounts, and civil servants' impressions were key to contextualising what I was recording in San Martin.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured in six chapters, each offering a vision of the *cruzados'* kaleidoscope refraction of paramilitary power. Corresponding to my methods, the thesis starts by explaining the sorcery or *brujeria* that produces *cruzados,* and next, it documents ethnographically how the supernatural bulletproof men acquired significance for the paramilitaries and for *llaneros*.

Chapters one and two describes the ritual to make *cruzados*. Drawing on sorceress and ex-combatants accounts, chapter one analyses how the ritual creates a "hybrid" –a mystical "other" vested with "unhuman" powers. The chapter explains how the ritual implies an elaboration of paramilitaries' presence, discussing how the groups required this *brujeria* to create the supernatural bulletproof men, the "unhumans" that they needed to wage war.

Building on interviews and interactions with sorcerers, chapter two further the analysis of the ritual to make *cruzados* by examining its resemblance of "occult aggression" rituals, a form of *brujeria* used to cause misfortune. It explains that *cruzados* become "unhuman" by redirecting the "aggression" used to cause misfortune and death in others, towards themselves. The chapter discusses the implications of this resemblance, the meaning of being "unhuman", as in cursed agents of death and terror. The chapter adds to an understanding of *brujeria* by recalling the feedback loop between the ritual crafting of the *cruzados* as "unhuman" and the paramilitaries "inhumanity" as perpetrators of violence.

Chapter three locates *cruzados* within the paramilitary groups. It draws on interviews with ex-paramilitaries and contextualised them with journalistic accounts and reports describing the salience of the practice among the combatants in the lower ranks during the paramilitary expansion. The chapter examine the relationship of *cruzados* with the violent degradation of the paramilitary war. It argues that *cruzados* encompass the ritual and social engineering of the "unhuman" in the "des-humanisation" of combatants in the paramilitary world. *Cruzados brujeria* comprises the producing of bodies that served as the fuel for the paramilitary "war machine".

Chapter four focuses on the ways in which *llaneros* - people from the Plains - reference *cruzados*. It brings together historical literature on the region and the everyday life of

llaneros to describe how references to *cruzados* have been integrated into storytelling spaces formerly occupied by stories about *espantos*, humanoid spirits wandering around the Plains. The chapter proposes that *cruzados'* occupation of these spaces corresponds to paramilitaries progressive alienation of *criollos* – the native *llaneros* - and cowboys – the producers of value - in social life. This argument is informed by *llanero* attitudes towards the stories of *cruzados* and the presence of paramilitaries as the "new men" gradually producing a "new frontier" that little has to do with their *llanero* ways of life as pastoral peoples.

Chapter five turns to *cruzados*' presence during paramilitary expansion. It furthers the reflection on *cruzados* as "unhuman" terror capturing paramilitaries' "inhuman" violence developed in chapter three. The chapter relies on accounts about *cruzados* that describe their association with the violent events that enabled the paramilitaries to expand. It argues that *cruzados* comprise the production of humans as weapons-tools for the expansion of the neoliberal frontier: the "unhumans" infusing terror and the alienated humans working for the new economies opened by the means of paramilitaries violence. The chapter expands on the discussion in chapter four, exposing how *cruzados* not only capture paramilitaries' transformation of social life in San Martin but the terror that made possible a whole encompassing transformation of the Plains productive landscape.

Chapter six follows the fate of *cruzado* combatants after demobilisation. Like other anthropological accounts on *brujeria* (c.f. Meyer 1999, Geschiere 2017), this thesis ends with a look at the rise of Pentecostalism. The chapter documents the Pentecostal exorcisms that combatants went through to rid themselves of the spirits lingering after the *cruzado* ritual and the redefinition of their "unhuman" condition as "born again Christians". The Pentecostal language of the "spiritual war", through which the world is constructed as a site of redemptive struggle against demons, provided ritual closure for *cruzados* with *brujeria* and from paramilitary life. Building on literature about Pentecostalism and the "neoliberal turn", the chapter explores how the churches offered *cruzados* forms of community building and political action that "harmonise" with the neoliberal structuring and the polarised political climate following the consolidation of paramilitarism across Colombia.

The Conclusion brings together the discussions about *cruzados* embodying terror in their "unhuman" "inhumanity". The thesis ends by emphasising how the supernatural bulletproof men capture the alienation of combatants' humanity - the ritually and socially engineered ablation of their humanity – and the alienation of *llaneros* from their capacity to reproduce their ways of life. *Cruzados'* sorcery sheds lights on the viscerality of armed violence and the forms of alienation produced for and through paramilitaries "gangster capitalism".

Chapter One – Becoming *Cruzado*

As a way of introducing the ethnographic setting and some of my regular interlocutors, this chapter first looks at the ritual paramilitaries deployed to become *cruzado* or supernaturally bulletproof. I turn to the sorceress' and ex-combatants accounts to examine this ritual and how it relates to general understandings of *brujeria* or sorcery. The chapter sets the tone for the discussions to come, explaining the key aspects of *cruzados* and their relationship to the paramilitary presence in the Plains.

Victor's Ritual

Victor was one of only two ex-paramilitaries I met who openly admitted to me that he had been *cruzado*. We met in my neighbourhood, one of eighteen currently in San Martin and the first working-class area in town. As mentioned in the Introduction, this was where I spent the most time during my fieldwork, interacting with people working in grocery shops, bakeries, internet cafés and other businesses near my house. In these networks, I met Victor and most ex-paramilitaries I mention in this thesis.

Victor and I frequently sat at the doorstep of his house, as is customary in town, where people leave the doors open during the day. The "open doors" policy was a blessed ethnographic circumstance that facilitated constant interaction with my neighbours. Victor and I sat for long afternoons and talked about his life. He was in his late thirties, and, like many others, he joined the Centaurus group (AUC) seeking to secure a decent salary, which started at 380,000 pesos and progressed to 1,000,000 pesos after the first promotion (approximately 40% to 400% above the minimum monthly wage in 2000). As a young *llanero* who had never had the chance to work in cattle-ranching, Victor enlisted in the group in the 2000s, and received military training for over a month before being sent to fill a gap in the squad in the Guaviare department (See Map 2), a dangerous jungle territory dominated at that time by the FARC guerrilla. He was part of the Centaurus group for over two years, fought in many combats in disputed territories with the guerrillas, and engaged in operations to decimate their supposed civilian supporters.

After many conversations, Victor recalled that one day, the commandant took the troop to a sorcerer's house in a remote rural area. For one day, and taking turns to protect the perimeter, the troop took part in a ritual to become *cruzados*. They were administered plants and subjected to prayers uttered in a strange language by the sorcerer, an indigenous woman. She gave them a *rezo* or spell written on a piece of paper, which they had to memorise and burn, and subsequently drink the ashes dissolved in a glass of water. Victor recalls that he felt dizzy after drinking this water and some of his comrades fainted. In the end, they were given a wristlet that had previously been dipped in the blood of the dead (*Sangre de Muerto*) to be worn at all times and were instructed to call the spirit's name every time they went into combat. In this way, Victor was *cruzado*, protected and inhabited by a spirit whose name he refused to pronounce for me.

Victor's version of the ritual is similar to others collected in the field and to the testimonies in secondary sources (c.f. Zabala 2009). Other accounts mention that the sorcerer marks with a cross, a substance or a needle, one “open” point for the spirit to enter and leave the combatant’s body. This “open spot” is the only part of the body vulnerable to bullets, for the rest of it is “closed”. This is why *cruzados* are also called *cerrados* or "closed" in some parts of Colombia (c.f. Garcia 2016: 138). The ‘spot’ was like the Achilles’ heel for the *cruzados*.

Collective rituals for entire troops were popular in the Plains during the paramilitary expansion. However, individual combatants also turned to sorcerers to perform the ritual for them. Individual rituals follow the same pattern described by Victor. Yet, they have a more comprehensive "cleansing" than the collective ones. Sandra, a woman I met in the neighbourhood and who was trying to leave behind her life as a sorcerer, had performed the ritual for middle-rank paramilitary commandants. She described their "cleansing" as comprising a strict diet free of red meat, alcohol, tobacco, psychoactive substances and the proscription of sex for up to twenty-seven days before the ritual. Sorcerers attribute the ritual’s efficacy to paramilitaries’ strictly following the prescriptions of the "cleansing" and the final instructions. I will return to the different elements of this ritual throughout this chapter.

Brujeria

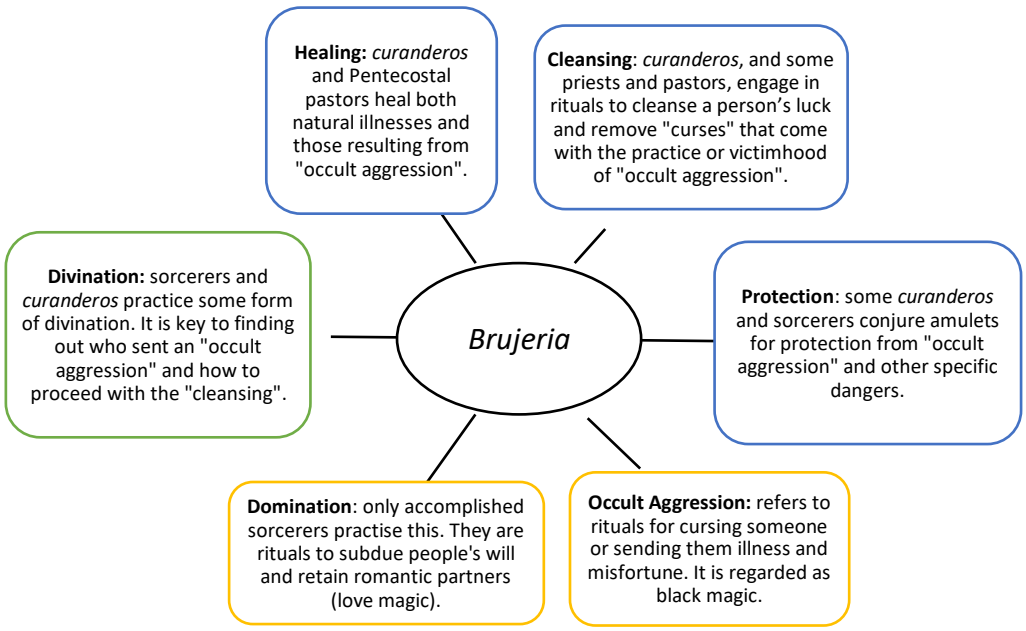
The ritual to become *cruzado* is called *brujeria,* a term translated in English as sorcery or witchcraft, often used to designate the most varied types of magical practices. [48] In order to better understand its significance – for combatants as in everyday life – it is necessary to explain some of its general characteristics.

As Victor describes, rituals to become *cruzado* are composed of two differentiated actions: the "cleansing" and the "invocation" or "conjuring" of a spirit. "Cleansings" are practised by *curanderos* or witchdoctors to cure ordinary conditions and those derived from what I call "occult aggression" – *brujeria* rituals to send curses. "Cleansing" is a ritual action aimed at purifying a person's luck, which has been polluted by curses or spirits, and which they may have inherited from their family. “Cleansings” are the practices defining witchdoctors like Don Dario, one of my regular interlocutors in town, known for curing common illnesses.

While most people are acquainted with *curanderos*' "cleansings", "invocations" involve secretive and socially sanctioned knowledge to summon spirits and harness their power. "Invocation" is the central ritual action in "occult aggression", practised by most sorcerers or witches like Doña Bella and Sandra. Such established sorcerers do not treat common illnesses through "cleansings" like Don Dario. Doña Bella treats mainly problems of luck and love through "divination" and "domination" rituals. The latter consists in solving marital problems, job-related difficulties, legal troubles, etc., by performing rituals seeking to subdue and dominate a person's will. "You are in the presence of a witch,” she stated boldly when I timidly asked if people would label her practice *brujeria*.

48 I should clarify that my approach to ritual differs from "structuralist" and "semiotic" perspectives (i.e. Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, respectively), which regard rituals as "texts" that vary according to underlying transformational principles or structure. In these perspectives, the ritual's meaning is deciphered from the interrelation of such principles, irrespective of participants' interpretations or the historicity of the practice. My take on ritual is, with some differences, closer to Kapferer’s (2010) phenomenological approach, which places the focus on participants' experience of ritual as "constitutive of that which it intends" (Kapferer 1983: 7). Particularly, it is closer to his notion of "virtuality", which describes the creative powers of ritual. Kapferer proposes "virtuality" as a perspective of ritual beyond performance, as a field of potentialities "engaging immediately with the very ontological ground of meaning (...) a method for entering within life's vital processes and adjusting its dynamics" (ibid.). His approach builds on the work of Victor Turner's examination of meaning in 'action', which emerges through the concrete articulation of symbols in practice. For Turner, ritual is a process of "becoming"; it creates meaning not by reworking cosmological and cultural categories, but by intervening on the "ontological grounds" where people and relations are created (cited in Kapferer 2010: x).

Brujeria, then, is a catch-all term comprising a variety of magical practices.[49] The practices I have mentioned so far are summarised in graph 1. Unlike divination and "protection",[50] which have wider applications in everyday life, "cleansings" are in a perpetual synergy with "domination" and "occult aggression" since the former is a way to rid oneself of the curse and misfortune caused by the latter.



Graph 1. Summary of the different practices mentioned by curanderos, sorcerers, pastors and priests when conversing about *brujeria.* The colours represent related practices. Brujeria is a complex interrelation of these practices.

The way I have described *brujeria* could lead us to think there is a clear distinction between "black" and "white" magic; however, c*uranderos* and sorcerers affirm that these divisions are not so straightforward. As Don Dario affirms, "*demons also cure (…) as they do evil, they can also do good things*". Likewise, sorcerers could do everything that *curanderos* do, and *vice versa*. This ties in with a theme that lies outside the scope of this thesis but that has been explored in relation to shamanism: the powers to heal and harm or kill are often described as complementary opposites, not antagonistic possibilities, "reflecting the

49 *Brujeria* has been studied in relation to healing practices (Suarez y Pinzon 1992, Gutierrez de Pineda 1985), folk religiosity (Losonczy 2001, Villa 1993, Pelaez 2001), and is contained in wider notions such as "medical systems" (Gutiérrez de Pineda 1985) or "therapeutic itineraries" (Bernard and Gruzinsky 1992). Practices grouped under *brujeria* come from a long trajectory of articulating Christian, African and indigenous magical knowledge and healing techniques, forms of rituality, and materiality, since colonial times. A great example of the kind of knowledge that *brujeria* refers to can be found in the work of the Colombian anthropologist Gutierrez de Pineda (1985), who reviewed the African, Hispanic, and indigenous "medical systems" that form the backbone of "traditional medicine" in Colombia. Examining "Indian [indigenous] chronicles" and colonial documents, including trials and medical and hospital records, Pineda accounts for practices like the use of bewitched dust, herbs, prayers and amulets that caused illness, misfortune or death. She shows that the forms of knowledge recognised as *brujeria* are closely linked to healing practices and shaped by the language of law and ideas, notions and concepts borrowed from European medicine.

50 Although I did not enquire about divination, it was evident that this is a valuable skill cultivated by most curanderos, sorcerers, pastors, and priests (through cards, tobacco, dreams, palmistry, visions, intuitions, etc.).

ethnographic reality that shamans are often sorcerers: two sides of the same coin" (Whitehead & Wright 2004: 10).

It is important to note that I did not directly observe the ritual to make *cruzados*. I mainly relied on verbal and pictorial descriptions of it by ex-paramilitaries and sorcerers. However, I observed *brujeria* "cleansing", "domination", and "healing" rituals with Don Dario, Doña Rosa and Doña Bella, all of them introduced to me by Sandra. Each sorcerer develops a unique practice, composed of different materials and traditions they have acquired throughout their lifelong learning. Sandra, a woman in her fifties, developed her abilities when she was a teenager, reading cards and later learning to use cabalistic symbols, managing the power of fire and mediaeval demonology. She learnt from books, other sorcerers and the internet.

Doña Rosa, sorcerer and *curandera*, explored her magical abilities after an accident that reduced her to her bed, where she started to pay attention to the "visions" she had had since she was a child. She developed clairvoyance through dreams and later learnt to prepare potions using plants and animal parts. Doña Bella, the most senior and feared of all, claims that magical knowledge runs through her veins because she has an indigenous mother. Doña Bella uses the power of tobacco, learns about rituals and spells from books, and derives her power from a spirit, Nicanor de Ochoa, who belongs to the *llanero* court of "Venezuelan spiritism".[51]

51 Venezuelan spiritism is a cult of folk saints, spirits organised in ranks called spiritual 'courts'. This practice is extensive in Colombia and the Caribbean, and a fundamental part of the repertories of *brujeria*.

Figure 2. Doña Rosa's Consultation Room. Doña Rosa lives in a house crowded with cats and dogs, chickens, parrots, and one big vulture whose behaviour determines who can be trusted. Thanks to the vulture's positive judgement about my character, I was able to interview and observe the work of the septuagenarian sorcerer.

The wandering lives and eclectic knowledge of *curanderos* and sorcerers could be the subject of a separate thesis.[52] Here, I wish to emphasise that they are a major force behind *brujeria*. As the differences among sorcerers' practice show, *brujeria* rituals are not a repetition connected to one magical tradition. They differ greatly from the recapitulative drives of religious ceremonies and lack the performative exuberance and cosmological edifices that normally occupy the centre of anthropological accounts (c.f. Obeyesekere 1981, Kapferer 1983, 2005). *Brujeria* rituals are often simple, composed of sequenced actions charged with the rich symbolism of the diverse magical practices (Guava 2009, Ospina 2015, Taussig 1980). They resemble more what is commonly called "rite": not prescribed formulas but "actions 'acting' on their own" (Durkheim, quoted in Richards 2006: 652). I will expand on this idea in the next chapter, where I explore the ritual to become *cruzado* as part of sorcerers' "repertories".[53]

52 One account of a sorcerer's life is the non-fictional work of writer and journalist Castro Caicedo (1994) in his book *Coca, Brujeria and Demonios*, where he depicts the learning curve that the sorcerer followed, and how she attained national recognition working for politicians and *mafia* bosses.

53 For clarity, I have decided to leave out of the thesis an analysis of the sorcerer's position in the paramilitary war, which would account for a whole new dissertation. Sorcerers and *curanderos*, like Doña Rosa, Doña Bella and Don Dario, provided all types of services for paramilitaries, from "cleansings" to "love magic". There were legendary sorcerers at the service of paramilitary warfare, like the one whom people called "la Abuela". "La Abuela" cast the cruzado spells on most paramilitaries in San Martin and became the right hand-woman of the group's commandants. I visited her once but was strongly advised against fostering a relationship with her. I followed the advice based on safety concerns.

Cruzados Ritual Language

Having clarified some general aspects of *brujeria,* we can revisit Victor's ritual. Like most sorcerers' and *curanderos'* practices, it is not a timeless formula but an ensemble in a "repertory" of *brujeria*. It amalgamates "cleansings" and its ideas of "luck", and "invocation", the central action of the "black magic" of "domination" and "occult aggression". "Cleansing" is a preparation of the body, accomplished by taking herbal beverages and inhaling smoke, and reciting of *rezos* or spells. The "cleansing" is a prerequisite of the "invocation", an action accompanied by spells or *rezos* uttered by the sorcerer in a strange language that impedes the ritual's recipients from distinguishing the words and thus alienating them from their meaning.

"Invocation" often entails ingesting, applying or incorporating materials or substances in the body, commonly bones, ashes, objects coated in blood, and soil from the cemetery. The "inserted" spirit inhabits the *cruzado*'s body like a substance, shielding it from bullets and affording it supernatural strength. Its presence is affirmed in the use of accessories that the sorcerer instructs *cruzados* to wear at all times when sealing the ritual. For Victor it was a wristlet. For others, the subjection to public display of ritual objects included painting their nails black and wearing a small bag with a handful of soil or bones from the cemetery tied to the chest or waist.

The ritual aims to "cross" or overlap the combatant and a spirit whose nature often remains unrevealed. Thus, the making of magical bulletproof men entails ritual actions that forge a "crossbreed" human, a "hybrid", liminal being with the potential to "become". This is the starting point for understanding the *cruzado*.

The Hybrids

The heart of the ritual to become *cruzado* is the intersection of a human with a spirit/substance. Many people, including priests and pastors, describe these spirits as demons, like "Ashtaroth", mentioned by Doña Bella hesitantly. The higher the rank of the demon, the higher the ritual fee, and thus, the more likely to be used in rituals paid for by

higher rank paramilitaries. Informed accounts from sorcerers like Doña Bella and ex-paramilitaries like Camilo alleged that, though demons were used in the rituals, many combatants became *cruzados* by intersecting their bodies with spirits of the dead: "in some cases, it is a soul in grief and the ritual is a way of purging its sorrows, so it is a spirit of light, a soul in pain and not a demonic entity" - explains Camilo, an ex-paramilitary I met in my neighbourhood. Camilo's life story is like that of many ex-paramilitaries in the lower ranks, who after obligatory national military service, ended up joining the paramilitary group that offered a decent salary for army reservists like him (c.f. examples in Cardenas 2005 and Civico 2016: 149).

The "souls in grief" mentioned by Camilo – commonly known as "the purgatory souls" – are at the heart of Catholic practices and central to folk religiosity in Colombia. Souls in grief are worship figures called the "*animas* cult" ("el culto a la *animas*") spread out across Latin America. This worship involves the ritual offering of prayers, candles and other gifts to the spirits of the nameless dead, or to specific dead people who become "popular saints" because they perform miracles[54] (Losonczy 2001). These spirits help *curanderos* like Don Dario, who travels from church to church paying for a Mass to be offered to the *animas* in exchange for their powers to heal common illnesses and "cleanse" the ills of "occult aggression". "The living [people] behind the Cross, and the Dead behind the light,"[55] outlines Doña Bella, clarifying the forms of exchange with the spirits of the dead, sinners who would do anything for a prayer or lighted candle, including providing the living with the means to sin, like equipping paramilitaries for violence.

54 There is robust literature about the cult of the animas in Colombia, addressing the relationship between violence, memory, mourning and trauma (Villa 1993, Losonczy, 2001; Peláez, 2001). Losonczy (2001), for example, focuses on the popular sanctification of male public figures, who contributed to some greater good and are often asked for jobs and money (i.e. the populist politician Rojas Pinilla), contrasting it to female saints, victims of extremely violent death, and martyrs to whom people pray for luck, family protection and health. Losonczy analyses how famous dead guerrilla fighters, drug traffickers and muggers, are transformed by people into miraculous saints, and thus acknowledged in regional and national memories.

55 In Spanish the saying rhymes: "Los vivos detras de la cruz y los Muertos detras de la luz".

Figure 3. “Niña Neusa”. The Central Cemetery in Villavicencio, the Plains’ capital, is visited by people who pray and leave presents for the popular saint called the “Neusa girl", the spirit of an indigenous girl who was sexually assaulted and killed. Losonczy (2001) documented the cults of popular saints, common in Colombian urban cemeteries.

Cruzados are then intersected either with demons or the spirits of the dead. The ritual to make *cruzados* goes one step beyond the exchange of "favours" or the logic of access directly or through the mediation of *curanderos* or sorcerers, to a symmetrical exchange with spirits, which is central to *brujeria* in Colombia (Losonczy 2001: 19-20). The *cruzado* is partly inhabited by the spirit and thus, becomes a “hybrid”. This is forged in the ritual act of consumption, inserting the spirit in the form of physical objects. In Victor’s case, this involved eating the ashes of a piece of paper with the spirit’s name. In other cases, it entails ingesting dolls, blood, or embedding medals and amulets under the skin. In Urabá, on the north coast of the country, anthropologist Carolina Lozano (2009) documents the objects called *aseguranzas*,[56] given to paramilitaries by indigenous *Zenu curanderos* or shamans to make them bulletproof.

Aseguranzas are magical beings hatched from metallic objects inserted under the skin. They are beings-objects that provide bulletproof protection and extraordinary strength to their bearers in exchange for alcohol, tobacco or blood. The most common of these are the “children-in-cross”,[57] tiny goblin-like beings that live under a bump in the skin. There are also the *animes*, beings from the indigenous *Zenu* cosmology that people incubate and

56 The translation is "assurances".
57 The expression in Spanish is “niños en cruz”, which is not “niños en la cruz” (children on the Cross) o “niños *cruzados*” (crossed children), referring to “the Cross” or to crucified children. Like the term *cruzados*, this expression has no obvious explanation.

swallow to later "nurture" inside their bellies.[58] As the case of *aseguranzas* shows, attaining bulletproof powers involves a form of *brujeria* that goes beyond the exchange of "favours" with the spirits to a type of intended "possession".

The action of receiving spiritual protection through the physical consumption of a spirit resembles a most important religious rite for Catholics: the Eucharist.[59] Communion entails invoking the holy spirit and uniting it with a human body. The ritual to make *cruzados* parallels Holy Communion's meaning, as it is a case of a spirit protecting and inhabiting a human body. Like in Communion, the spirit in *cruzado brujeria* is transubstantiated into the material to be consumed or inserted into the body to forge the *cruce*.[60] This explains why, according to priests and ex-paramilitaries, *cruzados* could not receive Communion: "it is as if they were going to take a purgative, an antidote" - explained Camilo. There was an antithetical relationship between the ritual to make *cruzados* and the Eucharist, the latter the "antidote" that subverts the ritual actions to create the former. The ritual to become *cruzado* is like an inverted form of the Eucharist, a sort of Communion with a spirit "other", a "soul in grief", a demon, or an evil substance.

The resemblance of the ritual to make *cruzados* to the Eucharist is not accidental: *brujeria* is closely connected to Catholic Christianity. As repeated in most literature on the subject (Losonczy 2001; Guava 2010; Taussig 1980, 1987; Lozano 2009; Ospina 2009; Uribe 2003; Pinzon 1988; Pineda 1989; Bohman 1981) and explained by *curanderos* like Don Dario, *brujeria* is deeply embedded in Catholic cosmogony, where the cosmos is divided into hell, heaven and purgatory, and *animas*, folk saints and demons actively intervene in human affairs.[61] *Brujeria* encompasses Catholic narrative and temporality, making Holy Week – particularly the days associated with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection – the most auspicious days for performing rituals. Additionally, such rituals contain the symbolism

58 *Cruzados* also refers to the incantation of bullets using cross-shaped inscriptions for killing people with *aseguranzas* (Uribe 2003; Lozano 2009)

59 Holy Communion is of the utmost importance for the *llaneros,* who, according to priests, are regarded as "sacramenteros" - people whose religiosity consists of obtaining the sacraments for spiritual protection instead of cultivating piety. This may be one of the factors why the ritual to become cruzado became popular in the Plains.

60 Most Catholics recognise the presence of Christ in Communion, in the same way that people recognise the presence of demons and spirits in their names and amulets. Even if a matter of debate among Christians, the concept of transubstantiation and sacramental union - the idea that literally (initially) or spiritually (later), bread and wine are wholly changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ - is the key principle of the Eucharist.

61 Don Dario, for example, often claims that his powers are a "gift" from the Virgin Mary and the "favours" of the souls in purgatory. In every conversation, he strongly emphasised biblical narratives in his life experience, like the visions of Abraham, Moses and Isaiah, prophets who handed him a sacred stick for expelling evil spirits and punishing witches.

and the materiality of Catholic liturgies, such as holy water, salt, incense, and altar candles. In this sense, *brujeria* can be understood as what Losonczy (2013: 18) refers to as a "creole ritual language" of Catholic inspiration, or a "popular cosmology" enacting the Catholic myths of creation, salvation and the fall (Taussig 1980: 104-108).[62]

Like many Colombians, combatants have been socialised in their families in an understanding of *brujeria* as "an alternative religious practice to the official Catholic cult, which ended up subtly inserting itself in the form of native Catholicism" (Lozano 2001: 79). In conversation, I found out that, long before their participation in the rituals to obtain bulletproof powers, paramilitaries had experiences related to *brujeria* in their family history. Thus, the ritual to become *cruzado* is charged with the previous knowledge that combatants, and people in general, have about the *brujeria* language of "cleansing" and "invocations", and forms of religiosity like the "*animas* cult". The ritual does not produce a new a religious subject, but creates a "hybrid" or liminal being whose social significance relates to their capacity to embody an "otherness" procuring "otherworldly" powers.

The *Mestizos*

As mentioned in the Introduction, the first thing I learnt about the word *cruzado* is that it is widely used in the Plains to denote "hybrid" plants, animals and mixed-race people. The ritual to become *cruzado*, creating a visceral bond between a spirit and the combatants, relates with this notion, especially with the concept of "hybrid" people: the *mestizos*.[63]

The *mestizo* is a figure of great import in the Plains, as across South America. Widely speaking, the *mestizo* denotes the racial and cultural mixing in the Americas since colonial times. This mixing does not refer only to the advent of the descendants of indigenous people and Spaniards. It refers to a "hybridity" manifest in the production of art and

62 For example, the spells of love-magic and their relationship with "Solomonic magic", the practices for forging kinship with Catholic saints, redefined objects of Catholic iconography used by African slaves in 17th-century, colonial Cartagena (Maya Restrepo 2003: 615-730). Solomonic magic dates to pre-colonial times and was Africanised before travelling to the new world (ibid. 617).
63 The notion of mestizaje is different in societies where 'individuals' are spoken of as ontologically one, albeit with a varied mix of cultural practices. While Amazonian ontologies suggest that within the SELF, a self/other may co-exist, it is not the same as being a mestizo.

religious forms in the Americas (Gruzinski 2000), and the forms of democracy and politics (Canclini 2005).[64]

In the Plains, the *mestizo* formerly referred to Christianised indigenous people, educated and socialised in Christianity, as well in the forms of labour of the missionaries on the *hatos* or cattle ranches (Rausch 1999: 9). This *mestizo* combined both the Christian person and the indigenous, the "savages" fought by "civilised" *llaneros* to expand their territory (Raush 1984, 1999; Bjork-James 2014: 110, 117; Gomez 1998b). Later in history, the *mestizo* included "foreigners" arriving in the region: people from agricultural traditions that came during and after the civil war called "The Violence" (see Introduction). In the Plains, *cruzados* as *mestizos* comprise a form of racial and cultural "otherness" embodied by indigenous peoples and foreigners who at different times in history, have represented a threat to the *llanero* ways of life based on extensive cattle ranching. As I discuss in chapter five, this "otherness" is particularly important for Sanmartineros, who identify themselves as the most authentic and pure *llaneros*. In this town, the word *cruzado* is used in a pejorative manner to refer to mixed-race descendants of indigenous or Afro-Colombian peoples.

Figure 4. Family tree in a house. In San Martin, people like to trace their lineages through various generations to demonstrate they are "proper" Sanmartineros and belong to a native llanero family. In their history books, as in their houses, there are reconstructions of the lineages (c.f. Chaquea 1979). I blurred the images to assure anonymity.

While we could discuss the *mestizo* as revealing certain forms of personhood, I highlight its importance as a concept "desperately complex, vague, changing, fluctuating and always on the move" (Gruzinski 2000: 60). As a "hybrid" form, the *mestizo* connotes a state of

64 There is literature about mestizaje in Latin America that I will not cover here, but that addresses the idea of mestizaje as a nation-building ideology, a homogenisation marginalising blackness and indigenousness, hiding the pervasive ethnic hierarchies and racism existing in countries like Colombia (c.f. Wade 2005).

liminality (Turner 1970) produced in the permanent mixing of two natures, not as transitory state but a continuous becoming. The *mestizo* is an embodied experience of the tension between difference and sameness (Wade 2005). As a changing form, the *mestizo* is always out of place: the *llanero* is a *mestizo*, neither completely a "savage" nor "civilised" (Arias 2017: 32); for *llaneros*, the *mestizo* is neither completely a "foreigner" nor completely *llanero*, as the *cruzado* paramilitary is a neither completely human yet not fully "other". The *mestizo* as a "hybrid" defies classification; it is an anomaly, "dirt" – in Douglas's (2005) sense – polluted and dangerous. Thus, *cruzados* as *mestizos* connote a liminal, polluted yet dangerous being in a state of altered human beinghood: "neither what they were, not yet what they will become" (Taussig 1980: 103).

Sorcerous Beings

Cruzados denote the widespread reputation of the "hybrid" beings for harnessing magical power. As mentioned above, sorcerers and *curanderos* often credit their powers to their status as *mestizos*. Doña Bella states that she is *cruzada,* meaning the descendant of an indigenous woman and a white *llanero*. The same goes for Doña Rosa and well-established *curanderos* like Don Dario. Although he is a white Sanmartinero from a traditional family, Don Dario claims to be the reincarnation of an indigenous warrior from the Spanish conquest, stressing a metaphysical indigenous lineage from which he sources his power to heal and "cleanse" evils.[65] In stressing their status as *mestizos*, *curanderos* and sorcerers establish themselves as liminal beings, inhabited by an "otherness" that makes them powerful.[66]

This link between sorcerous powers and "otherness" is explored in Taussig's *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man* (1987), where he contends that indigenous and African-

65 Every year, Don Dario performs a ritual in which he becomes possessed by the spirits of indigenous chiefs and receives offerings from indigenous peoples, both living and dead. He claims to be surrounded and protected by these spirits. Don Dario often stresses his kinship with indigenous powers as the key to his reputation as an all-powerful healer.

66 It is important to emphasise the limited influence of African religious elements in our context of study. Afro-Colombian migration to the eastern Plains is rather recent and small in number; the population has not played a role in forming social hierarchies in the area in the same way that indigenous people have. Moreover, literature on the topic points out that African descendants in Colombia did not develop well-defined religious expressions such as those observed in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti and Jamaica. The specificity of the Colombian case is often attributed to demographic factors, such as the small number of Africans brought to Colombia (when compared to Brazil, for example), among other historical reasons (Losonczy 2006).

descendant people's subordinate position within the colonial order underpins their existing association with powerful healing and dangerous magic:

> Doubtless, this 'it' we call magic, calling like calling into an abysm, existed in third-world countries before European colonisation. But equally surely, this 'it' from that point on contained as a constitutive force the power of colonial differentiation such that magic became a gathering point for 'Otherness' in a series of racial and class differentiations embedded in the distinctions made between church and magic, and science and magic (Taussig 1987: 465).

Taussig argues that magical power is not merely imputed to "savages" but "inscribed" "in racial and class differentiations" that has made these others "others", hated, but above all feared. He is not saying that sorcery is a form of ideology furthering dispossession of people or hindering an understanding of the "real" conditions of their exploitation. He is claiming that magical power entails a non-discursive knowing of "social relationality" developed within the violent 'colonial differentiation'. Magic and sorcery emerged in direct relationship with European colonialism, insofar as it was the quality of the colonised, the necessary "other", against which modern society could define itself (c.f. Meyer and Pels 2003).

I won't further enquiry the repeated association of magical power and the historical production of "others" – an argument sufficiently developed by Taussig. The sorcerers and *curanderos* I encountered stress their *mestizo* self, an attitude common among South American sorceresses and shamans who frequently identify themselves as *mestizos* and "foreigners," who live outside their communities and promise the power of "a never accessible beyond" (Taussig 2016: 47; c.f. Gow 1996, Hugh-Jones 1996, Whitehead and Vidal 2004).[67]

Cruzados-as-*mestizos* are, then, noticeable as sorcerous beings. As I will describe throughout this thesis, *cruzados* were often considered sorcerers themselves, carrying the cursed fate of all sorcerous beings. They were not typical "clients" of the sorcerers, for the risks involved in bringing about bulletproof powers were greater than for most regular

67 Gow (1996) traces shamanism's origins to the emergence of *mestizos* as a social category of people and the genesis of Amazonian cities in Western Amazonia. He explains that indigenous people often seek help from urban *mestizo* shamans, even though they trace the origins of their knowledge to indigenous forest dwellers in the area.

brujeria, even greater than the darkest practices of "occult aggression". The *cruzado* crossed a boundary that only a few people, like consummated sorcerers, dared to cross. They were not exchanging "favours" with the spirits, but inhabited by them and becoming "hybrids", thus, embodying an intense "otherness". *Cruzados* connoted an "evil understood as the physical essence of their bodies" (Taussig 1987: 9). -

The Unhumans

Discussing the case of *cruzados* she met personally, Doña Bella described the ritual as a voluntary subjection to spirit possession. She tried to discourage paramilitaries from going through with the ritual, for it comes with a curse: a horrible death and the calamity of severe spirit possession. Doña Bella offered combatants *contras*, amulets, *rezos* or spells to acquire invisibility, which were less risky. Unlike the ritual to become *cruzado*, these "protection" practices (See Graph 1) are cheap and counter danger by making the person "lucky": they do not stop bullets but make the combatants lucky enough to dodge the shots.[68] Army soldiers and paramilitaries across Colombia often resort to such magical protection (Garcia 2016: 145). However, according to Doña Bella and also priests and ex-army recruits, paramilitaries resorted to rituals to become *cruzado* more often than soldiers and guerrilla fighters (c.f. Garcia 2016, Lozano 2009). It seems that the protection of *rezos* or *contras* was not enough for paramilitaries.[69] They needed something else. A specific type of sorcery ought to protect them from bullets, not from other arms, like knives and *machetes*.

The assurance that paramilitaries needed was not easy to provide. Like Doña Bella, Doña Rosa – who counts criminals among her clients – declined to perform the ritual to make *cruzados*, "because if I say yes, and He [the Lord] denies the help, I am going to be in debt". While Doña Rosa was not concerned with the curse of this "black magic", she was apprehensive of the ritual, viewing it as a dangerous task that could see her killed if it did not work. The ritual required demonstrating the power of *brujeria* in the context of war

68 According to *llaneros*, the most used *rezo* is the "the Just Judge", which grants invisibility. Soldiers and combatants acquire it from *rezanderas* as the cheapest and most risk-free form of protection on the battlefield. "The Just Judge" features in "The Vortex", when used by the *rezandero* Mauco to become invisible by transforming himself into smoke. The "Just Judge" works as a "contra" or amulet, a type of protection that is closely related to ideas of "luck". The "contra" works should someone attempt *brujeria* against someone else, their home or business.
69 This does not mean that amulets were discarded – on the contrary, they were widely used. All sorcerers and curanderos practice some form of protection magic, conjuring amulets or "contra". However, this protection is different from the bulletproof power of *cruzados*.

and making promises to heavily armed men. Furthermore, performing the ritual implied for the sorcerers to become bearers of secret. The troops' predicaments on the battlefield or missions could be blamed on the sorcerers: they could be accused of either lying about their magical powers or sharing the location of the *cruzados'* "open spot" with the enemy. These were serious accusations. In San Martin alone, I heard about two sorcerers who were beheaded, accused of being snitches.[70] Sorcerers possessed vital information, not only about the "open spot" but also about commandants' movements and drug trafficking routes.[71] For these reasons, some sorcerers were often targeted and killed (Garcia 2016: 139; Zabala 2009: 59). The ritual to become *cruzado* was a particularly risky business. To understand it better, it is necessary to look at the relation of the language of *brujeria* with the actions of the paramilitaries.

Contrasting with "protection" practices like *rezos* and *contras*, "domination" and "occult aggression" (see Graph 1) – the practices that define a sorcerer – involve an assurance or guarantee that the magical power will work. "*Trabajo garantizado*" or "guaranteed work" is an expression used by sorcerers repeatedly when promising to make an ex-partner love you again or to rid you of an unwanted person by placing a curse on them. Sorcerers' "guaranteed jobs" entail charging fees and are regarded as "black magic". In this matter, the high fees and assurances of *cruzado* rituals requested by the sorcerers surpass those of most other *brujeria* practices I heard about. Depending on the sorcerer's reputation, the fees for the ritual oscillated between five and twenty times the value of the minimum monthly wage in Colombia at that time, which was often half the salary of the lowest rank.[72] According to Sandra, Victor and Camilo, commandants assumed the cost of collective rituals. They made deals with sorcerers to offer better rates for members of their squad who wanted to access the ritual individually. Discounted rates fluctuated between 400,000 – 700,000 pesos, approximately the same as, or double, the minimum wage for combatants.[73]

70 c.f. the case is described in the Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, Clauses 615 and 643.
71 Stories about sorcerers who collaborated with the enemy are very popular. See, for example, the many cases in which sorcerers were infiltrated by army intelligence in the documentary Paranormal War (Guerra Paranormal), directed by filmmaker Jaime Escallon and aired by the History Channel in February 2013.
72 The ritual cost was between two and ten million pesos (the average minimum wage between 2000 and 2005), approximately £497 to £2,486 at today's exchange rate.
73 Approximately £100 to £180 at the exchange rate for May 2021.

Sorcerers in the Plains not only charged extraordinary fees but also shot *cruzados* once the ritual ended. As described by Doña Rosa, a paramilitary she met told her:

> He told me, "I was in the 'Abuela' house [a famous sorcerer in San Martin] accompanying them [other paramilitaries] to become *cruzados*, and I asked him, "And you? You didn't get *cruzado*?" And he was all like, "Ehhh, noo, not me, I just got a *rezo* (spell). I didn't want it because of the "acid test"[74] they go through". "What "acid test"?" I asked him, and he said that she [the abuela] shoots people after the ritual, so he said. "I saw that and got too scared and so I didn't dare". It turned out that the 'Abuela' had a special room in the house, she undressed them, lit many candles, and smoked many tobaccos, passing the smoke all around their bodies, like exorcising them. Then she was, like, doing invocations, but nobody ever understood what she was saying, she was talking like she spoke in another language, like an indigenous one, I don't know. She went on for like one hour with each of them, doing *rezos* and *rezos* and other things, and she would slap them. Later she made them get dressed and say, "Let's go to the patio", and she would tell them to stand next to the tree. She would get a gun, a gun called '*changon*', she would load it, and aim at the guy and shoot, and that was the "acid test", she shot them and the bullet would not enter, would leave only a burning spot, a bruise on the arm – that's what people say, I never saw it.

In some collective rituals, commandants shoot the troops themselves to try out the new magical bulletproof shields. Paramilitaries made sure that sorcerers were not fooling them for money. After a few months in the field, it became clear that the final, conclusive gunfire was the best-known fact about the rituals to become *cruzado*. For most people, the "acid test" gunfire was irrefutable evidence to sanction the ritual as the ultimate form of "black magic".[75]

Taussig states in "Another Theory of Magic (...)" (2016), that magic is a movement between "skilled revelation of skilled concealment" (Taussig 2016:455). A skilled revelation that there is not "underneath" or "behind" magic power. I will be back to this point at different moment in the thesis. Here I wish to highlight that the "acid test" was a "skilled

74 In Spanish, "la prueba de fuego", the literal translation is the "fire test".

75 People take the high fees and spectacular assurances as proof of sorcerers' relationship with "patrons" or chief-like spirits that provide their powers, often identified as demons. These relationships are often described as "pacts" which create "debts" that sorceresses, as well as their clients, pay by way of fees and "burdens". Regarded as a form of slavery or "curse", these "debts" are the inevitable fate of those who practice *brujeria*: sorcerers and clients. The "pacts" between sorcerers and spirits entail the creation of "debt". This is correlated with the transaction between sorcerer and client: the higher the fee and the greater the assurance, the higher the "debt" between the spirits aiding the sorcerers. The "pact" stands in opposition to the notion of "gift" as a "free" power provided by God, translated by curanderos offering "free" help to their clients who pay with donations. In between the notion of "pact" and "gift" is the notion of "favour", an ambiguous form of transaction deployed by *curandero*s and sorcerers.

concealment" indeed. The "acid test" guaranteed *cruzado* power to people and paramilitaries who did not witness the ritual, while reaffirming the power of sorcerers and paramilitaries themselves. Paramilitary commandants became guarantors of the ritual's efficacy to create supernatural bulletproof men while exploiting these men to increase their power.

The high fees for the "acid test" guaranteeing bulletproof power imbued the ritual with high stakes. For the sorcerers and *cruzados*, the ritual was a matter of life and death. The former, when not killed, became powerful paramilitary allies. Sorcerers like Sandra, and the most famous one called La Abuela, are associated with the expansion of paramilitarism during the 2000s, a time when these women accessed great resources, attained status as powerful sorcerers and yielded power over the commandants' decisions. *Cruzados,* on the other hand, were ritual- and death survivors. They made of their bodies a deposit of paramilitary power. The "hybrids" had become powerful sorcerous beings, invulnerable to bullets, gunfire, and resistant to war. In other words, the *cruzados* were "hybrid" beings inhabited by an intense "otherness": supernatural or "unhuman".

The paramilitaries' presence sparked the demands for the ritual and determined its outcome. With the conclusive gunfire, they became the source and culmination of *cruzados'* supernatural power. Like most power, this is "something which exists only if other people think it does", as David Graeber suggests (2015:4).

The Craft of *Brujería*

As a practice of *brujeria*, the ritual to produce *cruzados* is not a passive repetition or an enactment of a "system of beliefs". As Taussig notes, rituals "actively create reality and their persuasive power lies precisely in the special type of knowledge that comes from creating" (1980: 102). Sorcerers know this very well. They insightfully read people, their desires and fears, and their wider social contexts, producing rituals that contain social forms without representing them. *Cruzado's* ritual craft does not rest on the ancient knowledge of one magical tradition as much as on the prolific, generative practice of sorcerers who actualised their practice in and for paramilitarism.

The way I understand this “actualisation” is different from a structuralist approach. In the influential piece *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe* (1985), author David Lan described ZANLA guerrillas’ participation in the rituals of possession by ancestors as a form of tapping into the forms of authority embedded in the institution of mediumship. In Lan’s approach, the rituals granted legitimacy to the armed group, which was subsequently invested with the sacred authority and powers of the ancestors. In other words, the ritual of possession framed the guerrilla's power in terms of cosmological categories and native institutions. The emphasis on legitimacy limits the analysis of the ritual by considering a "backwards-looking" idiom assimilating the new powers of armed groups. This focus deviates from questioning the ritual’s relationship to the cosmological transformations that armed struggle itself produces.

The ritual to become *cruzado* does not offer the comfort of a similar analysis. If paramilitaries were not in the Plains, the rituals would not have been performed, and were there no war in Colombia, *cruzados*, as people know them, would probably not exist. As the social dynamics of rituals imply, they involve a creative process set in motion by paramilitary presence. The process draws on *brujeria* language that creates the *cruzado* as a “hybrid” being whose social significance is maintained in parallel with that of *mestizo*, an “other” connoting liminality and sorcerous power. Attaining bulletproof powers rests on the potentiality of the “hybrid”, beings in a state of “continual becoming”: “others”, “unhumans”, feared and powerful beings embodying a mystical, racial, and cultural “otherness”. The *cruzado* is not a finished (ritual) product but a force unleashed.

To underscore the significance of *cruzados* in the Plains does not entail recounting a "system of beliefs", a "structure of thought", or disclosing a *llanero* ontology. As this chapter suggests, the ethnographic material makes it very difficult to problematise *brujeria* as a quintessential *llanero* practice. The ritual language to become *cruzado*, which draws on very different cults, forms of folk religiosity and sorcerers’ creative knowledge, does not itself incorporate anything particularly *llanero* and, as I will explain in chapter four, *llaneros* would not claim anything to do with this ritual. Thus, the ritual to become *cruzado* shifts the focus of analysis from *llaneros’* radical alterity, redirecting it towards the social

field that makes possible the ritual in the first place: the sorcerers' acumen vis-à-vis the presence of paramilitaries in the Plains – in other words, the craft of the ritual.

Brujeria at its very core does not exist as *llaneros* 'conceive' it. As David Graeber suggests in the context of a debate with proponents of the "ontological turn", this ubiquity extends to most magic phenomena.[76] Graeber finds that *fanafody* in Madagascar (2015), a widespread term connoting healing and magic practices, has incorporated elements of foreign powers arriving on the isle: "in the seventeenth century, *fanafody* involved bits of Arabic writing. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at the height of the slave trade, charms were typically composed of two elements: rare woods, and trade beads or silver ornaments" (2015: 10). Graeber argues that *fanafody*, like most magic, "has always been a form of engagement with the wider world" (Graeber 2015:9). Like *fanafody*, *brujeria* is a dialogical construction, never completely "native" to *llaneros*, nor absolutely alien to them.

As a form of engagement with the wider world, to paraphrase Graber, *brujeria* cannot be approached by focusing on *llaneros'* "native" concepts (Graeber 2015:9). As I have indicated in this chapter and will argue throughout the thesis, *cruzado brujeria* acquires meaning in the relationships that the ritual invokes: in the presence of paramilitaries, in their very bodies and force. This perspective pursues the points of "engagement", the ways in which *cruzados* introduce paramilitaries into the core of *llanero* social fabric. This is different from approaching *brujeria* as *llaneros* conceive of it, as if, paraphrasing Graeber on Malagasy people, *llaneros* existed in a sort of conceptual bubble that defines their own reality (Graeber 2015:9). Equally, this understanding of the craft of *brujeria* does not confound the supernatural bulletproof men with a form of paramilitary "identity". The ritual elaborates *cruzados* as a form of paramilitary presence in the Plains.

76 It is important to point out that the very term *brujeria*, like witchcraft and sorcery, is borrowed from the "colonial library" (Mudimbe 1988, quoted in Geschiere 1999: 231). These terms, and the practices they point to, emerged from the interactions between colonial officials, missionaries and natives (c.f. Geschiere 2016). *Brujería* captured the moment in which a particular moral vision pervaded native understandings of supernatural forces. This Western vision was useful to colonial pursuits, spreading representations of native religions as demonic and idolatry (Meyer 1999, Taussig 1980) *Brujeria* in Latin America, like "witchcraft" and "sorcery" in Africa, belongs to the same family of "moralising terminology", to borrow Geschiere's expression (1997: 14), linking non-Catholic religious practices to an absolute Evil. Despite the moralising connotations, the word *brujeria* in Latin America and witchcraft and sorcery in African contexts are central to everyday talk about supernatural and spiritual forces.

Paramilitary Presence

Although *brujeria* has been reportedly practised among armed groups at different moments in Colombian history (Uribe 2003, Ospina 2010, Garcia 2016, Uribe 1990), *cruzados* flourished during one of the most violent decades of the Colombian armed conflict as a powerful form of "dark magic". The spectacular assurances demanded and paid for by paramilitaries challenge an understanding of *brujeria* as a "language of power" (West 2005) or "political discourse" (Geschiere 1997). The ritual craft of the "hybrid" gives us a vision of paramilitary power that resides in combatants' bodies, in the presence of bulletproof men in town and across the region. Thus, *brujeria* is actualised in the dynamics of paramilitarism, but not because it "interprets" (West 2005) national and global socio-economic processes in the "ambivalent" language (West 2005: 280) or "cynical" discourse of witchcraft (Geschiere 1997: 203). As I will argue, *cruzados* frame *de facto* paramilitary power: the presence of heavily armed men. The ritual craft of *cruzados,* their experiences (Chapters three and six), the ways that *llaneros* related to them (chapter four), are always referred back to the human bodies holding the ground in battles, advancing paramilitary domination across the Plains and driving the accumulation of wealth and political power at gunpoint.

The next chapter expands on *cruzado brujeria* and explores the relationships between *cruzado* ritual and other ritual practices. This analytical journey will allows us to grasp how *brujeria* craft the meaning of *cruzado* as “unhuman”.

Chapter Two – *Cruzados*: Becoming Unhuman

Cruzados and Black Magic

> We warn people about what they are getting into, because there is the other issue of *brujeria* or black magic, and all those things like 'I came here because my husband has a lover, so I need to do something against her and that is how people talk (…) Even armed groups used to resort to that a lot: 'I've come here for you to perform an incantation so that bullets don't go through me.

These are the words of Father Rafael, the priest from the church in my neighbourhood, with whom I developed a friendly relationship.[77] Like the other two priests I interviewed, Father Norberto and Father Fernando, I was encouraged to talk to Father Rafael as the authority on *brujeria*. For Father Rafael, as for many people in the Plains, *brujeria* refers as much to the "occult aggression" commissioned by a jealous wife against her husband's lover as to the rituals to become *cruzado* contracted by paramilitaries. Father Rafael's words echo what many people stated in conversation and what I want to emphasise in this chapter: the rituals to make *cruzados* are closely associated with "occult aggression", that is, *brujeria* used to curse somebody.

This chapter further explores *cruzados* as part of the "ritual repertories" of the "black magic" of "occult aggression" to explain in what way *cruzados* become "unhuman". "Ritual repertories" is an analytical lens that emphasises the importance of understanding *cruzados* as part of wider constructs of *brujeria* rather than a stand-alone practice, as these types of practices are usually framed (c.f. Ferrer 2014). As I described in the previous chapter, before they heard about *cruzados* or became one, people in Colombia were already familiar with "occult aggression". It could be said that *cruzados* derive significance from their association with this form of "dark magic". However, the dynamics of "occult aggression", animating conflicts related to kinship, have little to do with paramilitary warfare. Before exploring how *cruzados'* "dark magic" is transposed to paramilitary war, it

77 My relationships with the priests were not very fluid, partly because they learnt I was not Catholic and in part because they were always acutely aware of their positions as Catholic church representatives. Regardless, people continue referring me to them, arguing that they were the authorities to speak about *brujeria*.

is necessary to take a closer look at "occult aggression" rituals and the contexts in which they are practised.

Rituals of Occult Aggression

Figure 5. Photo of Doña Bella's Altar. Doña Bella has worked in San Martin for more than ten years, treating problems of luck and love, using candles, fires, tobacco, baths, the favour of Saints Cipriano, Martha, Marcos de Leon and San Michael the Archangel, and her patron Nicanor de Ochoa, who belongs to the *llanero* court of Venezuelan spiritism. (See footnote 3)

Doña Bella (introduced in chapter one) is a recognised sorcerer who received me in her chambers on the outskirts of town. She gave hours of her time to talk to me about *cruzados,* many of whom she met. During my visits, she showed me her books of spells and the different materials she used in the rituals. Enveloped in a cloud of tobacco, a substance that she offers to the spirits in return for their favours, Doña Bella explained the ritual to make *cruzados* in terms of its similarities to other rituals that she allowed me to observe.

Like Sandra, the sorcerer who put in a good word so that Doña Bella might receive me, she affirms that the rituals to make *cruzados* are similar to "occult aggression", rituals to bring about misfortune, illness and conflicts in another person's life. This is the most socially sanctioned practice of *brujeria*, referred to as "black magic" or witchcraft in

anthropological literature (see "Graph 1 in chapter one). "Occult aggression" is usually performed by skilled sorcerers like Doña Bella.

After a few months of listening to stories about *brujeria*, I realised that the most common ritual of "occult aggression" was the "burial", or *entierro* in Spanish. The sorcerers use the intended victim's objects, clothing, or a photo of them, placed in a box or cloth together with other artefacts, like dolls, pins, bones and coins, to form a bundle to be buried in a tomb in the cemetery (c.f. Guava 2009: 395). According to Doña Bella, the buried bundle disturbs the spirit of the dead, which will not find peace until they fulfil the desires of the person requesting the *entierro*, or until a c*urandero* or sorcerer practices a ritual exhumation of the objects and subjects the victim to "cleansing" rituals. The bundle for the e*ntierro* can also be "planted" like a seed, placed in a container with soil from a cemetery and hidden near or inside the intended victims' house or workplace (c.f. Taussig 1980: 106, Ospina 2015). As the word denotes, e*ntierros* are rituals conducted as burials in cemetery soil or vigils at the sorcerer's house (Guava 2009, Cordoba 2011).

The other common form of "occult aggression" is the "poison", containing soil from a cemetery or dust from human bones or blood (Bolaños 2009, Cordoba 2011, Pineda 1985). These elements are used to prepare coffee and sugarcane water, the main everyday beverages in the region. According to Jhon, one of the gravediggers in San Martin who has taken courses on safety protocols as part of his work training, those substances infest the beverages with poisonous bacteria that cause rare illnesses. From my first weeks in the field, people sent me to talk to Jhon, who, like other gravediggers, is regarded as a direct witness of *brujeria*. In his daily activities, Jhon retrieves "bundles" from tombs, wrestles with people who want to steal soil and bones, and also observes *curanderos* and sorcerers attempting to ritually exhume the "bundles" and end the suffering of victims of "occult aggression".

Jhon, like people and sorcerers in San Martin, affirms that the "poisons" not only contain the evil of lethal bacteria but, like "bundles", they contain the "invoked" spirits of the dead. The spirit is the intangible ingredient that makes *brujeria* work, the reason why "occult aggression" is also commonly called *mal postizo* or "mock evil" (Garcia 2016, Cordoba 2011,

Bolaños 2009). “Mock evil" makes us think of what Evans-Pritchard refers to as a "second spear”, which the *Zande* people use to name the evil intention beneath the material causation of a misfortune that constitutes witchcraft (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 25). However similar, “mock evil” is not a “psychic” attack, but a ritual action, a "spear" that, beyond its intention, involves performance, the manipulation of forces and substances, collapsing the distinction between material and spiritual evils. Regardless of the participation of bacteria, both “burials” and “poisons” are considered “mock evils”, the ultimate form of “black magic” performed to cause terrible suffering.

Afflictions deriving from *mal postizo*, like slow development illnesses and family conflicts, deeply impact people's behaviour and social relations. Before I examine those conflicts, I analyse the symbolism of bones, soils and cemeteries, the substances in "burials" and "poisons" also used in the ritual making of *cruzados*.

Bones, Soil and Cemeteries

Jhon and other local gravediggers told me that sorcerers send people to the cemetery to buy soil and bones and even steal them when they cannot strike a deal with the caretakers. They told me that discovering looted graves was fairly common and that they face many risks for being the unintentional custodians of the materials of "black magic". For example, on one occasion, Jhon took strict measures to prevent the stealing of bones and soil from the cemetery, mounting guard at night. Soon he became the object of sorcerers' resentment. Resorting to the clairvoyance of Father Fernando, a respected priest during the times of the paramilitary expansion, Jhon learnt that a sorcerer had placed an *entierro* to make him ill in retaliation for his strict measures. The priest conducted a ritual exhumation of the buried “bundle” in the cemetery, an action that successfully relieved Jhon’s condition. Afterwards, he followed Father Fernando’s advice regarding the implementation of spiritual defence in order to work in the cemetery. Jhon got legally married, stopped drinking and lived a dedicated Christian life to ensure God's protection from the evil that he was exposed to as a cemetery worker. Like other victims of *mal postizo*, Jhon responded to “occult aggression” with a ritual “exhumation” and “cleansings”, practices that had consequences for his behaviour and personal relationships.

Like Jhon, Orlando, a gravedigger from a nearby town, procures protection specifically devised to confront the dangers of his occupation. These dangers are related to the conflicts arising as guardians of the bones and soil used in "occult aggression" rituals and to these substances themselves. Orlando talks as if both substances and conflicts were the same. He practises regular "cleansing" rituals to rid himself of “the cold” or *yelo,* as most people call the dangerous substances from cemeteries. As he explains:

> The *yelo* contained in the dead (…). For example, pregnant women cannot enter here [the cemetery] because the *yelo* is contagious and the baby falls sick – a cemetery always has its troubles…

The *yelo* is the substance accumulated in bones, soil and metallic objects in contact with corpses. This substance is deposited in huge quantities in the cemetery, and, as Orlando points out, it can be fatal for individuals regarded as “weak”, such as pregnant women and children. The *yelo* contained in the dead is contagious and causes serious ailments in healthy adults if they are constantly exposed, like Jhon and Orlando. It is this "*yelo* of the dead" which sorcerers seek when retrieving bones and soil, and what they manipulate in "poisons" and “burials”. As anthropologist Alberto Guava in his study of *brujeria* in the Tolima region points out,[78] all rituals of “occult aggression”:

> (…) are simple rituals that put in contact the *yelo*, the victims' life and a spell in a 'bundle' or 'knot'. These three essences together are arranged in such a way that they imitate a funeral or a grave (…). In all cases, the victim begins to die, without knowing it, the death of others. In all cases, the victim is dead and does not know it. To undo these burials, you must subject yourself to violent purges and 'untie the bundle' or 'unearth the burial'. Otherwise, the *yelo* preys on the body and death is inevitable (Guava 2009: 396).[79]

As Jhon and Orlando know, the *yelo* is very dangerous. This “substance of death” is used in “poisons” and “burials” to cause calamities for their victims, who typically experience sickness, extreme weight loss, pale skin tone and tiredness, often describing their

78 I derived these reflections from the work of Colombian anthropologist Alberto Guava on the tragedy of Armero, a town that disappeared under an avalanche that killed more than 23,000 Colombians in 1985. Factually an enormous graveyard, Armero town became a place renowned for its *brujeria*, guacas or objects of value buried during the flood and - one of the main points of Guava’s argument - the town became a tragic victim of *brujeria* itself.

79 My translation from Spanish: “son rituales simples que ponen en contacto el yelo, la vida de la victima y un conjuro en un “atado” o “amarre”. Estas tres esencias juntas se disponen de tal forma que imitan un funeral o una tumba (...) en todo los casos, la victima empieza a morir, sin saberlo, una muerte ajena. en todos los casos, la victima esta muerta y no lo sabe. Para deshacer estos entierros se debe someter a unas violentas purgaciones y desatar el atado o desenterrar el entierro. De lo contrario el yelo hace presa en el cuerpo y la muerte es inevitable”.

condition as a "dryness" that resembles the decomposition of corpses: "the victim is dead and does not know it (…) it is not a definitive death, but one acting on the life of the living (…) the substance of death that lives"[80] (Guava 2009: 399). As explained in the previous chapter, the ritual to make *cruzados* involves the invocation of the dead. This is accomplished by manipulating the substance of death contained in the dead and containing death, especially, the soil of the cemetery, bones and blood from the dead (*sangre de muerto*), which refers to dead animals and, according to some accounts, dead humans.

The *yelo* causes calamities; however, it is also manipulated to fabricate amulets, objects that create "luck" for their owners. There are numerous examples across Colombia in which bones are used to entrap "luck". Some time ago in the Plains, human bones were buried at the entrance of *hatos* or ranches as amulets, protecting against evil spirits and thieves.[81] Thus, bones containing the substance of death are used in "occult aggression" to cause misfortune, and to harness luck in the elaboration of amulets. In his analysis of *brujeria*, Guava concludes that "burials", "poisons", and the conjuring of "amulets", use the substance of death to create either death or luck, and thus alter a person's fate (Guava 2009: 399). The alteration of fate is the premise of all *brujeria*[82] (Guava 2009: 402). "Fake" destiny, like "mock evil", is "fake" for it is ritually crafted, yet it is undistinguished from the "real" version. "Fake" destiny runs towards its victims, who live fighting against misfortune, a fate that they do not know if is their own.[83]

Cruzados and the Substance of Death

80 My translation from Spanish: "no una muerte definitiva, sino de la que actua en la vida de los vivos, de una muerte que no acaba de morir: es la sustancia de una muerte que vive".
81 A similar practice is mentioned in the novel *Cantaclaro*, where, instead of human bones, they buried a living cow, whose bones would protect the property from "occult aggression" and thieves.
82 There are also two sides of the coin in the exchange of favours with the dead, which, as described in the previous chapter, is at the core of *brujeria* practices. In this exchange, typically practised by *curanderos*, the living help the dead dying through offerings like prayers, and the dead help the living to live by providing them with good luck (health, jobs, protection, etc.).
83 Guava also explains the structural relation between brujeria "burials" and guacas, buried enchanted treasures. Guaca's spells, called *encantos*, refer to the magical property inherent to the riches of the treasures, which could range from pre-colonial golden objects to buried money from drug traffickers. The *guacas* and *encantos* contain a type of *yelo* that is often described as "the cold" from gold. Similarly to the *yelo* from the dead, the "cold" of gold could be deadly for humans. Looking for *guacas* is a masculine occupation, pertaining only to the bravest *curanderos*, experts in dealing with *brujeria* and witches. Don David has dedicated a significant part of his life to finding *guacas*, for which he has learnt secret spells and rites to fight against the *yelo* of gold. Folk theories about guacas bear considerable resemblance to the logic of the "burials". On the one hand, guacas and "burials" contain yelo, the danger of death and the power to grant luck. On the other hand, guacas and brujeria convey the power to change someone's fate. Should the person pursuing the *guaca* succeed, their fortune change. *Guacas* bring sudden prosperity, a type of fast wealth that brings ruin in the long run.

According to Jhon, the stealing of bones and soil from the cemetery was impossible to control when the thieves' allies carried guns and yielded political and economic power in the region:

> Here, it was very common because of the paramilitaries, for them to go and become *cruzados*. They used to steal bones from the cemetery, and, I don't know what they were doing, but they used them like amulets and allegedly, that spirit of the dead would never let them die.

As Jhon's words suggest, the time of paramilitary expansion was the heyday of the illegal retrieval of bones and soil. Other gravediggers agree that there was an increased demand for these ritual elements, needed for "poisons", "burials", and becoming *cruzado*. The increased demand made cemeteries sites of power struggles where gravediggers, priests, sorcerers and paramilitaries fought for control over the substances and spirits of the dead, material and spiritual forces that are not perceived as completely separated. Undoubtedly, these struggles are one of the reasons why people in town recall the times of heightened paramilitary violence as a time of increased *brujeria* activity. I will come back to this point later in the chapter.

As the chapter one describes, combatants become *cruzados* by subjecting themselves to the substance of death, by consuming, inserting or applying it. Although I do not analyse in-depth the theme of the body in this thesis,[84] it is necessary to highlight its centrality in the ritual to make *cruzados*. Unlike the intended victims of "occult aggression" who are absent and unaware of the "mock evils" coming their way, the intended *cruzado*, like Victor (chapter one), is present at the ritual and is directly manipulated by the sorcerer, who applies blood, waters, herbs, or soil, etc. The ritual to become supernatural bulletproof men does not direct the substance of death toward an external victim, but directly into the combatant's body.

The body is subjected to what Taussig describes as an "implosive viscerality" (Taussig 2016:459): "movements of egress and ingress, of insides into outsides and vice versa combined with a movement of sheer becoming in which being and nonbeing are

84 Not because it is unimportant, but because I could not collect the necessary material.

transformed into the beingness of transforming forms". This "implosive viscerality" entails a "bodily knowing through empathy" (Taussig 2016: 474), evident in the fact that the recipient of the ritual rarely understands the words in the sorcerer's spells, for they use an "estranged voice" when "invoking" the spirit (c.f. the description in chapter one). This empathic form of communication comes from the combatants' familiarity with *brujeria*, where there is no distinction between the spirit of the dead, as entities to be perceived as separate, and the substance of death incorporated in the body. The ritual manipulation of the body enhances the *cruzado*'s state of "becoming", the "beingness of transforming forms".

Although the accounts I collected on the ritual are limited to exploring further combatants' bodily experiences of *brujeria*, establishing their resemblance to "occult aggression" allows us to infer how the ritual intrudes on combatants' bodies. The actions that compose the ritual, as described by Victor in chapter one, induce a bodily experience, a viscerality, which has been commonly reported for healing ceremonies (c.f. Taussig 1897) and exorcisms (Kapferer 1983). The "visceral liminality" created in the body's infusion of the substance of death makes *cruzados* "hybrids", more than the mix or a *cruce* of two natures, beings in perpetual process of "becoming" what the spirit-substance of death allows. The ritual creates combatants' bulletproof powers, the ultimate expression of luck, by galvanising a form of aggression on them, creating death for themselves in the form of an inevitable curse. The combatants chased their 'fake' destiny crafted in *brujeria* in the paramilitary world. *Cruzados,* like all those who change their destiny using the substances of death, are cursed. As Guava (2009) explains, rituals of "occult aggression" create death in the victim and the sorcerers: "the victim begins to die, without knowing it" (*ibid*. 396). This was certainly true for the ex-*cruzados* I met, who had to go through exhaustive "cleansing" rituals, more often than not "exorcisms", performed by evangelical pastors to rid themselves of the curses (see chapter six).

The transformation of combatants' bodies through the substances of death made them the embodiment of terror. As depositaries of the forces of death and luck, *cruzados* inspired a terror that went beyond the physical (as perpetrators of violence), to a mystical terror (Garcia 2016: 59). Elsa Blair's (2004) work on the violent manipulation of the body in the

Colombian conflict describes how the bodies of the victims of armed groups were used to terrorise the groups' enemies, but also infused a metaphysical fear in the population, insofar as those bodies became apparitions, phantasmal bodies that lingered on, to scare and torment people in the places where violence had occurred. Like the bodies of victims of violence studied by Blair, often manipulated in rituals of cruelty (massacres, dismembering, torture), *cruzados* became a field of terror, agents and objects of terror, becoming "unhuman" – as in supernatural, and "inhuman" – as in perpetrators of terrible violence (c.f. Uribe 1990, 2018).

Before examining the implication of *cruzados'* "visceral liminality", it is necessary to understand what the "aggression" in "occult aggression" is, and how it relates to *cruzados* and the paramilitary context from which they emanate.

Cosmologies of Conflict

"Occult aggression" implies a social situation where a sorcerer has been called upon to provide the means to curse a third person, the victim of the "aggression". "Poisons" and "burials" are performed in the context of interpersonal conflicts motivating the "aggression", like quarrels among family, neighbours, business partners and spouses. In this section, I explain how the ritual to make *cruzados* relates to the manipulation of the substance of death and carries the deepest implications of "occult aggression" in social life.

Although only a few people, like Jhon and Doña Bella, for example, have seen the ritual and the objects used in "burials" and "poisons", "occult aggression" is part of everyday conversation. My fieldwork diaries are replete with stories about the conflicts related to *brujeria*. People often tell stories about "witnessing" how friends or family were victims of "occult aggression", and rarely tell of their own experiences of victimhood, for these are personal stories that emphasise the conflict behind the "aggression".[85] "Occult aggression" encompasses conflicts resulting from an ex-girlfriend's jealousy, or as in the case of Jhon, described previously, the offence taken against someone standing in the way of one's

85 Infusing wonder and fascination, "witnessing" stories focus on encountering the material objects of *brujeria*, adopting the tenor of "mystery", a narrative form aimed at shaking listener disbelief. In contrast, "victimhood" stories, far more secretive, adopt a dramatic tone to account for the long time in which personal conflicts instigating the "aggression" develop, and the "sender" is exposed.

wants. The situations resulting in “occult aggression” are, to say the least, ordinary. They resemble the dynamics of sorcery described by Evans-Pritchard among *Azande* people (1931) as a device providing the "robes of culture" for feelings of "malice, jealousy, hatred, envy and greed" (*ibid*. 34), a channel for emotional release of the potentially disruptive behaviour these feelings can instigate.

Although “occult aggression” can have conservative effects by containing social tensions, a brief examination sufficed to determine its radical effects on personal relationships and kinship (Gutiérrez 1989: 29). As I will describe, the rituals are performed during conflicts and set other conflicts in motion, for the misfortune triggered by "poisons" and "burials" manifests in illness and family clashes. Furthermore, "occult aggression" activates ritual responses, for people resort to "cleansings", exorcisms and other practices to counter the lethal effects of "aggression". Therefore, "occult aggression" is not only a manifestation of a conflict but a subversive force within it.

I use the expression "cosmologies of conflict" to refer to the cosmos emerging in "occult aggression", that is, the correspondence between the ritual manipulation of the substance of death and the social happening enacting the "death" that it produces. The "cosmology" I address here does not refer to images of witches feasting on relatives, as highlighted in accounts of sorcery in Africa, nor to a system of beliefs through which people domesticate conflicts. “Cosmologies of conflict” relates to what Taussig calls "epistemic murk" (1987: 465), not the "closed system" that "explains coincidence" producing misfortune – as Evans Pritchard would have it – but the type of social knowledge that comes from the experience of conflict and misfortune and that foregrounds sorcery.

Though, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, “occult aggression” has little to do with paramilitary warfare, I contend that the "cosmologies of conflict" can help better understand how *cruzados* relate to the sociality of paramilitary life. The following sections will unravel this statement.

The Mutuality of Being

“Occult aggression” is constitutive of conflicts, not merely a representation of them. This is clear in the ritual dynamics of "poisons" and "burials", whose premise is that the evildoer has a degree of closeness to the intended victim. The “burials” require the proximity (to seize an opportunity) to access the victim's objects, and the “poisons” assume that the intended victim shares a drink with the malefactors. The closeness or intimacy of the victims with their aggressor makes "occult aggression" possible – and also tantalising.[86]

Intimacy is profoundly shaken when suspicion of "occult aggression" arises in a family or social group. A theme addressed in *Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust*, where anthropologist Peter Geschiere (2013) tackles intimacy as an enclave of solidarity and the dangers of vulnerability, from which witchcraft emerges as a transgression to kin formations. This has been a recurrent topic in anthropology on sorcery and witchcraft, where witches are aggressors described as "the ultimate traitors" (Lan 1985: 37), for they are often kin related to their victims (c.f. West 2000: 123, Bolaños 2004, Cordoba 2011, Bohman 1981).

Witches’ capacity to harm comes from what Sahlins calls the “mutuality of being” (Sahlins 2013: ix): the sharing of food, living space, land, childcare, etc. – that capacity to participate in each other’s existence through which kinship is formed (*ibid*. 59). Although in the Plains, witches or sorcerers are the intermediaries between evildoers and victims, the "mutuality of being" is the existential premise of "occult aggression". The possibility of performing the rituals by acquiring the objects presupposes the existence of a level of closeness through spatial and social proximity where victims and evildoers are connected. In other words, the objects taken to the ritual to come into contact with the substance of death are the tokens of the "mutuality of being". The ritual, then, contains the conflict by objectivising the relationship at stake.

Afflictions derived from "occult aggression", like sickness and destitution, prompt "cleansing" rituals (c.f. Graph 1 in chapter one), "repertories" that actively intervene in the "mutuality of being". Like the example of Jhon's case described in the previous section, the

86 On many occasions, my friends advised me to reject dark beverages when conducting interviews in San Martin. I found myself in a position where I could not reject drink offerings, knowing this would signal a strong mistrust. Conscious that I could be drinking a ration of venomous bacteria, I drank many coffees, searching in my interlocutors' faces as to whether they were pleased with my gesture of confidence. As I came to experience myself, “poisons” create a toxic environment, delineating the exacerbated uncertainty through which people navigate social relationships.

experience of "mock evils" impacts people's behaviour. In Jhon's case, he stopped drinking and lived a dedicated Christian life. The impact of “occult aggression" was evident in how people always ended their stories about it by admonishing me to pay special attention to my personal belongings and distrust all my new social relationships in town. Victims of "mock evils" learn life lessons on mistrust, about the high stakes of sharing or becoming intimate with others. It is as if they come to see "behind the scenes" of the "mutuality of being". "Mock evils" involve the acquisition of social knowledge about the immanence of conflict in human relations, revealing the fragile nature of social formations such as the family, friendship groups, and the community.

Social and Physical Death

The most common conflicts associated with “occult aggression” are related to the domain of kinship.[87] That said, it is important to understand that kinship networks in San Martin are widespread, a consequence of the town's endogamy over decades. I became fully aware of the extended kinship network when I noticed people calling each other "primo" or "cousin". "Are they real cousins or is that just an expression?" I asked my host Celina when I heard a woman greeting her husband Mario as "cousin". To answer my question, we sat down to sketch a kinship map for clarification: they were cousins in two ways, that woman was simultaneously Mario's first cousin's daughter and the niece of his father's second spouse. "Cousins", then, refers to second or third cousins, who in everyday life also become neighbours, work or school friends. In this extended kinship network in San Martin, conflicts related to "occult aggressions" usually arise.

Let me give an example. When Mario heard us talking about the intricate family relationships, he asserted that the woman calling him "cousin" qualified as such only because she was his cousin's daughter. The other relationship did not count as family. However, my host explained that this was not always the case. The category of "cousin" commonly incorporates the relatives of the parents' new unions, as in her family tree.

87 Some cases concern conflicts related to work relations. Jhon, the gravedigger, for example, was a victim of "occult aggression" because of his position as a guardian of the cemetery. He was attacked by sorcerers who resented his dedication to keeping bones and soil safe from stealing. As in this case, I heard stories about people using "occult aggression" to stop co-workers from being promoted, and eliminating competition in political and even clerical arenas.

Mario was unwilling to accept the family of his late father's second union because the new wife had done *brujeria* on him. The new wife stopped Mario and his sisters from visiting their father, and it was too late when they learnt that he had died alone from a rare illness. After Mario's father died, the new wife sold all his properties and cattle, leaving him and his sisters disconcerted and without any inheritance. A ritual of "occult aggression" was presumably used to plant the illness, which, according to Celina, slowly killed Mario's father, "drying him out". This despicable act explains Mario's reluctance to recognise the new wife's children and niece as relatives. As this case illustrates, "occult aggression" is not merely an "idiom" for expressing personal conflict but the source of the conflict itself.

In the case of Mario's father, as in many cases I heard of, the ritual of "occult aggression" was intended as a killer's weapon. However, it was a very inefficient one, for it took more than a decade to claim his father's life.[88] For the new wife, like all those who change their destiny by manipulating the substance of death, the inevitable curse of *brujeria* brought about the situation of poverty she is living in today after she enjoyed her ex-husband's wealth. Thus, "occult aggression" is not a powerful killing weapon, however, it causes the downfall of family relations by undoing family heritage in the way of wealth and relatives, for both, the victim Mario and the wrongdoer, his father's second wife. Although they did not have definitive proof that the ritual took place, as in other cases where the ritual objects are found and exhumed, "occult aggression" exists as a social happening, which, just like the ritual manipulation of the substance of death, produces death. This death is physical and social, both equivalent to the loss of social ties: "not a definitive death, but the one acting on the life of the living" (Guava 2009: 399). Consequently, "occult aggression", more than being circumscribed to the domain of kinship, works to delimitate such a domain by staging the progressive obliteration or rupture of kin relations. This is relevant in a small place like San Martin, where "cousins" are brought into and expelled from the sphere of relatives, and friends and neighbours become family insofar as new unions are formed. As the example of Mario's father shows, "occult aggression" recurs in

88 In all cases of "occult aggression" I heard, including those ending with the ritual exhumation of bundles, "occult aggression" causes prolonged illnesses in the victims. The "aggression" is deduced after allopathic medicinal explanations reach a dead end, and suspicions have developed slowly alongside the illness and other signs such as family clashes, dreams and apparitions. Occult aggression" causes illness, a form of conflict in itself. This is a theme that lies beyond the scope of this thesis, but that reminds us of observations made about South American shamanism: cosmologies underlying healing systems, widely acknowledged by scholars writing on the topic, also lies beneath practices of "occult aggression" (Whitehead & Wright 2004: 14, Maya Restrepo 2003: 657-673, Pineda 1985, Pinzon 1988, Vasco 1985, Fausto 2004).

everyday conversation, not only as suspicion but as part of the family history (Uribe 2003, Pinzon and Suarez 1992, Gutiérrez 1989).

While drawing the family tree, Celina stopped on various occasions to tell me about the crises triggered in the family by the successive romantic unions. During my time in San Martin, I realised that most stories about "occult aggression" involved the advent of a new romantic partner, in which rituals were performed (or suspected to have been performed) to curse and keep at bay the new or the old partner or their offspring. This was also affirmed by the priests, sorcerers and *curanderos* I met. Don Dario – the *curandero* introduced in chapter one – described "occult aggression" not only as a form of retaliation against an old or new partner, but as a vehicle enabling the formation of new romantic relationships.[89] Thus, “occult aggression” originates not only in envy and hatred, as has been overemphasised in the literature on the topic, but in the forces of desire. This was obvious for most people, who often talk about it with trepidation, for these conflicts not only shake family life but also shape it completely. As the case of Mario shows, it determines access to inheritance, and redefines personal identity.[90]

"Occult aggression" intervenes in the “mutuality of being” and connotes both the conflict’s origin and consequences: the physical and social death that reconfigures kinship networks.

Occult Sociality

Victims of "mock evils" are offered a glimpse "behind the scenes" of the "mutuality of being". In one case I saw unravelling within a neighbouring family, the victim was healed after ritual "cleansings" performed by a priest, whose clairvoyance corroborated that it was her boyfriend, by definition potential kin, accused of placing the "mock evil". The boyfriend, a man from the capital city described as a "bad influence", was finally expelled

89 Unlike the “intentioned universe” (Viveiros de Castro 1996: 126, quoted in Langdon 2004: 308) of “repertories” closer to shamanism, where shamans plunge into the agency and desires of animals, plants and substances producing the world, “occult aggression” belongs to a “repertory” of *brujeria* that emphasises "the creative will of persons" (Taussig 1980: 112, c.f. Geschiere 1997: 22).

90 This aspect of *brujeria* is discussed in the literature on the topic in Colombia as it is strongly associated with gender identity (c.f. Pinzon 1988, Bohman 1981, Uribe 2003, Gutiérrez, 1989: 29). For example, Pinzon (1988) analyses the top ten reasons for consultation with seventy-eight curanderos in Bogota, and found that an important part of their magic was used to obtain, retain or punish a spouse or partner. Pinzon (op. cit.) finds that an important part of these witchdoctors' job involves providing amulets and spells to cure sexual impotence in men, and rituals for women to obtain, retain or punish a husband. According to Pinzon, *curanderos* intervene to reassure male identity based on ideas of sexual potency, and female identity predicated on obtaining a husband for them to exist as wives.

from the woman's life due to the "occult aggression", which, as in the case of Mario's family, worked to exterminate potential or actual kin relations effectively. In this case, "occult aggression" unveiled the conflicting desires of the woman against the wishes of her family. The year-long suffering of the "aggression" revealed to the victim the "occult" sociality" not merely as hatred, envy or ill-will, but as the price for maintaining the "mutuality of being" of her social group, her family who deemed her boyfriend unwelcome. To see "behind the scenes" does not necessarily imply to experience a realm of absolute moral evil – such as the boyfriend's wickedness – but facing the threat of loss of the social group. The experience marks a before and after in people's and families.

Most cases I heard about ratify that "occult aggression" entails experiencing a sense of loss of the social group or what I call "occult sociality". Two anthropologists have referred to this idea in their research on *brujeria* in Colombia. Studying in the Plains, Bolaños (2009) describes *brujeria* "poisons" and "burials" as a secondary gift, hidden beneath the main gift of food, drinks and hospitality, sharing practices, producing "the mutuality of being". Bolaños argues that *brujeria* is a gift concealed within the manifest gift of drink or food, which must first be discovered to be returned. A gift of "occult aggression" is "returned", not by protocolary confrontations (c.f. Evans-Pritchard 1976), but by resorting to other ritual actions like "cleansings" or exorcism. Bolaños explains that the conflicts contained in "occult aggression" unfold the social in two dimensions: one manifested in solidarity practices, forming the "mutuality of being", and another, hidden in the practices that it transgresses. Like Bolaños's idea of a "hidden" gift, Cordoba (2011) studies *brujeria* "poisons", which visually imperceptible and tasteless ingredients – bones dust and soil – emulate a concealed aspect of social life. The lethal ingredients are contained in customary food and shared in meetings, framed as gestures of affection, commitment and solidarity – manifested "gifts" in the sense that Bolaños suggests. Cordoba reiterates that "occult aggression" entails a concealed or "occult" dimension of social life, the backstage of the "mutuality of being" where conflicts unfold, and the social group exist in a latent form.

Geschiere labels "occult aggression" practices as witchcraft's "levelling force" (1997: 10), which Taussig (1980) characterises as magic aiming to protect "reproduction": rituals to bind prospective partners, push away undesirable relatives, and guard the moral unity of

the family[91] (*ibid*. 100-105*)*. However, what I want to emphasise about these practices is the "occult" sociality, where transgressions against the “mutuality of being” emerge, and beyond “protecting’ the moral unity of the family, reveal the social group is not a given “entity” but a crafted enterprise. “Occult aggression” is probably the most publicly sanctioned *brujeria* practice for this very reason. The manipulation of the substance of death multiply death as the loss of family ties; the annihilation of social bonds; the devastation of kinship networks, trust, and intimacy; and the uncertainty it all entails. “Cosmologies of conflict” discloses how sociality stands over a vacuum, just as life stands over death.

Violence, Inequality and Occult Aggression

Before I explore the implications of the “cosmologies of conflict” in *cruzados,* it is important to understand the relationship between “occult aggression” and violence. Although the conflicts taking shape in "occult aggression" are personal, they are plainly visible in the town's life. Businesses and homes are purposely adorned with altars to the Virgin Mary, crucifixes, Aloe Vera plants hanging upside down, and images of St Michael the Archangel,[92] objects that repel "occult aggression". In everyday life, people use amulets, practice preventive "cleansing" rituals and receive Holy Communion as a way of ensuring protection against attempts of "occult aggression". These practices are public reminders of "occult aggression’s" omnipresent menace.

91 “Ritual repertories" of sorcery's "levelling force" (1997: 10) are contrasted to the "accumulative force" (Geschiere 1999) or magic to protect "production" (Taussig 1980), rituals aimed at the amassing of wealth.
92 St Michael is very popular across Colombia as the protector against the devil. People often carry an image of this saint in their wallets or hang it next to the doors in their homes and businesses.

Figure 6. Stall in the market. Most food markets in Colombia have a stall like this one, selling plants, candles, tobaccos, oils, objects and books used by *curanderos* and sorcerers. *Brujeria* is as much a part of everyday life as is food.

Practices of "occult aggression" are widespread throughout Colombia, yet many of the people I met in town think that it is exceptionally prominent in San Martin. In conversation, the town's mayor, for example, affirms that cases of "occult aggression" are more flagrant in San Martin than in any other town he has visited. According to him, other mayors in the region share this opinion. He presumes that *brujeria* has taken on grand proportions because the long-lasting violence has eroded the town's social fabric. The mayor, a Sanmartinero doctor, mentions the permanent presence of armed groups, starting with the drug lords that took up residence in the area in the 1980s, like Gonzalo Gacha, and the presence of paramilitaries during the 1990s and 2000s. He attributes the erosion of San Martin's social fabric not only to the violence – as in other areas controlled by the paramilitaries (c.f. Campuzano 2013, Madarriaga 2006, Civico 2016) – but also to the influx of drug-trafficking money, flooding the town with migrant workers and contributing to the rise of economies other than cattle-ranching. According to the mayor and many Sanmartineros, the permanent presence of the groups and their money contributed to the disintegration of the extended family and the loss of the sense of community in town (see Chapters five and six).

The mayor's observation coincides with an argument repeated in the literature on witchcraft and sorcery, concerning the link between the increase of *brujeria* activity and the escalation of violence due to inequality. In South Africa, Niehaus (2012), for example, shows that the drastic transformation of natives' modes of subsistence under the imposed *Bantustan* reserves and the escalation of poverty that came with it, increased witchcraft attacks in the villages. In *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, Peter Geschiere (1997) describes

how the new inequalities introduced by the State and the market in Cameroon propelled the use of witchcraft as a "discourse" through which people explained the enrichment of the new elites and aimed to gain control amid the violence it unleashes over the populace. Geschiere argues that witchcraft bridges the gap between the impersonal processes enabling unprecedented enrichment, and the intimate realities of the domestic community. In other words, witchcraft circumscribes the forces of modernity and globalisation in kinship frameworks (c.f. Geschiere 2013). Witchcraft raises pointed questions about intimacy, family bonds and local commonalities. These inquires, in turn, shed light on the processes driving inequality and violence (Geschiere 1999: 216). Perspectives like Geschiere's, claim that it is precisely because witchcraft is graphed upon family, domestic solidarities and local histories, that it serves as an entry point for understanding the global processes behind the violence of dispossession. From this angle, witchcraft is an actualisation of global capitalism in the most local of things:

> Whatever their powers, witches cannot escape history. Neither is their flexibility infinite or random. Shifts in their cultural conception often register the impact of large-scale transformations on local worlds. Indeed, their very durability stems from a genius for making the language of intimate, interpersonal affect speak of more abstract social forces (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: 286).

Similar to arguments around "modernity and witchcraft", studies of *brujeria* in Colombia have approached "occult aggression" practices as a mechanism unfolding power relationships inscribed in the social order through gender, race, and class differentiation, in a universe of magical powers (c.f. Pinzon 1988, Bohman 1981, Uribe 2003, Pineda 1989). These studies are less concerned than "modernity and witchcraft" perspectives with *brujeria* speaking to the wider process shaping power relationships. Uribe (2003), for example, explores stories of *brujeria* in one family involved in the drug-trafficking economy in the Antioquia region during the 1980s and 1990s. According to his analysis, *brujeria* is used by members of the family as a "discursive resource" to make sense of the misfortune that occurred to them while living under the violent control of the drug cartels. Uribe asserts that *brujeria* allows people to place themselves, in their life stories, as subjects at the mercy of supernatural powers, thus, without freedom of choice and individual

responsibility. Like other works on *brujería* in Colombia, Uribe resolves that it constitutes a means through which people interpret violence and social conflict (c.f. Pinzon 1988).

Certainly, these arguments are useful for thinking of the intensity of "occult aggression" in San Martin during the time of heightened paramilitary violence in the 1990s and 2000s, evident in the increased demands for human bones and cemetery soil to perform the rituals. Explorations of this kind can prove valuable in understanding the impact of paramilitaries on the town's social fabric. "Occult aggression" offers a vantage point to understand how paramilitaries' long-standing violence eroded networks of trust. Furthermore, it is useful for understanding how the influx of paramilitary money enabled a few people to accumulate great wealth overnight, introducing new inequalities and triggering conflicts within families and the community.

However useful, the "modernity and witchcraft" argument does not account for *cruzados*. Even though the ritual pertains to the "repertories" of "occult aggression", *cruzado brujeria* cannot be reduced, as Uribe (2003) contends, to a "discursive resource" deployed in order to make sense of paramilitaries' eroding the social fabric with violence and drug-trafficking money. *Cruzados* were part of the generalised increase in *brujeria* in San Martin during the peak of the paramilitary occupation, and, as such, they were relevant to the transformations produced in the social fabric (the themes of Chapters four and five). However, *cruzados*, in their "visceral liminality", do not refer to "the language of intimate, interpersonal affect", registering "abstract social forces", to paraphrase Comaroff and Comaroff. *Cruzados* are the combatants whose bodies were deposits of the substances of death, a societal and physical death that refers us to the "occult sociality" shaped by the presence of paramilitary groups. This theme is introduced in the next section and developed fully in chapter three.

Becoming Unhuman

While the ritual to make *cruzados* is closely related to rituals of "occult aggression", the former is neither an "aggression" against a specific other nor a form of protection against "occult aggression". The ritual is not directed towards an "enemy" defined within the

dynamics of interpersonal conflicts explained in previous sections. In paramilitary warfare, enemies were defined according to political ideologies as communist guerrillas and their potential supporters. In practice, paramilitaries also targeted as enemies, individuals who represented a menace to a certain conservative moral order, like thieves, homosexuals and anyone in the way of their business, like environmentalists, human rights defenders, journalists, etc.[93] Thus, the conflict taking shape in *cruzado brujeria* does not comply with the metric of interpersonal conflicts. Nevertheless, I argue, *cruzados* juxtapose the deeper connotations of "occult aggression".

"Occult aggression" practices, underscoring the immanence of conflict, are susceptible to being transposed to armed conflict. As Garcia (2016) concludes in his work about the magic used by combatants in the Cauca region, for them "life is a struggle" (*la vida es una lucha*, in Spanish), and for that struggle, *brujeria* – or as I argue, "cosmologies of conflict" – provides elements that articulate combatants' existential experiences of adversity in military life (2016: 73).

As has been portrayed in different ethnographic accounts, warriors are often created in rituals that consists of practices that make them "non-human" (c.f. Lan 1985, Ferrer 2014, Richards 2006, Roberts 2014, Harrison 1993). Warriors have to endure all sorts of physical and psychological trials of privation, endurance, and intimidation, often including ritual ordeals and bodily transformation, which purpose is to ensure that fighters become "liminal and transgressive figures" (Ferrer 2014: 12). For example, "non-human", in the sense of "animal-like", is very common in South American shamans. Shaman's transformation into jaguars, that is, into powerful predators, is an integral part of their socialisation as hunters- warriors. The "animal-becoming" of these warriors has been important for indigenous societies to deter external menaces (Whitehead and Wright 2004, Dolmatoff 1975, Fausto 2004). Becoming "non-human" seems to be a necessary human condition for war. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the warrior tends towards "becoming-intense", "other" rather than the "self":

> The man of war has an entire becoming that implies multiplicity, celerity, ubiquity, metamorphosis and treason, the power of affect. Wolf-men, bear-men,

93 See Introduction: on paramilitaries' violence.

> wildcat-men, men of every animality, secret brotherhoods, animate the battlefields (*ibid*. 243).

Combatants became *cruzados* by galvanising "aggression", that is, alienating themselves from their humanity and thus becoming "unhuman" and fitting for war. The "aggression" is accomplished in the infusing the body with the substance of death, which brings a mystical and social death, also, in many cases, as 'I will explain in the next chapter, a physical one.

Paramilitary "Culture of Terror"

The understanding of *cruzados* that I have developed in this chapter – as a social form acquiring meaning in relation to the practices of "occult aggression" – furthers the case for a perspective on this *brujeria* beyond the idea of a "*llanero* cosmology" or a ritual initiation to forge a paramilitary identity. Understanding *cruzado brujeria* as a part of "ritual repertories", avoids the risk of perpetuating representations about the *Llanos'* "remoteness", a land inhabited by sorcerous and violent peoples,[94] so common among sensationalist representations of *cruzados*, like those found in the press. Furthermore, examining the links to wider understandings of *brujeria*, enables us to see beyond a depiction of paramilitaries as evil and exotic, rather than as actors engaged in the Colombian conflict – which is the case for long and drawn-out political violence.

Cruzados' meaningful relationship with the forces of "occult aggression" produce a disjuncture or estrangement of the ritual practice from its immediate context: the paramilitary group. The ritual cannot be reduced to an instrument deployed by paramilitaries to maintain cohesion in their organisation, nor to a representational image of paramilitarism, as a conventional structural or symbolic analysis would argue (c.f. Lan 1985, Roberts 2014). Bearing the print of "bones, soil and cemeteries", *cruzado brujeria* concerns the making of a paramilitary being, which has to be ritually created by infusing the body with the substance of death, rendering visible a spectacular version of "occult

94 American historian Jane Rausch, who wrote extensively about the Plains (1984, 1993, 1999, 2008), conducted a small survey about the ideas of the Plains in Colombians' imagination. The results confirmed that the idea of an "unknown, remote and mysterious" (Rausch 2005: 37) land remains, most strongly in regions other than Bogota. People had a positive valuation of *llanero* folklore and the oil economy, but uphold negative views about the entrenched violence in the region (ibid. 37-39).

sociality", that of war, the threat of the loss of all sense of sociality. Therefore, *cruzados* are not only crafted as a form to instil terror in the enemy. Made from a familiar language of *brujeria,* the supernatural bulletproof men fill with meaning and plausibility the suspension of "normal" sociality in times of war. *Cruzados* objectivise in their bodies, the very "culture of terror" (Taussig 1987: 30) they emanated from: that of paramilitarism.

As I will examine in the next chapter, this "occult sociality" emerges from the paramilitary life among the lower ranks, the atmosphere of combatants' alienation from one another, and their organisation. It is a sociality expressing the normally concealed realm of social tension, a life where treason, mistrust and internal executions were everyday affairs. I claim that the ritual extirpation of a part of their humanity is what made *cruzado* combatants thrive within the paramilitaries, especially when they were expanding in the Plains and fighting for control of the territory.

Chapter Three- *Cruzados* as Dehumanised Beings

> There have always been paramilitaries in Colombia's troubled history, or at least its modern history. This is not surprising given that the term itself is as elusive as what it points to, namely soldiers that are not really soldiers but more like ghosts fleeting between the visible and the invisible, between the regular army and the criminal underworld of killers and torturers that all states seem to have no trouble recruiting when their backs are up against the wall (Taussig 2005: x).

As described in the Introduction, paramilitaries, "the ghosts fleeting between the visible and the invisible", are difficult to pin down. In *Law in a Lawless Land* (2005), Taussig recounts his experience in a town haunted by the ghostly and deadly presence of the paramilitary. He describes the killings and massacres, the fears they infused, the speculations they triggered, the norms they established, their conflicts with gangs, their liaisons with the upper class, and the surreal dance of law and impunity by which their criminal activities advanced. Taussig's book, written in diary form, offers the reader a sense of the "multiple realities" (*ibid* 127) produced by the paramilitary presence and the relentless conjectures about their purpose, connections, and whereabouts. The evidence of this presence is scattered yet definite, and people assemble it piece-by-piece like building "a cosmic jigsaw puzzle" (*ibid*). This indefinability underlies the paramilitaries' assimilation into the "war machine":

> This war machine resembles an animal and a supernatural being. It partakes from myth, creates new myths, and exists in a state of continual becoming. Above all, the war machine understands atmosphere: how to suspend reality, how to create the black hole (Taussig 2005:11).

The "war machine" also features in the work of Civico (2016), who evokes the notion to emphasise the paramilitaries' elusiveness and inscrutable "intertwinement" with the state and economic elites. Like Taussig and Civico, who conducted observations at the time of the paramilitary expansion, I was baffled by the paramilitaries' indefinability. Their fragmentary and short-lived existence as groups vis-à-vis the continuous reproduction of paramilitarism as a phenomenon contrast with the highly centralised and long-standing communist guerrillas such as the demobilised FARC (see Introduction). Undoubtedly, paramilitaries resemble the shapeless, nomadic, and violent forms of sovereignty

described by Deleuze and Guattari ([1987] 2004). By using this notion, I do not confine my exploration of the "war machine" to Deleuze and Guattari's concerns with their existence in opposition and external to the state.[95] I deploy it to explore how *cruzados* become "unhuman" through their experience inside the paramilitary world and how, in turn, this world objectivises the "supernatural being".

This chapter draws on accounts of ex-paramilitaries and the testimonies documenting the presence of *cruzados* nationwide. This includes reports from the "Centre for Historical Memory" CMH,[96] press articles,[97] and the Sentence of the Justice and Peace Court passed after the demobilisation of the AUC Centauros group.[98] These accounts show the prominent presence of *cruzados* at the point in the development of paramilitarism when they best resemble the "war machine".

Bulletproof Powers

Many guerrilla fighters and famed outlaws have been credited with supernatural powers in Colombia. Garcia (2016) describes the power to vanish in the mountains attributed to guerrilla fighters in the Cauca region who could transform into trees or animals to evade their enemies. The founder of the FARC guerrilla, Manuel Marulanda, was known for his spectacular escapes attributed to his power to transform into a bush or a bunch of plantains (Garcia 2016: 132).[99] Similar powers were attributed to the leaders of *Palenques*, fortresses of runaway slaves during colonial times (Taussig 1980) and the "bandoleros" or

95 Paramilitary forces resemble what Deleuze and Guattari (1987, cited in Hansen and Stepputat 2006: 296) call "nomadic war machines", mobile and globally connected, de facto sovereignties emerging from neoliberal rationalities that make institutionalised power vulnerable. In Divine hunger (...) (2011), Neil Whitehead discusses how the notion of the "war machine", which derives from an exploration of the "nomads", or "tribes" at the margins of the State systems of Europe and that resisted State control, has been evaluated insofar as the state has itself has become nomadic.

96 The CMH's mission is to contribute to the truth about the Colombian armed conflict (non-judicial truth). The "Truth Agreements Direction" (*Dirección de Acuerdos de la Verdad,* DAV) is the area in charge of compiling, preserving and analysing the more than fifteen thousand testimonials of the ex-paramilitaries who subscribed to truth agreements with the national government under the framework of Law 1424 of 2010 as part of their reintegration process. DAV is not a judicial setting, and the testimonials are freely rendered under strict confidentiality. Although individual testimonials are not publicly disclosed, they are presented anonymously in thematic reports. For further information: http://Centauros.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/somos-cnmh/

97 Examples: "El capitulo de "*brujeria* en la Guerra de los Paras", in *El Tiempo*, September 4, 2016, https://Centauros.eltiempo.com/justicia/cortes/*brujeria*-en-la-guerra-paramilitar-38288; "El Pacto Oscuro que convirtio la *Brujeria* en un arma de Guerra" in *Pulzo*, September 5, 2016, https://Centauros.pulzo.com/nacion/paramilitarismo-*brujeria*-pacto-oscuro-que-definio-contorno-guerra-PP116162; "*Brujeria*, un arma de Guerra" in Revista Credencial, December 26, 2017 http://Centauros.revistacredencial.com/credencial/noticia/actualidad/*brujeria*-un-arma-de-guerra. All last accessed March, 2019.

98 Estructura Paramilitar y del Bloque Centauros Centauros Héroes del *Llano* Centauros del Guaviare, Tribunal Superior del Distrito Judicial de Bogota, Sala de Justicia Centauros Paz, 2016 (Paramilitary structure of Centauros and Heroes del *Llano* Centauros del Guaviare, Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court).

99 There are stories about guerrilla fighters, such as FARC guerrilla fighter "Negro Acacio", famous for his power to transmute into animals and glide from tree to tree to escape the army.

'thugs' rising in Colombian rural areas after the "The Violence" (Uribe 1990). Efrain Gonzales, one of the most famous "bandoleros" of the 1960s, earned his nickname the "seven colours" for his power to adopt different forms and escape from the police and armed forces (Páramo 2011: 59). Invisibility and shamanic transmutation seem to be the most common powers among the guerrillas and criminals.

In comparison, bulletproof powers are more commonly mentioned in relation to the paramilitaries. According to Garcia, guerrilla fighters in the Cauca seldom talk about rituals to become bulletproof. However, they talk about "remedies" to become invisible or transmute into plants or animals, a magical protection provided by indigenous shamans and associated with the power of the mountain or forest (*ibid*. 145-161). In the 20 interviews that Garcia conducted with demobilised combatants of guerrillas and paramilitary groups, the stories about the bulletproof men were related to paramilitaries.[100] This is the case of his informant Miguel, an ex-paramilitary who vividly remembers a commandant from the Calima paramilitary group:

> (…) when he was in combat, the bullets didn't hit him. You were terrified that every time we went into combat, the man was standing like that, fighting, pushing and saying, 'go, go, go'. And you were always hiding behind the rocks, behind the bush (Garcia 2016: 148)

As mentioned in chapter one (The Unhumans), although *brujeria* was a generalised practice in the armed groups, the paramilitaries often resorted to it for specific protection against bullets. The next two sections explore this reiterated association of the paramilitaries in the Plains with supernatural bulletproof powers, essential for understanding the paramilitary "war machine".

Cruzados in the Plains

The presence of supernatural bulletproof men in the Plains has been reported in local and nationwide accounts about the paramilitary. In the stories about paramilitary commandants collected in Zabala (2009), none mention *brujeria or cruzados* except for

100 See the testimonies of Miguel, Giovanny and Evelin (Garcia 2016: 127, 140-141)

"Don Mario", who dedicates nine pages to narrate the supernatural events he witnessed as the second commandant of the Centauros in the Plains. The presence of *cruzados* in the Plains has also been documented in the press coverage of the armed conflict in this region. For this chapter, I reviewed a sample of 35 press articles about *brujeria* and armed conflict. I discovered that the word *cruzado* is relatively a recent addition to the jargon of esoteric terms used in the media to describe *brujeria* practices like *rezos*, "spells" or *hechizos*, and the popularly and misused term *Santeria*.[101] Press articles in the national newspaper *El Tiempo* and weekly publication *Semana* used the term *cruzado*, mostly in relation with the paramilitaries from the Plains and the Urabá regions operating during the 2000s.[102]

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debes saber

El capítulo de la brujería en la guerra de los 'paras'

Fallo de Justicia y Paz reconstruye prácticas esotéricas que fueron comunes en el conflicto, **así como persecución a personas señaladas de brujas.**

Justicia

Entre el 2002 y el 2004, en lo más duro de la guerra entre los paramilitares por el control de los Llanos Orientales, el jefe del Bloque Centauros, Miguel Arroyave, decidió mandar a centenares de sus hombres a la casa de una bruja en una vereda de Puerto López, Meta.

En medio de esa sangría entre 'paras', que dejó según las autoridades más de 3.000 muertos, a Arroyave le dijeron que sus enemigos, los 'Buitragueños', estaban 'cruzados'. El término, desconocido para la mayoría, es común en el mundo del hampa y se refiere a rituales oscuros para, supuestamente, proteger de la muerte y las heridas a quienes los practican.

Los paramilitares aferraban prácticas ritos y hasta visitar brujas para salvar sus vidas. AFP

dos. La borrachera del día del operativo (era Navidad) explica el abaqueamiento y el fin de su mito criminal.

Pero no solo los 'paras' manejaban este tipo de creencias. Entre la guerrilla es famosa la historia de Tomás Medina Caracas, el primer gran capo de las Farc. Su alias, Negro Acacio, apareció en las primeras órdenes de extradición contra ese grupo subversivo. 'Acacio', según sus compañeros y algunos militares que lo combatieron, también estaba 'cruzado'. Incluso lo llamaban el 'Siete vidas'.

Su historia de intangibilidad acabó en el 2007, cuando un avión Supertucano de la Fuerza Aérea dejó caer sobre su campamento varias bombas, cada una con 250 kilos de explosivos.

> No se puede igualar a la brujería con graves conductas violatorias de los derechos humanos **que sí han sido una verdadera arma de guerra.**
>
> EDUARDO CASTELLANOS
> MAGISTRADO SALA DE JUSTICIA Y PAZ

Persecución

La disposición a usar los 'servicios' de los brujos y santeros no impidió que los 'paras' persiguieran cruelmente a personas que se dedicaban a esas prácticas o sobre las que apenas existían dudas de ello.

so o varias que se dedicaban a la homeopatía.

Los desmovilizados contaron que era usual amarrar por varias horas al sol a las pitonisas, o hacerlas caminar largas jornadas como castigo por 'rezar' a la gente. También se comprobó que en la vereda El Barcino del municipio de Campamento, Antioquia, una mujer y sus dos hijas fueron amenazadas de muerte en frente de todo el caserío, si se atrevían "a efectuar algún maleficio" contra los jefes del grupo paramilitar local.

José Gregorio Mangones, uno de los jefes paramilitares más temidos en la Costa y conocido como 'Carlos Tijeras', confesó ante la Fiscalía que, el 4 de junio del 2003, ordenó asesinar a una mujer conocida como 'Linda Parapeto' porque supuestamente estaba relacionada con una secta satánica. Y Norbey Ortiz, del Bloque 'Tolima, aseguró que en uno de sus crímenes en el sur del departamento, sus hombres se encontraron con que la víctima no

Figure 7. National Newspaper "El Tiempo". Choice of the image from their archive to match their article "The Brujeria Episode in Paramilitary War."103 The press has documented sorcery used in the armed conflict more often than academic works (Garcia 2016: x). However, press articles often consider sorcery an exotic practice and eccentricity of Colombian superstition and violent peoples. As the photo suggests, the press presents sorcery as a recurrent yet extraordinary affair, while war is portrayed as occupying the ordinary's place.

The documents reviewed and the accounts I collected in the field show that *cruzados*' presence is connected with the paramilitaries' most violent actions in the Plains. One of the emblematic cases is the two years-long war between the paramilitary groups Centauros, a branch of the AUC (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia), and the ACC

101 A review of press articles from 1999 to the present shows how Colombian media have fashioned stories about the magical warfare used by guerrillas and paramilitaries. For this chapter, I reviewed a sample of 35 articles about "*brujeria*" and armed conflict, covering stories about drug traffickers, paramilitaries and guerrilla fighters resorting to witches for all sorts of supernatural help, like rituals to evade enemies, amulets for protection, and timely divination to organise the groups' movements and operations.

102 See: "Superstition criminal" in Revista Semana, Edition 1845, 10-17 Sept. 2017. The brief article summarises the different practices used by drug traffickers and criminal gangs and describes the "*Cruzados*" as a paramilitary practice in the Plains.

103 Source: "El Capitulo de Brujería en la Guerra de Los Paras" In: *El Tiempo*, September 4, 2016. https://Centauros.eltiempo.com/justicia/cortes/*brujeria*-en-la-guerra-paramilitar-38288 (Last accessed May 2020)

(Peasant Self-Defence Forces of Casanare), popularly known as Buitragos or Buitragueños, denomination taken from the last name of its founder Hector Buitrago. [104]

The Centauros entered into open war when the Buitragos refused to merge into one group (Desmobilización Centauros Reintegración, ODDR, Informe region Orinoquia 2013: 80). War struck when the Centauros were sold by the AUC leaders to a well-known drug trafficker as a "franchise" to enhance his business in the Plains. This deal added to the growing discontent within the Centauros and Buitrago's troops caused by allocating almost all their resources to protecting the drug trafficking business instead of fighting against guerrillas. The war between Centauros and Buitragos in the Plains epitomises a definitive moment in the history of paramilitarism. Across the country, internal wars proliferated among the paramilitaries when the AUC's efforts to work as a nationwide, centralised organisation, crashed against the conflicts caused by the factions who were in favour of keeping drug traffickers as distant "associates" versus other factions that welcomed them into the highest ranks of the organisation.[105] According to the various accounts, *cruzados'* presence was salient at this very moment during the clashes among the paramilitary groups, specifically when paramilitaries shattered the counterinsurgency discourse in pursuit of control over drug trafficking.

The war for paramilitary control of the Plains lasted two years and caused more than 3,000 casualties among the Centauros, Buitragos and the civilian population. The war left an unknown number of people disappeared, and an uncalculated figure of land grabbed (Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, Clauses 287-330). "I have never seen so many corpses together" (Zabala 2009: 54), wrote "Don Mario" after the battle in a town called "The Cooperative", a rural area of the Meta department (see Map 2). This was where the Centauros finished off the Buitragos in the operation "Final Point" with the help of the Colombian armed forces. The battle was brutal, and according to various sources, it was fought by *cruzados* on both sides.[106]

104 In this and all other chapters, I will use the colloquial *Buitragos* to refer to this group.
105 Another famous internal war was between the AUC and "The Bloque Metro". This is portrayed in Aldo Civico's book "No divulgar hasta que los implicados estén Muertos. Las guerras de "Doblecero" (2009). Intermedio Editores Ltda. 278 pp.
106 See, for example, the testimony of "Don Mario" in a diary of the AUC paramilitary commander. Zabala (2009) "Don Mario" in Paracos. Editorial Debate. Colombia. See also the testimonies compiled for the Court Sentence prosecuting against the leaders of the Centauros groups: Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, op. cit., Clauses 616-617.

According to “Don Mario”, commandant of the Centauros, his intelligence unit found out that the Buitragos were well-prepared to resist the attack and had a powerful sorcerer on their side. To face this, Centauros' commandant Belisario suggested calling a well-known sorcerer from San Martin before entering "The Cooperative". "We called that ‘becoming *cruzado*', so that bullets would not enter the body. We thought it was comical, but we knew of cases where that had worked out well and thus summoned the sorcerer"- remembers "Don Mario" (Zabala 2009: 52).[107] On the eve of "The Cooperative" battle, more than 1,000 combatants of the Centauros were subjected to the ritual to become *cruzado* (Zabala 2009:49). Multiple versions state that the rituals were conducted in the way described by Victor in chapter one,[108] with the difference that the object given at the end to the troops was not a wristlet but a handful of soil from the cemetery in a black plastic bag which should be kept in their pockets at all times (Zabala 2009: 52). Camilo, ex-paramilitary fighting for Buitragos, told me that rituals to become bulletproof were also cast over the troops barricaded in "The Cooperative".

Figure 8. Camilo’s drawing. Camilo always wanted to be an artist. However, life took him down the path of war. He likes to paint his experiences in the paramilitary and talk about the darkness of war and *brujeria* that he witnessed in the groups.

The *cruzados’* presence was strong during the war among paramilitary groups, which were more vicious and disheartening than others because they were conflicts between "teammates" united against the enemy guerrillas. In the words of an ex-paramilitary from the Centauros documented in the Court Sentence delivered after their demobilisation:

107 My translation from Spanish: "Belisario" nos expuso una idea que tenia con la que segun el podiamos entrar a la Cooperativa sin correr el menor riesgo. El plan era el siguiente: segun el, en San Martin, habia una bruja buena, muy acertada, debiamos mandar a traer para que rezara a los hombres que irian a combatir. nosotros lo llamabamos a eso cruzarlos para que el plomo no les entrara en el cuerpo. Nos parecio gracioso, pero sabiamos de casos donde eso habia servido bastante Centauros se organizo la traida de la señora bruja de San Martin”. Zabala, Alfredo (2009). “Don Mario” in: Paracos. Editorial: Debate. Colombia.

108 In the testimonies of the Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, 2016, Clauses 614-615; journalistic accounts and oral testimonies collected during fieldwork.

> For us, it was very difficult, because, in addition to ideas, we shared a good deal of time with them (…) we knew each other, it was a very friendly environment because everyone knew where the families of each member of both groups lived (…) that order took us by surprise because it was not going to be easy, with their having the same advantage over us (Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, Clause 45).

Victor, who was working for the Centauros, affirmed the same about the deadly conflict against the Buitragos: "one should not play with men's morals". Echoing Victor's words, Camilo explains that the conflicts among paramilitary groups were utterly demoralising:

> What was said among the troops was that fighting against other 'paracos' [paramilitaries] was not legit, that fighting the guerrilla was moral, but fighting the paramilitaries was just wrong.

The conflict scarred the combatants, not only because they were like "teammates" but because they had collaborated previously on joint operations and knew each other well, each possessing potential strategic information.[109] "Don Mario's" account of the events leading to open war emphasises most of the Centauros' middle-rank reluctance to engage in the war against the Buitragos. "Piraban", one of Centauros senior commandants in the Plains, warned that this would be the toughest war they had ever fought. Even Carlos Castaño, the highest commandant of the AUC (the overarching structure containing the Centauros), exhausted all diplomatic means to avoid it (Zabala 2009: 44-48). Once the war was inevitable, "Don Mario" lied to the Centauros' political and civilian allies about the origins of the conflict. He attributed it to the Buitragos' greed and loss of ideology, conscious that it was caused by the voracity of his commandant, Miguel Arroyave, who was determined to control the Plains' drug trafficking. "Don Mario" admits that the lies were necessary to justify the war among the people who had been both military and business associates and considered "almost family" (Zabala 2009: 52). The reports of *cruzados'* presence in the Plains during this time were signs of the degradation of the paramilitary when they trashed in a "fratricidal" war the alliances that they had managed to consolidate.

109 The ACC or Buitragos collaborated with the "Self-defence" groups of San Martin engulfed in Centauros. They jointly planned and executed the famous massacre in Mapiripan to reduce guerrillas' support in the area (Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, 2016, Clauses 328-355).

Cruzados and the Paramilitary Expansion

Cruzados are then associated with the Plains but also with the time of the paramilitaries' expansion nationwide. For example, in the section describing the war between the Centauros and Buitragos, the Sentence of the Justice and Peace Court of the demobilisation of the AUC states:

> The Courtroom proposed to find out if *brujeria* was considered a weapon of war in the Eastern Plains, insofar as the rites that some men of these [paramilitary] structures practised before combat were made public in the trial[110]

Officially, members of the group declared that "the Centauros bloc never used *brujeria* as a weapon of war, and it was never a policy of the bloc".[111] However, demobilised paramilitaries talked about *cruzados* in the media and institutions like the CMH.[112] In their report on one of the most powerful groups in the Plains, the ACMV ("Self-Defence Forces of Meta and Vichada, also called *Carranceros*), there is a section entitled "religiosity and spirituality" which states that "33 per cent of the interviews compiled under the Truth Agreements [Acuerdos de la Verdad] contain information about the ritual and magic religious practices, known colloquially as *brujeria*. It is known as *cruce* or becoming *cruzado*". The CMH report reiterates that *cruzados*' presence was prominent when clashes between the Centauros and Buitragos exploded in the Plains.[113]

The presence of *cruzados* during this time is also documented in the fortuitous photographic evidence of Pablo Licona, a Colombian artist who accompanied a demobilisation commission in the Plains in 2004. He unintentionally took dozens of images of *cruzados* and their black nail polish applied under the instructions of sorcerers

110 Ibid. Clause 618.
111 Ibid, Clause 136.
112 For example, the documentary 'Paranormal War' aired on the History Channel in February 2013, directed by Colombian filmmaker Jaime Escollon. Check out the interview with Jaime Escollon, "La *Brujeria* se usa para protegerse de las balas" ("*Brujeria* is used to protect yourself from bullets") In Revista Semana, 16th February 2013. https://Centauros.semana.com/gente/articulo/la-*brujeria*-usa-para-protegerse-balas/333783-3 (last accessed March 2019); and the radio programme "Luna Blu", which dedicated a special edition to the issue: https://Centauros.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBRL4cQxPsu5hF8_T4C-_W9gAXz7D5lIm.
113 Violencia en la Altillanura: Las autodefensas Campesinas de Casanare Centauros Vichada. Informe número 3. Centro de Memoria Historica, 2018. (Violence in the Altillanura: The peasant self-defence groups of Casanare and Vichada. Report number 3.) Available online: http://Centauros.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/informes/publicaciones-por-ano/2018/violencia-paramilitar-en-la-altillanura.

to seal the ritual to become bulletproof.[114] The images were exhibited in 2011, detailing the recurrence of this *brujeria* practice among paramilitaries in the Plains, prompting increased press attention on the *cruzados*. [115]

Figure 9. Exhibition by artist Pablo Licona in Medellin's Modern Art Museum (MAMM). The series was named "Jesus and Satan (The *Cruzados*)" in the exhibition "The turnaround" or La Vuelta in Spanish.

Cruzados were even represented in the Colombian TV series "The Three Cains",[116] a *narconovela*, a TV genre that fictionalises the life of mafia bosses (*capos* in Spanish). The series' plot revolves around the life of the founders of the AUC, the organisation that attempted to unite the regional paramilitary structures into a nationwide organisation. Here again, *cruzados* are introduced when recounting the clashes between the Buitragos and Centauros. Episodes 61 to 63 feature the supreme commander of the Buitragos, nicknamed "Martin Llanos", calling a sorcerer to perform the ritual to become *cruzado* as part of the preparations for the war against the Centauros. In contrast to the depiction of the *llanero* group Buitragos as practitioners of *brujeria*, the series portrays the paramilitaries from the Antioquia region as devoted Catholics. The *cruzado brujeria* becomes a narrative device exclusively deployed to describe the short *llanero* plot, important insofar as the series focuses on the AUC in the north of Colombia. The fictional

114 "Las Uñas Negras de los *Cruzados*" ("The black Nail Polish of the *Cruzados*") In El Espectador, October 15 2011, https://Centauros.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/unas-negras-de-los-*cruzados*-articulo-305719 (last accessed March 2019).
115 See for example: "El Pacto Oscuro que Convirtio la *Brujeria* en un Arma de Guerra", in: Pulzo, September 5, 2016, https://Centauros.pulzo.com/nacion/paramilitarismo-*brujeria*-pacto-oscuro-que-definio-contorno-guerra-PP116162, (last accessed May 2020).
116 *Los Tres Caínes*, or "The Three Cains", is a 2013 Spanish-language series produced by *RTI Producciones* for Colombia-based television network RCN TV and United States-based television network Mundo Fox. It was written by Gustavo Bolivar Moreno, an author, screenwriter, journalist, and elected senator from 2018 to 2022 for the coalition of left-wing political parties called "The List of Decency". The series is based on the story of the Colombian paramilitary leaders Carlos Castaño, Vicente Castaño and Fidel Castaño, the founders of the AUC (United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia).

account deploys *brujeria* to reproduce nationwide ideas about *llaneros* as superstitious people from remote lands (Raush 2008). I will return to Licano's photos and the TV series later in this chapter. These documents echo the testimonies that I encountered in fieldwork. As Camilo and Victor recount, there were many *cruzados* when the paramilitary groups waged war among themselves.

Although *cruzados*' presence has been mostly reported for the Plains, the supernatural bulletproof men have also appeared in other parts of Colombia. Again, their presence is associated with the brutal events that marked the paramilitary expansion. In Cauca, for example, guerrilla fighters report the presence of *cruzados* in the Naya Massacre in 2001, a bloody event that marked the paramilitaries' expansion towards the south of the department[117] (Garcia 2016: 141). In Urabá, *cruzados* were noticeable during the systematic paramilitary extermination of the guerrilla civilian support that caused massive displacements in the 1990s (Lozano 2009). In San Martin, *cruzados* form part of the memories of corpses piled up in town after the fatal strike in "The Cooperative" and other violent events during the paramilitary expansion. The memories of these events, which were key to consolidating the paramilitary at the regional and national levels, are cast under the presence of supernatural bulletproof men (see chapter five).

The paramilitary expansion, occurring throughout the 1990s and 2000s, is characterised by forced recruitment,[118] a decrease in the quality and duration of "training", the proliferation of internal factions, and, as described in the previous section, a decay in the troops' morale. Like their presence in "The Cooperative" battle suggests, the supernatural bulletproof men appeared when the paramilitaries failed to sustain a counterinsurgency discourse. During the expansion, the paramilitary groups that had just united to advance military operations against the guerrillas started fighting each other and entering into

117 The massacre left at least 100 people disappeared; 27 were found dead with signs of torture, and others were dismembered. Three thousand people were displaced, mostly indigenous and from Afro-Colombian communities. The massacre was committed by 220 members of the recently formed "Bloque Calima", a new AUC branch led by Éver Veloza García, alias Centauros, to conquer the territories from guerrillas and seize the rents of drug traffickers in the area close to the Pacific ocean. In the Justice and Peace trials that followed the demobilisation process of 2005 and 2006, paramilitary commandants gave horrifying details of the massacre that forever changed the lives of people in Bellavista, La Esperanza, El Coral, La Silvia, Campamento, Patio Bonito, Aguapanela, Palo Solo, Alto Sereno, Río Mina, El Playón, La Paz, Saltillo, Concepción, Yurumanguí Centauros Puerto Merizalde villages. The details also compromise the Pichincha army headquarters in Cali, where they procured uniforms, provisions, and intelligence support, to get to the area without being detected. For more information, check: "Los origenes de la Masacre del Naya" in *Verdad Abierta, June 19 2012;* https://verdadabierta.com/los-origenes-de-la-masacre-de-el-naya/. Also the academic work of Myriam Jimeno, Ángela Castillo e Daniel Varela: "A los siete años de la masacre del Naya: la perspectiva de las víctimas" in Anuário Antropológico, v.35 n.2, 2010. https://journals.openedition.org/aa/958.

118 Various reports document the increased recruitment in the 1990s, especially the recruitment of children as combatants and helpers in the training camps for the AUC and the FARC guerrillas (Velandia 2017).

alliances with drug traffickers to control the territories and new business opportunities (Cubides 1998, Bejarano 1997, Ballve 2020, Hristov 2009). In other words, *cruzados* flourished during the degradation of war when the paramilitaries best embodied the "war machine":

> Bands of killers like this do not always fit easily into national organisations, especially in hierarchical ones like the army. Their inclination to cruelty, romance, and anarchy fits them better for what has been called "the war machine" which has few rules or keeps changing them (Taussig 2005: 11).

Taussig compares the paramilitaries to the "war machine" in light of the many contradictions arising when they attempted to function as a centralised, hierarchical and national organisation under the AUC. Although the AUC sought to exercise internal control and discipline, like the guerrillas, by establishing an internal code of conduct and organised military training, the multiple internal tensions in the groups impeded the process of internal cohesion as unified political actors. Cubides (2005) demonstrates that the AUC was rather fictional. The more they attempted to become the national counterinsurgent army they claimed to be, the more they acted as greedy and autonomous "bands of killers". Ironically, paramilitarism best resembles the "war machine" in the AUC's attempt to formalise a paramilitary model across Colombia.

Cruzados' presence exudates from the paramilitary "war machine". The evidence suggests that *cruzados* are meaningfully connected to the bloody paramilitary expansion. When greed overtook paramilitaries' ideological flags, and enemy factions multiplied, thousands of combatants in the Plains became "unhuman".

The *Brujeria* of the Troops

Having established that *cruzados* were prominent during the paramilitary expansion, I will now inquire further into their "presence". One of the first evident aspects of *cruzados* is that they are often combatants from the low ranks of the paramilitary groups, commonly called *patrulleros*.

Even though stories about *cruzados* commanders were popular, the *brujeria* of the higher ranks had distinctive connotations that I do not analyse in this thesis for reasons of space. The *brujeria* used by commandants is described as a "pact" with the devil, a sort of 'upgrade' from *cruzado* with the dead, to *cruzado* with the devil itself. This *brujeria* granted them bulletproof powers but also money, immortality and, in some cases I heard, mundane powers like walking under the rain without getting wet or hanging a hammock in the air. As Garcia (2016) describes in a section dedicated to stories about "commandants with a pact" (*ibid.* 149-155), these characters were surrounded by mystery, and they deeply impacted the ex-combatants he interviewed. Stories about commandants with a "pact" described them as extremely violent characters, flaunting their wealth at parties and with luxury items, and seducing the most attractive women.

Although I will not go further into this subject, I will provide an example of these stories in the case of "Martin Llanos", a high-level commandant from the Buitrago group. Although in the TV series "The Three Cains" he was portrayed as a *cruzado,* ex-paramilitaries who lived under his rule regard his *brujeria* as a "pact with the devil". The paramilitary leader was immensely feared across the Plains. With his brother "Caballo", "Martin Llanos" ruled over a vast territory with an iron fist from 1997, using his army to expand his territory and political power.[119] He commanded an armed organisation of 3,500 men[120] and was one of the three paramilitaries on Interpol's red list in 2003.[121] "Martin Llanos", like many paramilitary commanders in the Plains,[122] nurtured a reputation as a sorcerous man, wearing charms and always surrounding himself with sorcerers. It was believed that he had a pact with the devil. This tinted his persona with a supernatural and maleficent aura, which was convenient when it came to instilling fear as the head of a large army, especially when enemies surrounded him during the war against Centauros. At this time, it is said that he became extremely paranoid, torturing and killing many of his men under speculative suspicion of betrayal.[123] The form of authority of the paramilitaries with

119 For example, they broke "the Casanare pact" with the mayor, councillors, and the governor of the department of Casanare, many of whom served time in jail. The ACC was one of the groups with better armaments. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, op. cit., Clauses 798-799.
120 Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, op. cit., p.594.
121 "'Martin *Llanos*' the Lord of War" in *Verdad Abierta, September 26, 2008*, https://verdadabierta.com/el-senor-de-la-guerra/ (last accessed May 2020).
122 Other famous paramilitaries with the pact are "Pollo Roger", "Chimichagua", and "Pijarvey". Nicknames were mentioned repeatedly by my informants as well as in press articles and Court Sentences testimonies.
123 See, for example, Verdad abierta, "War Drives the clashing factions Insane" 10th December 2009; https://verdadabierta.com/war-drives-the-clashing-factions-insane/ (last accessed May 2020)

the “pact” was very different to the social bandit figures or the persona of the “feared charismatic gangster” (Michelutti et al.: 223) cultivated by some drug lords, guerrilla commanders, and the top paramilitary bosses of the AUC. The sorcery of the higher ranks is part of the commandants' "art of bossing" (Michelutti et al. 2018: conclusion), the key to the reign of terror necessary for commanding unstable paramilitary organisations, particularly during the expansion.

The example above serves to understand the difference between the *brujeria* of *cruzados* and the "pact with the devil". There is some ambivalence between the two practices, for having the "pact" is a form of being *cruzado.*[124] As the case of "Martin Llanos" shows, the higher the status of a paramilitary individual, the more likely his powers are attributed to a "pact" with the devil. The "pact" is the *brujeria* of the higher ranks associated with money, unrestrained violence, and sexual potency. Unlike the “pact”, the *brujeria* of *cruzados* does not reproduce myths about powerful paramilitary leaders. *Cruzados* is mainly the *brujeria* of the troops. It concerns the supernatural bulletproof shields and strength of the *patrullero:* the anonymous men in uniform. I will return to the distinction between these two types of *brujeria* at different points in this thesis.

Objects of Terror/ Subjects of Disgrace

Figure 10. The *cruzado* display of black nail polish, by Colombian artist Paulo Licona.125 The sorcerer ordered the use of black nail polish and accessories such as wristlets and necklaces at the end of the rituals for becoming *cruzados*.

124 Although this distinction can become blurry in some cases, the *cruzados* were generable perceived as evil yet redeemable, while those who have made the “pact” with the devil were the absolute evil, too far gone, commandants that were too deep into the secrets of the organisation.
125 Source: “Brujería entre los Paramilitares Colombianos”, in Infobae, October 15, 2011: https://Centauros.infobae.com/2011/10/16/1035838-*brujeria*-los-paramilitares-colombianos/ (last accessed March 2019).

The photo shows a *cruzado*'s hands displaying black nail polish, a mark of a combatant subjected to the ritual. Commenting on this image in the press, Colombian anthropologist María Victoria Uribe affirms that the display constitutes "an aesthetic disposition to be adorned, to cultivate a warrior image that generates fear towards others and identity with the group".[126] Although the *cruzados'* usage of black nail polish definitively constitutes an "aesthetic disposition" that distinguishes them from other paramilitaries and civilians, there is not enough evidence to conclude with Uribe that the practice is comparable to the tattoos symbolising the group identity of the Central American *Mara Salvatrucha* gangs that she cites as an equivalent example. Her interpretation of the *cruzados'* displays of ritual tokens as grounding a group identity is common in studies of the uses of magic in armed violence (c.f. Roberts 2014, De Grave 2014, Ramirez and Kerestetzi 2021). Uribe, who has written extensively about violence in Colombia (1990, 2018), fails to grasp something that Licona's artistic sensibility picks up. Licona suggests that the combatants' display of black nail polish confronts the viewer with fighters attempting to disguise a weakness by sourcing physical strength and skill from *brujeria*: *"Everyone wants to be Rambo, Indigenous people disguised as Rambo, little ones".* Licona wrote this in his diary when he started hearing stories about the *cruzados* in the Plains.[127] In his appreciation, *cruzados' brujeria* implicates a masquerade used by the vulnerable, such as indigenous peoples, to conceal certain exposure.

People I met in the field concur with Licona's suggestion about the *cruzados'* display of black nail polish. Ex-paramilitaries like Camilo - mentioned in previous sections - say that the display provoked fear in enemies in battle, for everyone knew this was an indication that "black magic" was at play. However, as Licona's photoshoots indicate and Camilo himself confirms, black nail polish and other ritual accessories were not only displayed in battle as a signal to the paramilitaries' enemies. The ritual tokens were displayed at all times for everyone, including family, neighbours, and friends. Black nail polish, wristlets and accessories widely divulged what was normally a private affair and a heavily

126 Maria Victoria Uribe quoted in "Las Uñas Negras de Los '*Cruzados*'", in El Espectador, October 15, 2011: https://Centauros.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/unas-negras-de-los-*cruzados*-articulo-305719 (last accessed March 2020).
127 Paulo Licona's interview in "Las Uñas Negras de los '*Cruzados*'" [The black nails of "*cruzados*"] in El Espectador, 15 October 2011: https://Centauros.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/unas-negras-de-los-*cruzados*-articulo-305719 (last accessed March 2019).

sanctioned practice, that is, the participation in *brujeria*, the ritual alteration of a person's "natural" fate by manipulating the substance-spirits of death (see chapter two).

Although resorting to *brujeria* is common, people are very private about their personal involvement with “occult aggression”. For example, *brujeria* stories are usually told by the victim of "occult aggression" and seldom by the wrongdoer. As explained at length in chapter two, “occult aggression” is the ultimate type of “black magic”, an evil action deployed to curse a person. This clarifies why ex-paramilitaries avoided admitting their involvement in the ritual to become *cruzado*. Recognising their participation in “black magic” carried a substantial social sanction. Although "about two out of ten men in the troops were *cruzados*" in the Centauros troops -according to Camilo- *cruzados* were always “other” *patrulleros*. See, for example, Doña Rosa’s recollection of an interaction with a paramilitary man:

> He told me, "I was in the 'abuela's' house [a famous sorcerer in San Martin] accompanying them [other paramilitaries] to become *cruzados*", and I asked him: "And you? You didn't get *cruzado*?” And he was all like, “Ehh, no, not me, I just got a *rezo* (spell)."

Like Doña Rosa’s interlocutor, many of mine also denied they had been *cruzados.* Despite the evidence of the practice's prevalence among the troops in testimonies in the press, reports, court sentences, and oral and visual accounts like Licona’s, only two of the dozen ex-paramilitaries I met openly recognised they had been *cruzado*. One of the two self-identified ex-*cruzados* I met, Victor, was reluctant to elaborate on his experience with this *brujeria.* While he was certainly vocal about his participation in the Centauros’ combats and killings, Victor was visibly uncomfortable recounting his involvement in the ritual. My diaries record my disappointment at the many times he postponed the conversation about the subject. After we had talked about it a couple of times, he took me to the Pastor in the church he attended and asked me to direct my questions about *cruzados* to the religious authority (chapter six).

Because of the social stigma associated with the *brujeria* practice, it is difficult to interpret the display of black nail polish and accessories by *cruzados* walking around town as a sign of group identity. Given that the ritual to make *cruzados* is a form of “black magic”,

displaying black nails had a high social cost for the combatants. One can imagine that there must be compelling reasons for the combatants to pay the price of broadcasting their association with "black magic". I argue that these reasons are related to their experience of the paramilitary "war machine", experiences that made them "unhuman". The next section describes these experiences and the social production of *cruzados* as "vulnerable warriors" who, in dressing themselves as powerful bulletproof fighters, objectivise their vulnerability as *patrulleros*.

As established in chapter two, unlike protection practices like the use of amulets or *rezos,* the *cruzados* are made in a ritual action directing an "aggression" against combatants themselves. They acquire bulletproof powers by sacrificing part of their humanness, becoming "unhuman" – simultaneously *objects of terror*, inspiring and embodying terror, and cursed, *subjects of disgrace*. As I will explain, this curse is also related to the vulnerability of *patrulleros*. At once powerful and ashamed, the *cruzados'* presence draws attention to the experiences of the combatants in the lower ranks.

"Be Afraid of Us": Inside the Machine

Victor told me many times that *cruzados* were so brave that they all "fight standing up" ("*pelear parados*"). Fighting "standing up" is underlined in the testimonials of demobilised paramilitaries collected by the Centre for Historical Memory (CMH). An example:

> (…) And you saw them, those people, you are in combat, and you all crouched because you cannot stand up, and there they stand as if it were nothing. And you could see when the bullets hit them and bounce like rubber (CMH 2018: 213). [128]

As Victor admitted, *cruzados'* act of bravery was performed for both the paramilitaries and their enemy because to survive in the group, one cannot show the slightest sign of fear. This is also evident in Camilo's reasoning, who, despite not being *cruzado,* had to "act like one":

128 Violencia en la Altillanura: Las autodefensas Campesinas de Casanare Centauros Vichada. Informe número 3. Centro de Memoria Historica, 2018. Available online: http://Centauros.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/informes/publicaciones-por-ano/2018/violencia-paramilitar-en-la-altillanura.

> Camilo: The Army has different combat tactics (…) they crouch and look for a position of protection or cover. The "paraco"[129] No, the "paraco" opens fire while standing. And they told us in training: if the commandant opens fire standing, you all have to fight standing. For those who lay down or hide, the commandant is authorised to shoot them down, he has the order to kill those who crouch down or hide.
>
> Jo: Why they don't do that in the army?
>
> Camilo: Because it is more likely to get shot!
>
> Jo: So, that tactic does not make sense, militarily speaking?
>
> Camilo: If the enemy sees us all standing, they will think we are witches. The *cruzados* go with their chest wide open and with a gun in each hand. (…) So, you think, 'if I crouch down my own group will kill me, I'd prefer to die in combat, I'd prefer to fight standing up

Camilo, like many *patrulleros,* attended compulsory military service where he developed military skills[130] (Cardenas 2005, Civico 2016, Taussig 2003, Medina 2009). As our conversation makes clear, he opted for "fighting standing up" with his "chest wide open", despite being conscious that this was a dangerous move. Camilo acted like a *cruzado* for his commandants who would kill him if he refused to take part in this suicidal act of bravery that, as he tells it, characterised the *paraco,* the colloquial word for paramilitary. *Cruzados*, then, embody what it meant to be *paraco*. The combatants became "unhuman" in the ritual and in performing reckless acts of bravery inside paramilitary life.

Cruzados' bravery was important for cultivating a reputation as a fearless *patrullero*, which, as Camilo declares, was necessary to endure the pervasive terror in the groups. Testimonies from ex-paramilitaries highlight that the training and social life in the groups were shaped by this constant need to restate bravery: "*There [in the groups] cowardice is never pardoned*", - asserts one of the paramilitaries interviewed in Cardenas (2005). His study of the differences between the guerrilla fighters' and paramilitaries' socialisation and militancy emphasises the recurrence of acts of extreme violence against recruits among the latter. All the ex-combatants I met recounted the atrocities of their military training with the paramilitaries. Whether they experienced torture or witnessed it, internal executions and the dismembering of the trainee's classmates were everyday affairs. In this

129 Paraco" is an abbreviation of paramilitary, used in popular jargon
130 According to the CNM, many combatants had received military training in the army (CNM, 2014: 139)

sociality, reaffirming bravery was not an issue of honour but a matter of life and death. As Camilo states:

> Daily there were two or three deaths per [training] course, instead of creating a 'we want you here, we are going to take care of you, we are a group, and we are going to end the guerrillas as a group'-type of atmosphere. Group sentiment is not fostered but rather fear: "don't be afraid of the guerrillas, be afraid of us".

Camilo recalls the impact of this last sentence, uttered by a commander who had just killed a 16-year-old boy who had tried to escape the training camp: "the troops were called to witness the boy's beheading and were instructed to line up to pass the head around". This occurred in the first week of his training with the Buitrago group in 2000. During the two-month training and the three years he was with the group, he witnessed the cruelty of commanders towards the combatants in the lower ranks. Testimonies of this cruelty are also documented in journalistic accounts:

> In training, what caught my attention the most was that they killed those in the [training] course. It lasted a month. (…) You get shot at a lot. If you didn't run fast, they would kill you. Two young boys [were a bit slow] and were killed. One was 17 and the other 25 [years old]. We had to zigzag on an obstacle course, and they would shoot at us. That was four days after instruction began. It was terrifying. All I knew was that I would not be returning home [alive].[131]

"Terrifying" is the most common adjective used to describe paramilitary training. Like the testimony in the press, Camilo and other ex-paramilitaries describe this training as much harder than the one in the army. This was not only due to the physical tests and phycological mistreatments that come with military subordination, but because of the executions of trainees[132] (Cardenas 2005: 215; Medina 2009: 30-32).

The social environment during the "terrifying" short training period was reinforced in the daily life of paramilitaries afterwards.[133] Suspicions of treason and internal executions were

131 Ex-paramilitary interviewed in "Yo conocí la maldad", in Revista Semana, November 2, 2012; https://Centauros.semana.com/nacion/articulo/yo-conoci-maldad/253273-3 (last consulted January 2022). My translation: "En el entrenamiento lo que más me llamó la atención era que mataban a los del curso (…) A uno le bolean mucho plomo. Si uno no corría lo mataban. A dos peladitos se les durmió la mosca Centauros los mataron. Uno tenía 17 años Centauros el otro 25. Teníamos que correr en zigzag en una pista de obstáculos Centauros nos tiroteaban. Eso fue a los cuatro días de empezar la instrucción. Fue aterrador. Lo único que sabía yo era que no volvía a la casa".

132 See: The testimonies about causing pain and sexual violence against their own teammates: Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (2020). Memorias de una guerra por los *Llano*s. Tomo I. De la violencia a las resistencias ante el Bloque Centauros de las AUC. Bogotá: CMH. Pág 310-318; See also CNMH, 2021: 112-120.

133 Training usually lasted two months, but it could last just three weeks when combats intensified. The training included physical conditioning, managing arms, and political classes, op. cit., Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Clauses 611-718.

everyday affairs. According to Camilo, internal executions occurred for disobedience to the norms but for all sorts of other reasons too: not coping with physical exercises, eating something without permission or grabbing a beer during work hours. These infractions were punished according to the commandants' mood and could easily end up in the infractor's beheading, burning alive or being run over by the commandant's van, as Camilo witnessed. According to Cardenas (2005), in paramilitary groups, "internal regulation is left to the free will of the commandant, which implies that his mood and criterion are the only pertinent considerations in imposing punishments, regardless of the offence"[134] (*ibid*. 217).

The testimonies reiterates that in warfare, training and their social life, cruelty was part of how paramilitaries were produced and socialised. Every aspect of their paramilitary life was aimed to "draw from their human essence precisely that which is human, to give way to a 'killing machine' that feels nothing when drinking human blood and flesh, when dismembering a body".[135] (Cardenas 2003: 253). *Cruzados* ritual to become "unhuman" encompasses the dehumanising violence that went into the making of *patrulleros* into "killing machines".

As captured in Licona's images, the *cruzados*' display of black nail polish and accessories mystified the *patrulleros* but also laid wide open the many burdens of paramilitary life in the lowest ranks: their constant exposure to treason, torture, and death. As described in this section, this exposure also occurred outside the battlefield, in the chaotic sociality where the combatants' lives dangled on the whim and wishes of their commanders. *Cruzados* emerge in the experiences of combatants as terror, "not only the terror they produced but the terror they lived and felt" (Garcia 2016: 125).

The combatants' exposure was greater during the paramilitaries' expansion when war intensified and training became harsher. It is not a coincidence then that the presence of *cruzados* was the most common at this time when recruits found themselves in the middle

134 My translation: "el reglamento interno esta dejado al libre albedrio del comandante, lo que implica que los estados de animo Centauros el criterio de esa persona son las únicas consideraciones pertinentes para imponer los castigos, sin importar la falta".
135 My translation: "Sacar de su esencia humana precisamente lo humano que lo caracteriza para darle paso a una máquina asesina, que no sienta nada al beber sangre o comer carne humana, descuartizar un cadaver".

of a reconfiguration of power among the paramilitaries and drug traffickers and at the mercy of greedy, paranoid commanders exclaiming "be afraid of us!".

While the combatants' lives were at the commandants' disposal, to the point that they controlled even expressions of sentimentality, like singing, praying and crying (Cardenas 2005:221), treason was the currency of sociality among the higher ranks.[136] The maximum commandant of the Centauros, Miguel Arroyave, was killed by middle-rank commandants who plotted his death after discontent with his ambition as a drug lord, evident after the war against the Buitragos[137] (Zabala 2009: 76, Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, Clauses 569-640). Treason was so common that the maximum commandant of the AUC, Carlos Castaño, is thought to have killed his brother Fidel and to have been assassinated by his brother Vicente in the context of other fratricidal wars during the paramilitary expansion. The TV series based on the Castaño brothers is for this reason called "The Three Cains", a biblical name that illustrates the extent to which betrayal and internal conflicts, like deadly quarrels among siblings, have shaped paramilitarism.

At all levels of paramilitary structure, the environment of distrust and fear of losing their lives at the hands of their companions shaped social life in the groups: "The very organisation was the enemy; you were in greater danger inside than in combat"-affirmed one of the paramilitaries interviewed by Cardenas (2005:238). In this "atmosphere", *cruzados* flourished, offering *patrulleros* protection against their most likely foe: other paramilitaries, namely, their commanders or combatants from other paramilitary groups. The *cruzados*' display of black nail polish and other accessories signals to other paramilitaries that they were "unhuman", as in supernaturally "hard to kill". Camilo told me that killing a *cruzado* was a delicate task because you had to know the "open spot", the only part of the body vulnerable to bullets, or take them by surprise with a knife or *machete* so that they did not have time to react. Thus, *cruzados* were the *brujeria* of the troops, an occult power that was vital when "the very organisation was the enemy".

136 "Don Mario" described the times he ordered the execution of people under his command, sometimes for suspecting they were stealing money, sometimes because someone in the middle ranks was out of control, like when he ordered the execution of "Pollo Roger", who was arbitrarily killing civilians and other combatants. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, op. cit., Clauses 383, 580 and 731.
137 Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, op. cit., Clauses 569-640.

After hearing about the atrocities that he witnessed during his training, I asked Camilo:

> Jo: How can they [the groups] be strong militarily and remain as a group in such an environment?
>
> Camilo: they have people recruiting across the country; it was a business. Recruiters earned by commission and combatants kept coming, filling the gaps.

The feeling of those in the lower ranks like Camilo, who joined the Buitragos when his wife got pregnant and he saw no other way to obtain a salary and survive extreme poverty, was that of being easily replaceable or disposable units "filling the gaps". Although Camilo admits this was certainly true in the Buitragos but different in the Centauros,[138] ex-paramilitaries recall experiencing their life as having little or no value for the commandants. They were not human to the organisation.

The paramilitaries' brutality against their own members intensified during the conflicts triggered by the AUC expansion when recruitment was at its maximum and systematically included children.[139] As Taussig (2005) noted, during this period, paramilitaries ended up "employing far more people than the national police force and army combined" (*ibid.* 10). Camilo, for example, remembers that many construction workers joined the group the same day he did, deceived by the Buitragos' promise of good salaries:

> There is a lot of unemployment in the cities and the countryside, and they [the recruiters] say, we are going to earn two million [pesos] a month, and you're like, 'whom do I need to kill?' Without a second thought.

Mass recruitment and extreme internal violence have been reported in irregular armies during phases of "degradation" of war in other conflicts in the global south. The case of the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leona (RUF), known for the violence they unleashed against rural populations and also over its members, is a case in point that provides a parallel with the *cruzados'* context. The RUF lapsed into apocalyptic violence after the government betrayed a peace process and the ensuing loss of the group's popular

138 According to Camilo, the Centauros were better because they paid on time, had paid holidays and permits, had better food and equipment, and provided medical care and compensation when hurt in battle. It is important to highlight that Camilo deserted *Buitragueños* to join Centauros, who pardoned his life, for which he is thankful.

139 "Paramilitares reclutaban niños a la fuerza en Casanare", in Verdad Abierta, September 16, 2009; https://verdadabierta.com/paramilitares-reclutaban-ninos-a-la-fuerza-en-casanare/ (last accessed March 2020).

support (Richards 2006). Although it had a very different historical trajectory, the RUF, like paramilitary groups, was progressively divided into factions forming around new leaders rather than ideology. At this point, they started forcefully recruiting personnel and forced combatants into the ritual mutilation of civilians and group members. The rituals served as entry ordeals but were not long-standing and honoured ritual practices that enhanced group solidarity. Similar to the "be afraid of us" motto, ritual violence in the decayed RUF was an ensemble of "actions of despairing practitioners, threatened with the loss of all sense of society" (Richards 2006: 659). *Cruzados* do not simply offer an open vision of the “loss of sociality” of the degradation of war (the “occult sociality” discussed in chapter two) but instead embodies the "loss of humanity" that characterises the "war machine".

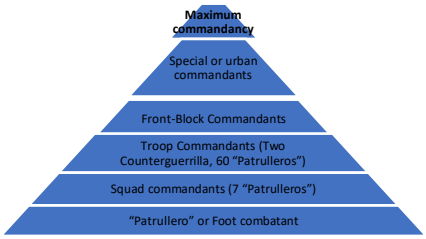
As one can see in Licona’s images, *cruzados* crafted a spectacular image of terror for combatants. The testimonies of their violent training, however, show that this terror is not only directed to "produce" fear in the enemy or the population, but it is also what they become: the lived experience of inhuman training and the atmosphere of distrust inside the paramilitary lines, aggravated when the paramilitary groups devastated entire communities and their own groups in the pursuit of monopoly over the territories. *Cruzados* objectivise the hardship of paramilitary life among the lowest ranks. They were symptoms of the degradation of war when the combatants' wish to obtain a salary was shattered against the realities of the social life inside the paramilitary groups. Even those who willingly joined the paramilitary, like Camilo, found themselves vulnerable and alienated from their group and from each other with the statement: “Be afraid of us”.

The Need to Become Unhuman

Becoming *cruzado* was important for the *patrulleros* who sought promotion within the groups. Camilo's training during obligatory military service gave him advantages over other recruits who were peasants and labourers, an advantage that he capitalised on to become a squad commandant in a very short time (see Graph 2). Envisioning his promising future, Camilo sought to become *cruzado* as a way to climb the ladder:

> You start realising that if you want to last there, you need to become *cruzado* or something (…) my goal was to climb high and get to have power, so I saw that [becoming *cruzado]* as a necessity.

Apart from the few occasions when paramilitary commandants paid for collective rituals, becoming *cruzado* was an individual decision. Camilo personally contacted the sorcerer that offered discounts for members of the Centauros and, though resolute, some contingencies prevented him from showing up to the appointment for the ritual - or so he told me. Camilo's motivation to become *cruzado* was to increase the chance of being appointed counter-guerrilla commandant. The ex-combatants I talked to often suggested that becoming *cruzado* was a "necessity", not for the bulletproof protection in battle but to demonstrate that you had what it takes to climb up through the ranks. Here again, the *cruzados'* powers were not aimed at inspiring fear in the enemy but directed towards the commandants to demonstrate how far they were willing to go to climb the ladder and what they were willing to "become".



Graph 2. Chain of Command of the Centauros group (Information from the Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, 2016).

Apart from the top three positions, promotion through the groups was fast-paced as posts became vacant rapidly due to the losses in battle and the many internal executions. Although discipline and obedience were important for rising through the groups, these were partly arbitrary. As Cardenas (2005) points out:

> The commandant, an all-powerful authority, is, in all cases, chosen by hand by the superior on duty, who only takes into account his combat capabilities and the discipline and submission that he has shown since the beginning of his militancy (*ibid.* 216).

The arbitrariness of promotions was conducive to admitting to the "subjective" factors in the commandants' decisions. According to Camilo, Victor, and others, being *cruzado*

increased the chance of being selected. This partly explains the recurrence of the *brujeria* practice in the lower-middle ranks. According to Camilo, squad commandants and troop commandants were all *cruzados* in the Buitragos. Though less common in Centauros - he affirms - becoming *cruzado* was essential to rise through the ranks in the groups. In turn, such escalation reinforced the reputation of *cruzados.*

This was the case of "Cuchillo" or "Knife",[140] a paramilitary whose rapid promotion was attributed to his powers as a *cruzado*. From a *patrullero* in 1998 in the Centauros' "Guaviare Front"[141] to a front commandant by 2000 and the highest-ranking leader of the post-paramilitary-demobilisation group ERPAC (Revolutionary Popular Antisubversive Army) in 2006, "Knife's" steady ascendant trajectory was puzzling for other paramilitaries and for people who met him as a young boy working at the town's petrol station. As commandants "Don Mario" and "Charro" affirmed, "Cuchillo" did not have any merit or "baton" (*vara)* - as paramilitaries refer to the discipline to obtain approval from their superiors. His promotion to front commandant was credited to his power as a *cruzado* (Zabala 2009: 83).[142] "Cuchillo's" case illustrates the power of *cruzados* beyond the bulletproof shields and the potentialities of their "continual becoming" (Taussig 2005: 12) – in this case, "unhuman" combatants with the potential to be "killing machines" to progress in the violent sociality of the paramilitary world.

140 For some biographical notes on "Cuchillo" see https://Centauros.semana.com/nacion/articulo/quien-alias-cuchillo/126558-3.
141 Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, op. cit., Clauses 71.
142 His case is the opposite of "Don Mario's", whose steady but slow promotion from 1990 in the ACCU and later in "Centauros" was openly attributed to the fact he "cogio vara" or "took the baton" (lit.) with the Castaño brothers, displaying military skills and loyalty (Zabala 2009: 25, Cardenas 2005: 224)." To get/take the baton" and becoming "cruzado" were different mechanisms for establishing authority within paramilitary groups yet equally important to assume higher-level positions.

Figure 11. “Cuchillo” and “Piraban”. “Cuchillo” was a renowned *cruzado* from San Martin. He was always covered in bracelets and neckless, accessories that revealed his participation in brujeria rituals.

The Death of *Cruzados*

As Camilo mentioned, *cruzados* were “hard to kill” and so their extermination required planned ambushes. He witnessed the killing of a *cruzado* who had to be carefully disarmed, tied up, and beheaded because it was unlikely that he would die by gunfire. The bulletproof protection did not extend to other weapons like knives or *machetes.* In his words:

> There were cases where they gave the order to execute one of our own, and if he was a *cruzado*, what a problem! Because you needed to disarm him first, without him noticing, it was a complicated procedure.

The dreadful stories about the difficulty of killing *cruzados* are common among ex-combatants. They recount the fate of *cruzados* whose death was plotted by their superiors. In some cases, the plan needed “intelligence” because they had to discover the *cruzados’* “open spot” where bullets could enter the body. As mentioned in chapter one, only the sorcerers and *cruzados* knew the secret location of the “open spot”. Like the Achilles heel in Greek mythology, the “open spot” was *cruzados* only weakness. It was both a reminder of the difficulty of killing them and a token of their mortality. *Cruzados* inspired fear in other combatants and their superiors and thus had the power to deter internal enemies. This same power that could give *cruzados* advantages to obtain their superiors’ endorsement for climbing up the ladder could eventually become a menace for their commandants, who would plot to kill them. *Cruzados*' powers were thus a double-edged sword, yet death was at both ends.[143]

The *cruzado* “Cuchillo” was “hard to kill”. After he became a fugitive and started a new paramilitary group in 2006 (ERPAC), he was hunted by the Colombian authorities. According to stories circulating in town, some of which reached the national press,

143 The commandants nicknamed ‘Pollo Roger’ and ‘Chimichagua’, infamous in the Plains for their cruelty, were known for having a "pack with the devil". They committed atrocious crimes (see the testimonies compiled by the Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota; summary here: https://verdadabierta.com/paramilitares-contaron-su-version-sobre-la-masacre-de-cano-jabon/ . Their death was plotted by their superiors who had grown terrified of them and required major military operatives (Zabala 2009: 52). According to official records, ‘Chimichagua’, for example, was killed with more than 200 gunshots (Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, 2015, Charge No. 126-115, case of Gustavo Quitián González, page 434). People in town said that the shots were necessary because he “did not die”.

"Cuchillo" was able to escape amid a "rain of bullets"[144] during the major military operative set up to capture him in 2010. Although he escaped, his corpse was found floating in a nearby stream a few days after the operation. He had drowned attempting to cross the shallow water. His demise in the stream inflamed his reputation as *cruzado*. It is common knowledge that the *cruzados'* "open spots" manifested in other "weaknesses" like an incapacity to cross moving water like rivers and streams. *Cruzados* like "Cuchillo" were hard to capture and kill, yet they were inescapably mortal. Paradoxically, after he proved "hard to kill" but inevitably died, his reputation as a powerful *cruzado* spread.

Although they were "fighting stood up" and with their "chest wide open" in battle, the *cruzados*' powers were rendered visible in their deaths, which was fairly usual among the paramilitaries. While *patrulleros* like "Cuchillo" rose to prominence as a *cruzado,* most combatants with bulletproof powers never made it out of the paramilitary groups alive. According to Camilo:

> During the fighting between the Buitragos and the Centauros, the Buitragos brought in a witch from Venezuela, and she made all the troops *cruzados*; more than 100 men entered the combat all confident, but all of them died and the witch was killed.

In the rendition of this event by "Don Mario", the sorcerer performing the ritual before "The Cooperative" battle (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) assured the efficacy of the *cruzados'* bulletproof powers. Her assurance was decisive in designing the group's military strategy. The commandant who brought her in "felt very sure of the witch and suggested that we entered straight in, standing on our feet and pushing forward".[145] Against "Don Mario's" advice, the commandants dismissed other military strategies for entering "The Cooperative" and instructed their troops to enter on foot and open fire upright or to "fight standing up" ("*pelear parados*"): "this is what we sent them to get *cruzados* for" - one of the Centauros' commandants retorted (Zabala 2009: 60). After four hours of combat, the Centauros were losing, more than 100 men had been killed, and their

144 In Spanish "Lluvia de Balas". Descriptive words used in the press article: https://Centauros.eltiempo.com/justicia/cortes/*brujeria*-en-la-guerra-paramilitar-38288. "Knife" was often described a powerful cruzado. See also, "El Pacto Oscuro que convirtio la *Brujeria* en un arma de Guerra" in Pulzo, September 5 2016 https://Centauros.pulzo.com/nacion/paramilitarismo-*brujeria*-pacto-oscuro-que-definio-contorno-guerra-PP116162 and https://Centauros.semana.com/nacion/articulo/las-brujas-guerra/248172-3 (last accessed December 2021).

145 My translation: "'Belisario' se sentia muy seguro de la bruja Centauros sugirio que entraramos de frente, peliando de pie Centauros echando para adelante" (Zabala 2009, 59).

infirmary was not coping with the many wounded. Disconcerted, “Don Mario” reprimanded the commandants: "Oh irony! (…) For believing in witches, look how many casualties!" (Zabala 2009, 61). The testimonies compiled in the sentence of the Justice and Peace Court (2015) confirm this account, stating that: "in the face of the mystical failure, the witch was later dismembered in sight of the entire troop".[146] According to Camilo, who deserted the Buitragos just before “The Cooperative” battle, the same occurred in this group. Even when the trust placed in *cruzados* was crucial to determine the military strategy, what was questioned in the face of failure was not sorcery but the trustworthiness of the sorcerer performing the ritual.

This reminds us of a situation that Evans-Pritchard encountered when researching witchcraft among the Azande, who would go on to question the powers of a certain witch but never witchcraft itself. This contradiction, deceptively emerging from the confrontation of a "belief" with a given "reality" is repeated in other anthropological accounts of sorcery and magic (Taussig 2016, Graeber 2015). Graeber (2015) examines the scepticism surrounding magical phenomena as constitutive of its power. As illustrated by the commandant “Piraban”, even the higher ranks were sceptics: "to do not take any risk, we opt for that security. But I cannot be sure it was true that the bullets did not hit them". This scepticism leads us to ponder not what is "really real" but why people act as if something were real. In our case, why did the *cruzados* keep dying but the combatants continued subjecting themselves to the ritual to become bulletproof?

Despite the monumental losses in both groups during the war between the Centauros and Buitragos, *cruzados*’ power remained intact. “They believed they were untouchable. In one day, 78 boys died due to their beliefs”, said Centauros commandant “Piraban” when talking about the popularity of *cruzado* rituals among the troops.[147] “Piraban" affirmed that many continued subjecting themselves to the rituals, notwithstanding the casualties so plainly evident after "The Cooperative" battle. The demise of hundreds of *cruzados* did not affect *brujeria*, which continued to be essential for the hundreds of *patrulleros* that kept coming, “filling the gaps” -to paraphrase Camilo.

146 Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, 2015, op. cit., Clause 617.
147 Piraban was one of the highest commanders of the *Centauros.* These words were rendered during the testimonies of the court cases leading to his demobilisation, quoted in: “Brujería, ¿Un Arma de Guerra?" in *Revista Credencial*, 26th December 2017. http://Centauros.revistacredencial.com/credencial/noticia/actualidad/*brujeria*-un-arma-de-guerra, (last accessed May 2020).

The seemingly endurance of *brujeria* is also evident in the attitudes of *cruzados* like Victor towards their own magical powers (introduced in chapter one). I heard him saying about them: "*In my case, I believe and didn't believe*". For a while, I bit my tongue to avoid the confrontational questioning that my curiosity demanded, expecting that his doubts would be superseded by a way of cosmological thinking that could account for the many contradictions surrounding *brujeria*. Yet, one day I could not hold back for long and asked: "*So, if you were cruzado how did your accident happened*?"- Victor had lost the mobility in his left leg, part of his fine motricity and memory after being shot four times in the head during a combat against the guerrillas. His skull was broken into so many pieces that the doctors could not explain how he was still alive. An official of the Reintegration Agency that he introduced to me later corroborated that I was, indeed, in the presence of a "medical miracle". Victor gave me a wide smile that light up his round cheeks and sparkly brown eyes when answered my question with mischief: "*well, for every witch there is another witch*". This is a stereotyped form of expressing scepticism about *brujeria* in Colombia and also an invitation to speculate about is reality. The mystery of his *cruzado* powers is certainly puzzling for Victor himself, whose life, which was to be "protected" by a spirit-substance, changed entirely after the accident. With his mobility seriously compromised, he has become completely dependent on government help and his wife, whose salary is hardly sufficient for the family.

Instead of asking what combatants like Victor must believe in order for the repeated deaths and accidents of *cruzados* to not conflict with the bulletproof protection offered by *brujeria*, I opt to question whom these contradictions serve. *Cruzados'* powers remained fundamental for combatants seeking to climb the ladder inside the organisation and those who fed on their "life force" to advance their interests. In this sense, *cruzados* can be understood as "specular images" (Uribe 2003: 68) mirroring the unhuman voracity of the paramilitary "war machine".

Like the endurance of *cruzados'* powers after their monumental demise, paramilitary power has survived to this day the many fractures of the different groups, crude internal wars, the internal executions of their leaders, a complete downfall of anti-communist ideology, and even a demobilisation process. In some way, the transcendence of *cruzados'*

powers is an accomplished metaphor for the endurance of paramilitary power throughout Colombian history. However, beyond the comfort of such a conclusion, it is necessary to look at the darkest truth of *cruzados*: they are dehumanised combatants turned "unhuman", the expendable bodies of the paramilitary "war machine" (c.f. Whitehead 2013).

Being Inhuman / De-Humanised Beings

Cruzados' brujeria is often explained as the desperate means of paramilitaries to overcome the fear of death in armed confrontations. Psychologists, religious leaders, and social scientists have been called on to explain the practice in journalistic accounts. They often talk about trauma, desperation, and near-death experiences in war time as the causes underpinning the combatants' decision to resort to *brujeria* to become bulletproof. Many experts explain *cruzados* as a practice aligned with a natural inclination to protect life at all costs.[148] This explanation - often not based on empirical research - is far too simplistic. I am not arguing that becoming *cruzado* has nothing to do with the combatants' desire to protect their life. This would go against some of the ex-paramilitaries' testimonies I encountered in the field. Instead of resorting to these general explanations, I propose that *cruzados* have to be decoded in relation to the context in which they acquired significance: paramilitary life itself. In doing so, it is essential to ask how death is confronted in the paramilitary world and how it relates to the death created by *brujeria*. To approach these questions, I will first briefly compare how death is generally approached among the paramilitaries and other military formations like the Colombian army and the guerrillas.

In the Colombian army, soldiers resort to priests who perform Mass for the troops before each combat and bless them and their objects for protection from death.[149] As the priest from one of the biggest military bases in the Plains explained to me, soldiers are assured of God's presence in every battle and have been coached to face their death as glory: they die for the *Patria*, the fatherland, and the concrete institution they represent which was

148 Violencia en la Altillanura: Las Autodefensas Campesinas de Casanare Centauros Vichada. Report Number 3, Centro de Memoria Historica, 2018. Page 213. See also expert opinions in the articles "Las Uñas Negras de los '*Cruzados*' [The black nails of *cruzados*] in *El Espectador*, 15 October 2011: https://Centauros.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/unas-negras-de-los-*cruzados*-articulo-305719 (last accessed March 2019).
149 By law, every military base in Colombia has a church and a priest that is dedicated exclusively to overseeing the soldiers and the organisation's wellbeing.

there before them and will be there after them. In contrast, paramilitaries, especially during their expansion in the Plains, were poorly indoctrinated and often alienated from their organisation's goals: "the less you know, the longer you live"-a commandant told Camilo when he asked for the squad's military strategies. [150]

As the priests, soldiers, and ex-paramilitaries I met in the field emphasise, the meaning of their martial activities and the reason for risking their life differed between the paramilitaries and the army. Although the *Patria* was a part of the counterinsurgency discourses imparted in ideological training courses delivered under the AUC (Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, 2015, Clauses 708-719), the paramilitaries were overly entangled with the protection of large landowners and drug lords' interests. This was particularly obvious during the paramilitaries' expansion in the Plains when the Centauros was sold as a franchise to Miguel Arroyave, a notable drug lord whose ambitions drove them to war against other regional paramilitary groups (Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, *op. Cit.*, Clauses 599-167). Paramilitary counterinsurgency discourse soon faded in the eyes of the newly recruited *patrulleros* who realised they were not dying for the *Patria*. Apart from the monetary incentive, combatants were pursuing approval from their commandants and dying in the name of the inextricable goals of unstable organisations.[151]

In addition to the *patrulleros*' alienation from their organisation's purposes, when a soldier in the army or a guerrilla fighter in the FARC died, their bodies were buried, and death was an occasion to reaffirm their ideals as an armed organisation working for the *Patria* or the *revolution*. As Guzman, Fals Borda and Umaña (2010) highlight in their comprehensive account of violence in Colombia, guerrilla fighters developed a "mystique for their movement and their leaders (…) a sublimation of motives" (*ibid*. 227-228, c.f. Garcia 2016: 171). FARC and ELN guerrilla fighters sacrifice their individuality in the name of the

150 See: *Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (2020) Memorias de una guerra por los Llanos. Tomo I. De la violencia a las resistencias ante el Bloque Centauros de las AUC. Bogotá: CNMH, pp. 305*

151 A quick look at the lifespan of paramilitary organisations gives an idea of how unstable the paramilitary world was. The AUC, one of Colombia's largest and most powerful organisations, existed for approximately eight years, from 1997 to 2005. The *Centauros* branch lasted five years before it was divided into the ERPAC and AUG in 2010. The ACC or the *Buitragos* was more long-lived, lasting over a decade. This is interesting when compared with the almost-six decade lifespan of the FARC guerrilla (1964-2016) and the five decades of the ELN guerrillas (1970-present).

organisation's collective goals.[152] During training and in their everyday life, for the heavily indoctrinated guerrilla fighter, the collective came before the individual to the point that romantic relationships were strongly regulated and pregnancy prohibited, for it would disrupt the collective with the individuals' desires and emotions [153] (Medina 2009: 40-45, Cardenas 2005). In contrast, as both Camilo and Victor recall, paramilitary *patrulleros* did not develop such a "mystique", for death came first for their leaders and other paramilitaries. As they recollect, inside the paramilitary during the expansion, *patrulleros'* deaths were meaningless for the groups. Often, recovering the combatants' guns was more important than recovering their bodies, which on many occasions were buried in mass graves "because the combatant can be replaced, but the gun cannot, which is why it is more valuable than the 'paraco'" (testimony in Cardenas 2005: 219). As Camilo told me, in full knowledge of these facts, for *patrulleros,* knowing that their bodies could end up in a mass grave and thus not be returned to their families was a constant source of anxiety (see other testimonies in Cardenas 2005: 224).

The examples above illustrate that death can take different forms, even within military life. For paramilitaries, death is first imminent from within the paramilitary lines. The organisation was:

> Assassinating all the time, unjustifiably, in a dark ceremony where the horror of death was not only lived in the execution but after, because not only is life put to an end, but the cadaver is killed, death is killed, again and again, by burning, mutilating, dismembering the body (Cardenas 2005: 224).

Patrulleros faced the "dark ceremony" up front. In training, in combat, and the violent social life of the paramilitary, they were already dead for the organisation, which was death itself. This is the death that *cruzados* were overcoming. As described in this chapter, the supernatural bulletproof men were vulnerable *patrulleros* protecting themselves mainly from other paramilitaries. While the physical and physiological trials of privation, endurance, and intimidation that come with military training are often described as a part

152 It is often agreed that the initial FARC formations of the early 1970s, which enjoyed wide popular support, changed considerably after the involvement of the higher ranks in the business of drug trafficking in the 1990s (see Introduction).
153 These policies led to the practice of unwanted/coerced abortions among female guerrilla fighters which have been denounced in the trials of the transitional justice tribunals created after the 2016 Peace Agreement with the FARC guerrillas (see: "Abortos Forzados en las FARC, un Crimen que urge Reparar" en Pacifista, 22nd October 2019, https://pacifista.tv/notas/los-abortos-en-farc-womens-link-jep/, (last accessed May 2021).

of a necessary “animal-becoming” to ensure that fighters survive in the context of war (Ferrer 2014: 12), I have shown how the greater risks in paramilitary training and the social life demanded of the fighters to become ever more "other", in a mystical and moral sense. They became "unhuman" as in "dehumanised" through the violent process that made them "killing machines". Unlike other mystical dead warriors -like Efrain Gonzales from the period known as "the Violence" who had shamanic-like powers, and mafia bosses like Pablo Escobar – dead *cruzados* are neither powerful spirits summoned by sorcerers, nor are they worshipped as cult figures (c.f. Losonzcy 2001). They were the devalued combatants in the troops, dehumanised in life as in their death.

Fuel for the War Machine

Cruzados emerge in what Taussig calls "the space of death" (1987: 5) – a space of transformation created by the exalted presence of death, especially in "cultures of terror" (*ibid.* 30) where torture is endemic. *Cruzados* convey more than just paramilitary terror as the perpetrators of violence. As I have explained so far, *cruzados* also objectivise the paramilitary “culture of terror”, the “space of death” emanating in everyday life for the combatants among the lowest ranks where death comes first from within the group.

“The space of death”, like the excess of violence during the rubber economy that Taussig studied, is animated by the ineffability of dehumanising violence. Taussig goes to great length to describe these excesses of violence, the torture, beheading and burning alive of indigenous peoples by the rubber barons who enlisted them as labourers (*ibid*. 14-35). This random cruelty of the rubber barons, he argues, that spectacular wasting of the labour force, does not respond to an economic logic of efficiency or competition for resources but the reactivation of a myth from a previous era: the "conquering" not only the ideology of "peonage" but the "fantastical" aspects of "real" terror inscribed in the body of the indigenous people. The logic of "conquering" was deployed to rationalise the extreme violence against them, the viciousness of the barons, and their armed men wasting the scarce labour force during the rubber economy. In Taussig's words:

> But maybe, it was not the political economy of rubber nor that of labour that was paramount here in the horrific 'excesses' of the rubber boom. Perhaps, as in the manner strenuously theorised by Michael Foucault in his work on discipline, what was paramount here was the inscription of a mythology in the Indian [sic] body, an engraving of civilisation locked in struggle with wildness whose model was taken from the colonist's fantasies about Indian [sic] cannibalism. 'In the excess of torture', Foucault gnomically writes, a whole economy of power is invested. There is no excess (Taussig 1987: 49).

Cruzados' "de-humanisation" defies all rational calculation and economic logic because the combatants, like indigenous people during the rubber economy, were not even valued as workers. As described in this chapter, paramilitary recruits were randomly killed during training and throughout their time in the lowest ranks, where their life depended on their commandants. Moreover, they were dehumanised even in death, their bodies deposited in mass graves and, in many cases, lost forever to their families. Becoming *cruzado* then, can be interpreted as the inscription of a mythology in the combatants' body: one that produced them as "unhuman", simultaneously a supernatural and a "dehumanised" being.

Thus, *cruzados* are produced in an alienation of the combatants' humanness, produced ritually and as a social happening through the experience of "de-humanisation" inside the paramilitary groups. The *cruzado* is a creature demoted from its human value, alienated from the organisation's goals, and is replaceable as a labourer. The *cruzados* magnify the existential experiences of the lower ranks as the "killable bodies" in the multitude of the troop, as the fuel for the paramilitary "war machine".

Cruzados and the Multitude

Cruzados convey the force of the troops as cannon fodder; as such, they are not entirely human but instead "fuel for the war machine". Accounts of *cruzados* as "vulnerable warriors", the replaceable pieces of the "war machine", draw attention to the dissonance between the fate of the individual combatants and the paramilitary as an abstract force. The "unhumans" are associated with the concrete realities of combatants during the dehumanising training, social life and death in the paramilitary groups. Concurrently, they are the abstract body of the troops and de facto sovereignties advancing in their territories.

Cruzados are "unhuman" also in this sense: they are the "multitude" of the troop. “Multitude” relates to the notion developed by Antonio Negri (2002), referring to an immanent social subject with revolutionary potential, a type of power that “wants to acquire a body”.[154] I give “the multitude” a “darker” turn to uncover the link between the fading individuality of combatants within the troop and the ritual extirpation of their humanity.

Cruzados become the “unhuman” presence of the troops. They enclose the “multitude”, at once the *patrulleros*’ bodies and their immanence as a social subject. This "multitude" of combatants is, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), essential to the “war machine”:

> Tens, hundreds, thousands, myriads: all armies retain these decimal groupings, to the point that each time they are encountered it is safe to assume the presence of a military organisation (…) there is always a connection between the Number and the war machine (ibid. 387).

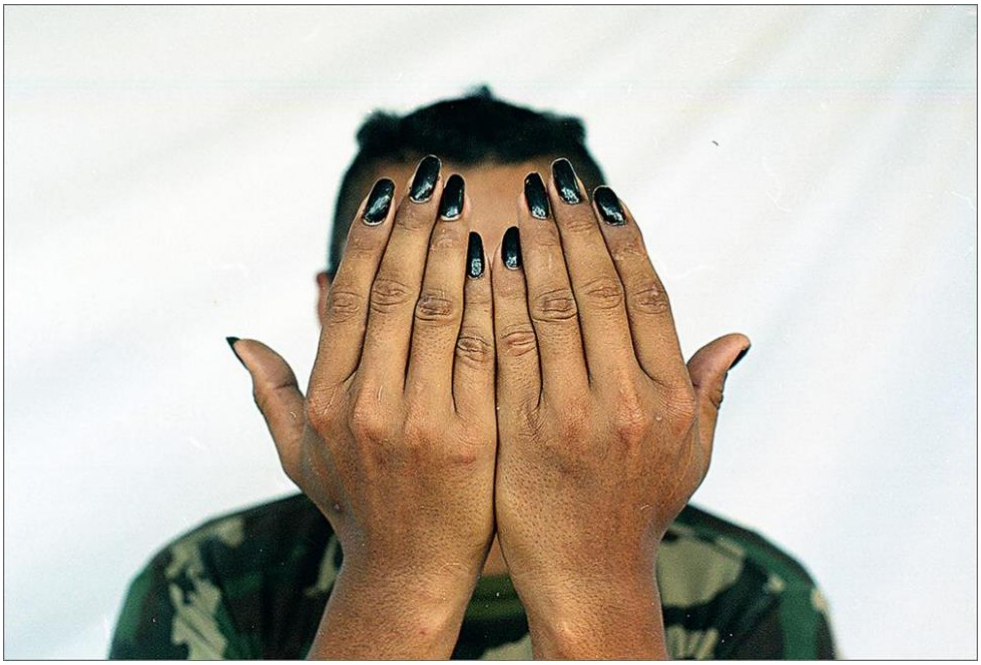


Figure 12. *Cruzados* by artist Paulo Licona. The portraits of *cruzados’* hands covering patrulleros' faces capture the "vulnerable warriors" emerging from the harsh realities of paramilitary life in the lower ranks.

The images of the artist Licona help us understand the idea of *cruzados* as the "multitude". The images show the paramilitaries’ hands and heighten the absence of their faces,

154 On the concept of multitude, see “Approximations: Towards an Ontological Definition of the Multitude” by Antonio Negri (2002) Published in the journal Multitudes number 9 as "Pour une définition ontologique de la multitude", pp. 36-48, https://Centauros.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/space/multitude.htm.

denoting the blurred individuality of military life and the imposed anonymity of fighting for an irregular army.[155] The combatants' faces are replaced by hands which stand for the agency to fire a gun, kill and dismember, and work.[156] As Licona expresses, the hands are polysemic bodily signifiers: "not only the hands of horror but the hands of peasants".[157] The images of *cruzados'* hands communicate the life force of the *patrulleros* in their incommensurable multiplicity and potential as workers: "soldiers that are not really soldiers" (Taussig 2005: x). Licona's images capture *cruzados* as paramilitary ghostly armies, the endless reserve of faceless "killers and torturers that all states seem to have no trouble recruiting when their backs are up against the wall" (*ibid.*).

Liconas' description of *cruzados'* hands as allusive to their potential condition as workers refers us to a similarity of the supernatural bulletproof men with another unhuman "multitude": the *zombies*, "half-humans" whose presence has been documented across Africa (Geschiere 1997, Comaroff and Comaroff 2002, Niehaus 2012). *Cruzados* and *zombies* are beings alienated from their human selves, defined by the ritual erasure of their social beings (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002: 794). *Zombies*, like *cruzados,* are created using special sorcery that draws on "ritual repertories" that target intimacy and kinship relations (*ibid*. 793). In Cameroon, this sorcery is called *Ekon* and is distinctive from eclectic traditional forms of magic called *Nganga*, for it is considered "new" and related to new forms of wealth linked with the mafia (Geschiere 1997: 222). *Ekon* is used to obtain wealth by "eating" kinfolks and creating *zombies,* humans devoid of willpower, alienated from their kin relations and expropriated of their labour force. Like *cruzados* during the paramilitary expansion, *zombies* are everywhere in the public sphere in South Africa: in stories of people in rural areas, on the TV, on the news, in court cases, etc. (*ibid*. 787). *Cruzados* and *zombies* are "multitudes" of the "unhuman" associated with the intensification of sorcery in times of social turbulence.

155 For faciality and humanisation, see Butler, 2004, Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence. London, New York: Verso.
156 The report *Basta ya! Memorias de Guerra Centauros Dignidad* (Enough Now!: Memories of War and Dignity) published in 2013 by the Centre for Historical Memory, calculated that between 1958 and 2012, paramilitaries were responsible for 1,166 of the 1,982 massacres perpetrated during that period and killed at least 8,903 civilians. See: https://www.centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/descargas/informes2013/bastaYa/basta-ya-colombia-memorias-de-guerra-y-dignidad-2016.pdf
157 Paulo Licona interview in "Las Uñas Negras de Los *Cruzados*", in El Espectador, October 15, 2011. https://Centauros.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/unas-negras-de-los-*cruzados*-articulo-305719 (last accessed March 2020).

Across Africa, *zombies* are a multitude of waged labourers fabricated by witch-like individuals that "consume" people's life substances by making them *zombies* (Niehaus 2012: 51). Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) analysed the association of *zombies* with the labour force, describing people's fears of *zombie*-makers growing rich by exploiting an "army of ghost workers" across South Africa (*ibid.* 285). The mounting fears of this "new" sorcery, they argue, is not a retreat to tradition but "new forms of consciousness" of the intensification of capitalism: the increased deployment of "monstrous means to appropriate the life-force of others" (*ibid.* 288). Therefore, the "multitude" of *zombies* belongs to a "phantasmagoric history of labour" grasping "the problematic relation of work to the production of social being" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002: 794).

Cruzados and *zombies* are a "multitude" of ritually alienated beings. The comparison enables grasping an important aspect of the "multitude": the interchangeability of combatants and workers. In a sense, combatants are workers who joined the paramilitary for a salary (Civico 2016: 149; see, for example, Victor in chapter one). *Cruzados* capture combatants' alienations as labourers. This relationship goes beyond a loose association. In other Colombian regions, sorcery similar to that used to become *cruzado* is deployed by farmers to increase their work capacity. In Urabá (Lozano 2009), the Caribbean (Taussig 1980), and Cauca (Garcia 2016: 139), farmers and civilians ingest or insert amulet-beings to obtain strength and better bear heavy tasks. As Licona's images suggest, the supernatural bulletproof men are combatants and workers, weapons and tools. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) reflect, war evolves from the indistinction and convertibility between the two (*ibid.* 396). I will return to *cruzados* and the convertibility between "ghostly armies" (Taussig 2005) and the "army of ghost workers" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) in chapter five. For now, I wish to claim the words of Comaroff and Comaroff (1999) to affirm that *cruzados* embody 'the problematic relation of war to the production of the social being'.

The comparison between *zombies* and *cruzados* has obvious limitations. Unlike the spectral threat of *zombies*, *cruzados* cannot be understood only as "etiological principles" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002: 796) of the material and social transformation of the economy under capitalism. *Cruzados* are not like vampires, monsters or creatures conveying the arrival of the factories, the plantations or the mines, which diverted the

productive energies formerly invested in reproducing a situated order of domestic and communal relations (*ibid.* 795). *Cruzados*, like Victor, were combatants subjected to *brujeria* rituals and whose experience in the paramilitary groups kept on affecting their lives (chapter six). By considering their experience, that of their families, and the people who met them, I distance myself from Comaroff and Comaroff's account of *zombies* as "figurations" (*ibid.* 798) or "vectors of affective engagement" (*ibid.* 796) translating the structural contradictions of the global and local conditions of 'class struggle' into the argot of interpersonal kinship and morality. My approach to *cruzados* comes closer to what the authors acknowledge limits their investigations (*ibid.* 798): *cruzados* are subjects. Although they have become objects of poetic elaboration in the public sphere - like on the TV series Three Cain - their experience is indispensable when it comes to understanding the supernatural bulletproof men as the "multitude", the immanence of the troops in the combatant's body.

Cruzados are the combatants expropriated of their life-force and the "atmosphere" of terror of the paramilitary "war machine", which was strongest during the bloody time of the expansion:

> Given that creating atmosphere is crucial for the success of the war machine, it is curious how little attention is paid to the art and culture of paramilitary terror by human rights experts (Taussig 2003: 12).

It can be said that this thesis is all about the "atmosphere" that engenders *cruzados* and that is engendered by their presence – an aspect that, as Taussig points out, is often overshadowed when studying armed violence. Even when the object of study is sorcery deployed in war, which Ferrer (2014) terms "war magic", authors often overlook the existential weight of the "culture of terror". According to Ferrer in his Introduction to the issue of the journal *Social Analysis* dedicated to the topic, "war magic" comprises "symbolic and embodied practices" concerned with revitalising tradition and spiritual innovation in relation to violence and politics, which ultimately "add[s] legitimacy to groups and organisations struggling to revive, redefine, transform, or maintain cultures threatened by rapid social change and instability" (Ferrer 2014:19). Focusing attention on "atmosphere" - the *cruzados'* presence as the multitude and as terror - it is possible to conclude that

cruzados did not just "add" legitimacy to paramilitary groups in a society "threatened" by instability. However, they are indeed a "symbolic and embodied practice" of *brujeria,* concerning the very instability of paramilitary formations and their existence as a "war machine".

Chapter Four- *Cruzados* and *Llaneros*

This chapter examines how references to *cruzados* arise in *llanero* social life. It is based on observations I made while spending time with *llaneros* and ex-combatants in San Martin and contextualised by historical and fictional accounts of the Plains. The approach I adopted is a result of an indirect questioning method (See "Methods" in the Introduction), from which I learnt that *cruzados* had become a discreet part of the stories of the supernatural, a social space formerly occupied by *espantos*, spirits inhabiting the Plains. By focusing on the ways in which *llaneros* evoke *cruzados*, this chapter offers a perspective on the subtle yet powerful ways in which the supernatural bulletproof men affirm the presence of the paramilitaries as a force of transformation in San Martin.

The case of *cruzados* in the space of *llanero* pastoralism illustrates how paramilitarism – and in general the Colombian armed conflict- inscribed itself not only upon different geographies but also the mythologies that have moulded the regions of the Colombian nation.

Criollos' Silence

The idea for this chapter was born out of an elementary ethnographic observation: *criollos* – as *llaneros* call respected experienced cowboys – seldom talk about paramilitarism and certainly never about *cruzados*. In the Plains, as in the Argentinian Pampas for *Gauchos*, *criollos* are a category of people, the "native sons of the land" (Clementi 1997: 147), the most *llaneros* of *llaneros*. While all *criollos* are *llaneros*, not all *llaneros* are *criollos*. The term specifically refers to *llanero* artists and connoisseurs of the *llano*, its history, culinary or oral traditions. I spent a good part of my fieldwork talking to *criollos*; people entrusted me to their authority to talk about 'all things *llanero'* from my first weeks in San Martin. Sandra - sorcerer introduced in chapter one -referred me to them when I first asked her about the meaning of the word *cruzados*: "Well, I never took the time to think about it. But maybe it is easy, maybe older people have knowledge of words and can explain where they come from". She introduced me to a few "older people", *criollos*, who invited me to their social gatherings and became regular interlocutors. My fieldwork was divided chiefly

between life in the neighbourhood and my social life with *criollos*. In a way, *criollos* were the gatekeepers of San Martin society, and, inconveniently, they were reluctant to talk about *cruzados* and paramilitarism.

Like *criollos*, *rezandera*s (traditional witchdoctors) rarely talk about paramilitaries' *brujeria*. Doña Aida, the oldest of the three *rezandera*s I met, avoided talking about *brujeria* altogether. Remaining in stoic silence about the topic, she seemed to keep it separate from her practice of *rezos* – spells or prayers that cure all sorts of ills. To my surprise, when the other two *rezandera*s talked about *brujeria*, they associated it with urban life where, according to them, envy crops everywhere. *Rezandera*s refer to *brujeria* as the evil emanating from urban settlements, remote from the *hato* or cattle ranches and the good *llanero* life.

I had difficulty understanding *criollos* and *rezanderas* disinclination to talk about *cruzados*. Especially considering that the Plains occupy a prominent place in the Colombian imagination as a "mystical" land of powerful sorcery and mysterious apparitions (Rausch 2008, Bjork-James 2015). "The land of legend" (Gómez 2005: 116) is a trope propagated in literature, music, folklore books, political discourses, journalists' accounts and even in touristic slogans promoting the Plains.[158] As a Colombian, I was familiar with these imaginaries of the region as a mysterious place. I expected that something intrinsic to the enchanted frontier explained the prominence of *cruzados* there.

Contrary to what I anticipated, the native *llaneros*, place *brujeria* on the outskirts of their world and rarely elaborate on the subject of *cruzados*. I noticed a similar silence in other places, such as *llanero* music. During the civil war – "The Violence" – *llanero* music was the means for circulating news of the battles between the formidable *llanero* liberal guerrillas and the conservative militias, as well as a form of immortalising guerrilla leaders like Guadalupe Salcedo. In contrast, for decades now, *llanero* music has remained silent in the face of paramilitary violence and armed conflict. Unlike other music in Colombia, like *vallenato*, and in Latin America, like *norteña* in Mexico, which lyrics and compositional

158 For example, " The *llanero* enchantment" is a tourist tour visiting San Martin and its surroundings. There are also hotels, bars, and Facebook groups with this name.

styles reflect the life changes under armed criminal organisations, *llanero* music, the quintessential form of *llanero* art, does not make any reference to paramilitarism. This silence never ceased to surprise me. What happened to the aesthetical codes and ideological forms of *llanero* society under the armed rule of paramilitaries?

In the ethnographic literature on areas of armed violence, silence is frequently understood as a strategy born of fear to deal with the constant threat of violence (Campuzano 2013, Madarriaga 2006; Taussig 2005). However, in this case, the idea of silence as a coping mechanism to deal with violence is insufficient to explain *criollos'* reluctance to talk about *cruzados* because young *llaneros* frequently engage in conversation about this topic. *Criollos*' silence, the reluctance of 'proper' *llaneros* to elaborate upon the supernatural presence of the paramilitaries, prompts an examination of the social field unfolding in *brujeria*, that is, a perspective of the relationships of *criollos*, *llaneros* and paramilitaries.

My ethnographic material resists what otherwise would be a straightforward argument: that *cruzados brujeria* is a form of *llanero* magic, a local conceptual apparatus interpreting the powers of armed groups. *Criollos'* silence requires us to proceed differently than those on the quest for an "ontology". It leads us to think that *brujeria* does not exist only as *llaneros* conceive it. Besides, this silence makes it difficult to think of *cruzados* in a way that confines paramilitarism, a nationwide phenomenon enmeshed in global influxes of capital, to a conversation between a *llanero* "reality" and that of the anthropologist. Rather than focusing on finding the authoritative statements about *cruzados* to which we could apply the "radical constructivism" that would enable our understanding of the conceptual universe that makes for *llanero* reality, I look at *criollos*' interaction with that silencing them: the urban people, the paramilitaries and the powers threatening their ways of life built mainly on cattle ranching. I suggest that *criollos'* and *rezanderas'* silences on *cruzados* produces a disjuncture of their *llanero* world from the paramilitary. The disjuncture discloses *cruzados* as a force alienating *criollos*, and that simultaneously reveals how *criollos* are sustaining their *llanero* world. *Cruzados* are not a *llanero* cosmological expression of the paramilitary, but an outer "unhuman" presence that *llaneros* confront.

The Storytellers

Though silent about *cruzados*, *criollos* talk a lot about their adventures in the Plains wilderness, which always includes stories about their encounters with errant spirits called *espantos*. Although most *llaneros* tell stories about *espantos*, people always sent me to speak to *criollos* as they really "know" about *espantos*, having had close encounters with them. *Criollos* mesmerised me for hours with their stories about their fantastic undertakings in the open savannahs and encounters with *espantos*, stories intertwined as in a natural order. *Llaneros*' songs, poems, and literary works set in the Plains contain stories about *espantos*. They were essential to people's lives in the *hatos*, where workers gathered around music-making and storytelling.

While *criollos* restrict their stories of the supernatural to *espantos* and tales about their fantastic feats, ex-paramilitaries and younger *llaneros*, born and raised in towns like San Martin, talk a lot about *brujeria* and *cruzados*:

> Their powers are displayed in combat or in situations that put them in danger. They become violent, with more force than normal, basically aggressive and with much more force, and in combat they want to go to the front, they want to go for the kill.

Camilo – the ex-paramilitary introduced in previous chapters - mentions that *cruzados*' powers were only visible in battle, in situations of extreme danger or at the moment of their death, when they proved "hard to kill" (chapter three). *Cruzados* emerged from within the paramilitaries and were carried to the *llanero* world in these stories, inspiring fear and awe among civilians and paramilitaries like Camilo. Younger *llaneros*, and especially paramilitaries, who have first-hand knowledge of the *cruzados*' powers, became keen storytellers, whilst *criollos* remained silent (and silenced) about the paramilitaries' supernatural powers.

Cruzados have become part of storytelling time, appearing in stories to describe paramilitaries' feats in the Plains. Although it may seem counterintuitive to place them alongside *espantos* as part of the same supernatural ecosystem, so to speak, I argue that

they are related in meaningful ways. As a recent addition to *llaneros*' accounts of the supernatural, *cruzados* are the matter of which *criollos* cannot speak; they do not acknowledge the presence of supernatural bulletproof men in their versions of what the *llano* is about.

Before approaching *cruzados* as a form of eliciting paramilitary force in the Plains, the following section takes a detour to explain the significance of *espantos* for *llaneros*. It is necessary first, to look at *llaneros'* pastoralism, the world produced by cowboys in their work with cattle.

Llanero Pastoralism

Figure 13. The landscape of the Plains: Extensive and seasonal cattle ranching was developed in the region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and expanded throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This economic activity transformed the region's ecology. It defined the land tenure system and the modes of territorial occupation, connecting the scattered population by paths for transporting cattle, goods, people and news (Gómez 2015, Arias 2004, Enciso 1988).

The Plains was developed as a distinct region through the expansion of cattle ranching.[159] Ecologically, socially and culturally, the region took shape through this economic activity. Simultaneously, the landscape of the Plains, transformed under cattle ranching, was perceived by foreigners and *llaneros* as "destinated" for it (Arias 2017: 28-31). *Llanero* were the Plains' colonisers, taming the wilderness through cattle ranching or "el trabajo de *llano"*, a *llanero* expression that I translate in this thesis as the "*llano*'s work" and which I will explain in the next section. Concurrently, *llaneros* were the humans determined by

159 Cattle ranching has never been the sole economic activity in the Plains, for agriculture has always been part of the hato's life. Nevertheless, agricultural workers have been purposely rendered invisible in the region's history, music, and other cultural expressions. This tendency has been reversed only very recently.

the Plains' nature: "the *llanero* appears as part of this particular physical environment of savannas, rivers, loneliness, natural and social deserts, and at the same time, wild nature that he had been domesticating through the work of cattle"[160] (Arias 2017: 30). The narrator in the novel *Doña Barbara* (1985) captures this tautology when describing the equivalence of the Plains and the *llanero*: "The Plains makes you mad, and the madness of the man of the wide and free land is to be a *llanero* always".[161] The *llanero* became the "natural" human of the Plains, the product and producer of its pastoral world.

The naturalisation of extensive cattle ranching in the Plains is the genesis of the *llanero* peoples. This genesis is reaffirmed in the way in which the history of the Plains has been written. According to historian Lina Gómez (2015), unlike other Colombian regions, the history of Colombia's *llanos* is composed of studies undertaken by *llanero* intellectuals and amateur historians. The *Llaneros* have been prolific in producing historical and sociological studies, comprised mostly of descriptive accounts about their "way of life", yet lacking a rigorous revision of sources and historiographic thinking.[162] Gómez asserts that, with some noteworthy exceptions, the *llano's* history has been written in this fashion until recently.[163]

Basically, until the last two decades for academia, "the region was self-evident"[164] (*ibid*. 115). For a historian like Gómez, her work is precisely a corrective attempt of the *llanos* "self-evidence", regarded as an "interpretative limit" (Rueda Enciso 1989) to understanding the region's history. Like others revising this history to account for the diverse "frontier experiences" (c.f. Jane Raush 2006), Gómez's (2015) work describes the ecological diversity, the discontinuous occupation of the space and the multiplicity of political processes in San Martin's territory.[165] She explains the Plains' "heterotopia" (Gómez 2015: 23) as opposed to the homogenising vision of the region as the "The steppe Orinoquia" (Baquero Nariño

160 "El *llanero* aparece como parte de este medio físico particular de sabanas, ríos, soledad, desiertos naturales y sociales, y a la vez, naturalezas salvajes que él había ido domesticando por medio de la ganadería (Arias 2017:30).
161 My translation from Spanish: "El *llano* enloquece y la locura del hombre de la tierra ancha y libra es ser *llanero* siempre".
162 *Llaneros* created the "Meta Academy of History". They have hosted symposiums every two years since 1985, where historians, amateur historians, writers, and intellectuals from the Colombian and Venezuelan Plains gather to reflect upon the most diverse aspects of the region's history (c.f. Baquero Narino 2004).
163 This tendency has been reversed in the last twenty years. Recently, social scientists have looked at the territory to understand the role of cattle ranching in the ecological and social transformation of the region (Arias 2004), and the different policies that make Meta different from the Casanare, Arauca and Vichada departments (Rausch 1999), the tensions between rural and urban dynamics in the Plains (Rausch 1999, 2006), the conflicts over land (Barbosa 1988), and, in general, the emergence of a distinctive region within the Colombian nation-state (Arias 2005, Gómez 2015)
164 In Spanish: "La region se explica sola."
165 In the twentieth century, Meta and Vichada became departments (see Map 2).

2004: 12), an idea that emerges from the region's self-referential historiography. Although this historical correctness is vital for the progress of academic knowledge, I contend that the region's "self-evidence" cannot be dismissed as a limit. On the contrary, the region's "self-evidence" discloses the mysticism fallen upon the historical processes that united Colombia's largest territory, fusing the departments from Arauca to Meta (Map 2 in Introduction), their urban and rural populations, and connecting the poor and the rich in a mode of being *llanero*. *Llaneros* emerged from the vernacularisation of the two languages of the European colonisers in that area, cattle ranching and Christianity. Furthermore, they emerge from the proclamation of a *llanero* "essence", palpable in *llanero* historiography, and, as I will show, in their aesthetics, oral traditions and *espantos*.

Llaneros' relative isolation from the colonial authorities and the Colombian State enabled them to develop a distinctive way of life over four centuries. The Plains took shape as a substantially different region from 'the feral Amazon' and 'the populated Andes' (Gómez 1998), for *llaneros* emerged as peoples living in-between "savagery" and "civilisation". As anthropologist and historian Julio Arias (2005) asserts:

> Above all, the *llanero* was produced as a liminal being who, despite being valued for his skills at working with cattle, was marginalised as a barbarian, violent and unrestrained, traits resulting from his indigenous ancestry. The image of the *llanero* was like that of the Eastern region, in between domestication and savagery, an insalubrious land but full of wealth and prosperity (Arias 2005: 118).

Cowboys, the *llanero* men domesticating wild cattle and fighting animals in the bushes, are the protagonists of the perennial colonisation,[166] that movement between "domestication and savagery", to paraphrase Arias (2005), where *llaneros* constantly prove their force against the wilderness yet never fully claim victor y over it. The Plains' perennial colonisation provides a trope for *llanero* music, poems, oral narratives, novels, paintings, and material culture. It is the encoded aesthetics of *llanero* pastoralism. Although some authors confine *llanero* pastoralism to "folklore" emerging from the explosion of Colombian "costumbrist" art and trace it to some "Hispanic origins" (Vergara and Vergara

166 It is important to highlight that not all *llaneros* are cowboys. Except in rare cases, cowboys are always men. In the typical *hato* gendered division of labour, men work with cattle while women attend to the children, the kitchen, the house's domestic shores, the chickens and the garden. Also, some *llaneros* are "conuqueros" who work in typical agricultural labour, often across the river backs.

1867: 210 in Arias 2017: 33), there is more to *llanero* oral tradition and arts than their formal qualities. *Llanero* pastoralism produces the *llanero* perennial taming, a beautiful and worthy way of life.[167]

As my work in the Plains progressed, I started to understand that the region's "mystique" – its reputation as a magical land - had less to do with magical happenings (Rausch 2008; Bjork-James 2015) than with the accomplished mystification of the *llanero* ways of life. *Llanero* pastoralism is not merely a set of cultural expressions identifying *llaneros* as a "regional type" (Arias 2017) in a multicultural Colombia. It refers to the process of *llaneros* creating themselves by creating the *llanos*, claiming the region as a distinct world, a mode of being, inseparable from the work with cattle. *Espantos* are part of *llanero* pastoralism and, thus, assertions of the value of *llanero* life by *llaneros* themselves. Hence, the significance of *cruzado* juxtaposition to these mystical beings, who have receded to make space for the supernatural bulletproof men eliciting a world that has nothing to do with the work with cattle.

The "*Llano's* work"

Images of the *llanero* as "heroic, free, picturesque cowboys" (Rausch 2008) proliferated after their crucial participation in the independence wars in 1820: "The *llanero* was a symbol of the liberation struggle (…) when his depiction as a "centaur": a warrior figure materialised, guided by freedom and absolute independence, but also the symbol of the union between barbarism and civilisation" (Arias 2017: 32). The figure of the "centaur" became popular among intellectuals and politicians visiting the region throughout the twentieth century.[168] This image of *Llaneros* as natural heroes is also poetically described in novels set in the Plains: "The race of fearless men that has given more than one centaur

167 This is manifest in accounts of travellers and intellectuals -also in the novels set against the Plains describing the "disdain" and "contempt" that *llaneros* displayed against foreigners who could not "do" what cowboys do in their everyday or did not see *llanero* things are "they were". See, for example, the descriptions of Colombian politician Eduardo Restrepo in his book "flight to the Orinoco" (1870: 159) "The *llanero* does not conceive of a sedentary life and professes the highest disdain for the men of the cities" or the words of Geographer and historian Vergara y Velasco (1982: 967): "(…) whence their [*llaneros*] contempt for refined people incapable of kicking (throwing down) a bull like them". (Quoted in Arias 2017: 31-33).

168 By 1947, for example, government official General de Leon wrote: "in the national mentality [the territories] are clouded by a legend, part epic, and part daring, a romantic adventure, featuring improbable cowboys taking on ferocious jaguars, wild bulls, and enormous snakes, if not numerous and warlike tribes of Indians, lands divided by rivers filled with crocodiles and caimans, stingrays and quicksand (…)" (Rausch translation 1999: 10).

to the epopee, and more than one 'cacique' to the Plains", states the narrator in the celebrated novel *Doña Barbara*.

Llaneros carved for themselves a nationwide reputation as "Centaurs," libertarian men of "extraordinary courage" (Jose Maria Samper in Rausch's translation 1999: 10).[169] However, except for the occasional reference to *llanero* military leaders during independence,[170] and during "The Violence", everyday allusions to *llaneros*' bravery refer to the situations that cowboys face working with cattle. In other words, stories about *llaneros*' bravery are not placed in the context of warfare but in the "trabajo de *llano*" or the "*llano*'s work" (Bjork-James 2015: 116). This common expression in the Plains needs some explaining.

Throughout my fieldwork, I regularly stayed in one of the few big *hato*s or cattle ranches remaining in the San Martin area, visiting Don Jose, a *criollo* I met at a social gathering. Don Jose is a poet, singer, composer and seasoned cowboy who took the time to explain to me what is "el trabajo de *llano*". Jose describes himself as the "caporal",[171] the older and more experienced cowboy in charge of running the *hato* for one of San Martin's traditional families. Jose delegates the various jobs in the *hato* to the workers, which every day involves working the cattle, or the "*llano*'s work". This includes herding or *arreo*, checking groups of cattle or horses in their pastures, moving them from one to another, providing them with salt, and segregating or reuniting the groups. Ordinarily, cattle are brought into the corral to be cured, treated, vaccinated, marked, castrated, inseminated, and kept under surveillance during a difficult pregnancy or contagious illness.

I had to become a decent horse rider in a very short time to accompany the cowboys on their daily *arreo,* something I accomplished thanks to Jose's belligerent teaching style. Horses are the main means of production for cowboys, the first tamed wilderness, essential for taming the cattle and the Plains. In most *hato*s today, the *arreo* ordinarily involves less

169 As historian *De la Pedraja's* statement illustrates, *llaneros* are known for being "reluctant to obey any authority, and of a very accentuated independent spirit" (quoted in Rausch 1984: 2). Journalist Galvis wrote in 1938 that the *llanero* is a "happy man (...) owner and master of all that surrounds him, tranquil and free, far away from civilisation and the noise of the world". The same journalist Galvis reviewed his articles about the Plains many years later, emphasising how government neglect, theft, violence, and diseases have contributed to the decline of the cattle-ranching economy and, thus, of *llaneros* (Rausch 1999: 170).

170 Military leader Juan Nepomuceno Moreno in the Casanare department built his reputation as a brave *llanero* during the independence wars and tried to position the region in the national order (Arias 2017:32).

171 The designated foreman of slaves and later of workers in the *haciendas*. 'Caporal' was the title of the cowboy directing vaquerias or the travel with cattle across the Plains. He was the ultimate authority during the journey and, in the *hatos*, the second in charge after the owners. Currently nonexistent in other parts of Colombia, the word 'caporal' is still used in the Plains, but its original meaning has died out, along with *vaquerias*. It has been replaced by the word "encargado", which translates as "manager."

than 100 animals and lasts a few hours. Participating in it was extremely important for expanding my understanding of *llaneros*' voluptuous lexicon and deixis, containing notions of space, time, movement, categories of colour, and sound, which mediate their relationship with the environment that they transform through the work with cattle. In other words, the world contained in the "*llano's work*".

A recurrent theme in conversations with cowboys was their disposition to work hard to carry on with the "*llano*'s work". Many recalled their fathers and uncles in their family, who taught them to "lose their fear" and work hard from a very young age. Basilio, another *criollo* like Jose, remembers that his uncle threatened to beat him with a *chaparro,* a stick used to strike animals, if he failed to ride an untamed horse. Knowing that his uncle never made a false threat, for he was "so so *llanero*", ten-year-old Basilio climbed on the horse and clung to it, as he was more afraid of his uncle than of the erratic beast. The same happened when he was asked to bullfight and perform tasks that seemed impossible for his size and age: he just had to do it because, with real *llaneros*, you could never argue. Jose, now almost 60 years old, and all the older cowboys I met, recall similar experiences. They emphasise that such an upbringing qualified them to perform the most dangerous tasks and develop an array of job skills. Basilio and Jose are experienced cowboys who conceptualise bravery as part of a work ethic, where being a good *llanero* means to be a hard and daring worker.

I had a taste of this self-will acquired through work after an experience stopping a bull from breaching an opened fence. On the orders of Don Jose, given amid a tense situation with the herds, I had to manoeuvre my horse in front of the enormous beast and approach it, shouting and waving my hands to dissuade it from crossing. This performance of assertiveness was entirely for the animals, for I was put in charge of a crucial task to avoid ruining the afternoon's work of separating three herds. As with all good performance, I had to believe it myself, to become what I was pretending to be: brave. This act of 'believing-becoming courageous' was a transformative experience. It enabled me to understand Jose's repeated answer to my questions about the "real" cowboy: "a cowboy does what he has to do. It is not just about working with cattle; he does what he is asked to do". I understood that becoming a cowboy was not about physical strength, but about

the skill and self-determination acquired through the demands of "el trabajo de *llano*". As I learnt from my brutal horse-riding tutorials, these demands include compliance with established hierarchies fixed by seniority and gender. This disposition to work hard, as in "to do what it takes", is also mentioned in *llanero* novels. In *Las Guahibiadas*, a novel by author Silvia Aponte (2005), it is described as "the inner sufferer": the cowboy's most valuable possession.[172]

Tamers of fears, horses, cattle and dangers of all kinds, cowboys recount the Plains' perennial colonisation through the "*llano*'s work", the source of economic and social value, and the aesthetics of *llanero* pastoralism. This is best exemplified in *llanero* music, where sounds, compositional forms and lyrics convey the world emerging in *llaneros* work with cattle".[173] It is also noticeable in everyday expressions, such as those that use words like *cerrero* to refer to wild animals, bold peoples and raw substances, as in "feral" states; the term *recio* to refer to the toughness and determination as virtues of someone's character, or the Spanish word *brioso*,[174] which is commonly used to describe waters, animals and people, and connotes the beauty of their wild being. These everyday words express the aesthetical values derived from the "*llano*'s work" and the movement of "taming" it recreates.

The "*llano's* work" is the backdrop of stories about cowboys' bravery, often describing the journeys across the Plains in the long *vaquerias* or large *arreos* in times past. In all my conversations with cowboys, I heard stories about them swimming across torrential rivers, knocking over bulls, riding furious horses, or shooting an aggressive anaconda with a gun. The heroic and sometimes humorous stories are an essential part of *criollo* gatherings and an indispensable part of folklore books, *llanero* songs, and novels set in the Plains.[175] Like

172 It is also a recurrent theme in songs, for example, "Mucho *Llano* pa' un *Llanero*" or "Too much *Llano* for a *llanero*" by Walter Silva: "If I were to be a boy again/I would choose to be "mensual" and "becerrero"/ If that be conducive to one day becoming "caballicero" /Being obedient in life and working vigorously/You could get to be a "caporal" and have your own branding iron/A hardworking *llanero*, cowboy and ranger/he is jubilant at the sight of the boundless horizon /And swallows the clean, pasture-free Savannah /Calm as his shadow /Free as a travelling wind". The terms "mensual", "becerrero" and "caballicero" are different jobs on the hato, assigned by seniority. My translation from Spanish: "Si volviera a ser muchacho/Escogeria ser mensual y becerrero/Con tal de llegar a ser algún día Caballicero,/Siendo obediente en la vida y trabajando con esmero/Se puede ser caporal y tener su propio hierro/Un *llanero* de a caballo trabajador y vaquero/Se extasía en el horizonte a la vista sin linderos/Y se traga la Sabana limpiecita y sin potrero/Tranquilo como su sombra/Libre cual viento viajero".

173 *Llanero* music has changed over time as much as other music. However, there is strong support for what some denominate as "canonical *llanero* music" versus a "modern" variety. While the Introduction of new sounds and instruments, like the banjo, is generally accepted, criollos draw the line when it comes to music that does not reflect the" *llano*'s work". *Llanero* music is varied and addresses all topics, from love songs to those about animals, plants, landscapes or noisy neighbours. However, "the *llano*'s work" is always present in the lexicon or the story's background. "Modern" songs leave this aside, arguably pursuing a commercial interest.

174 Although translated into English as "spirited", *brioso*, in its *llanero* usage, entails both beauty and wilderness.

175 Such as the fights with "tigers" or the Jaguar described by Chaquea (1969: 96), or the type of songs called *corridos* that immortalise cowboy feats in musical tales, as the words conveyed by cowboys in *Doña Barbara* exclaimed, the Plains is an "ample land, responsive to the effort and

other expressions of *llanero* pastoralism, cowboys' heroic narratives are acts of self-affirmation as distinctive peoples, sustaining the genesis of *llanero* values in "el trabajo de *llano*".

Figure 14. A *Campechana*. Objects like a *campechana*, the typical llanero hammock made of raw leather, encompass the values attached to the "*llano*'s work". Hard and rough when new, the proper *campechana* must be used for months before it softens and becomes properly comfortable. As I corroborated during some sleepless nights, using a *campechana* requires endurance and determination. In the words of *llaneros*: to tame this *cerrero* hammock, you must be *recio.*

The "*llano's* work" is a *llanero* mode of producing the Plains sustained in the artistic and everyday expressions of *llanero* pastoralism and reproduced historically through *llaneros*' active defence of their ways of life. The counterpart of "perennial colonisation" is the Plains' "permanent frontier", which has been produced in a series of violent conflicts against indigenous peoples, royalist armies, and conservative militias, peoples who had represented a threat to the "*llano*'s work" in different moments in the history of the region. These clashes fashioned the Plains as a frontier, a land riddled by violence wherein struggles over accessing land and resources (Rausch 1984) have been framed as an agonistic conflict of righteous *llaneros* versus "others" threatening their ways of life. Thus, the *llanero* frontier is not merely a discourse about how the Plains "lacked" incorporation into the colonial regime and later the Colombian State. The *llaneros* were owners of their frontier; they signified this by fighting their "enemies". The *llanero* frontier is an overarching narrative through which *llaneros* have defined these conflicts in their own terms and interpret the history of their territory, their history as the Plains' colonisers, producing the region by defending the "*llano*'s work" (Rausch 1999, Arias 2017).

good for the deeds, just horizons, like hope, all paths, like will", exclaims a cowboy witnessing the feat (Gallegos 1985: 59). My translation from Spanish: "Tierra abierta y tendida, buena para el esfuerzo y la hazaña; toda horizontes, como la esperanza, toda caminos, como la voluntad".

Fighting the treacherous "others" threatening their ways of life, the *llanero* "centaur" is fearless. Or he was once, in earlier times. According to Jose, "el trabajo de *llano*" is not as demanding as it used to be. In the old days – he says - "the work was demanding because the jobs were delicate, the horses were delicate, and the trips were long (…) then, people used to be 'good' because the work demanded it, and you had to deliver". According to cowboys from San Martin, today, the "*llano's* work" has changed for the work in the *hato*s, since the ranches are small, enclosed by fences, *vaquerias* last weeks and not months, cattle and horses are domesticated, and cowboys are tied to *hatos* and towns rather than to the vast Plains (Bjork James 2015). If I were writing a book about my conversations with cowboys and *criollos*, I would entitle it "Tristes *Llanos*", after Levi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* (2006), where he accounts the complexities and beauty of the worlds that he thought were disappearing as a result of modern changes. *Criollos*' nostalgia reminded me of Strauss' sense of loss, which, as I explore in this chapter, closely relates to their silence. Their stories, always set against what the "*llano*'s work" used to be, often contain stories about *espantos*.

Espantos

I spent many hours of fieldwork listening to *criollos'* stories about spirits known as *espantos*. In most gatherings, they talk about "The Hat Lady", "The Weaver", "The Whistling Man", and "Juan Machete",[176] just to name a few of these spirits. As a Colombian, I was familiar with *espantos*, a term that means "those who terrify", spirits regarded as part of Colombian and South American "folklore", like the well-known story of "The Wailer" or "Llorona". However, I was surprised by the ways in which *llaneros* claim to have a close relation to *espantos*.

176 In Spanish "La Sombrerona", "La Tejedora", "La Bola de Fuego", "El Silbon", "El Carro Fantasma", "Juan Machete".

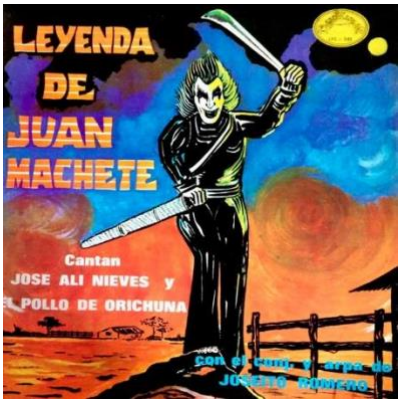


Figure 15. *Leyenda de Juan Machete*. Album cover for the version of the story of Juan Machete set to music by Jose Ali Nieves, 2018, Discos Cachilapo. This *espanto* wandered in the Plains after he made a pact with the devil. Celebrating *espantos* is common in the region, where many songs, poems, plays and parades are dedicated to them.

In contrast to other Colombian regions, where they are limited to oral narratives, in the Plains, *espantos* are immortalised in art and festivals. In San Martin, for example, there is a parade in April called the "*espantos*' party", where actors dress up to represent famous *espantos*, mocking the audience while the narrator recites the song from which the parade takes the name. The song's authorship is today disputed among *criollo* composers, who in interviews explained that these wandering spirits are characteristic of the Plains as much as cowboys. Talking with them made me appreciate the corpus of songs, poems, folkloric and literary works where the connexion between *espantos* and cowboys is rightfully stated.[177] As described in *Doña Barbara*, one of the novels by Romulo Gallegos set in the Plains:

> Under the roofs of the *caneyes* [ranches] or standing on the corral's doors, one cowboy always talks about the *espantos* that have revealed themselves to him (...) The restless life of the cowboy and his vivacious imagination provide for thousand adventures to tell, each more extraordinary than the other: 'the dead' to all those to whom they manifest, from the Uribante to the Orinoco and from the Apure to the Meta [see: Introduction, map], I know their hairs and signs – He Pajarote, [one of the cowboys from the novel] used to say (…) (Gallegos 1985: 50).

Like the novels *Cantaclaro* by the same author, *The Guahibiadas* by Silvia Aponte and *The Vortex* by Jose Eustacio Rivera, also set in the Plains, *Doña Barbara* portrays *espantos* as

177 For example, the poetic compositions "The Silbon", "Anima de Santa Elena", "The Lost Lumberjack", the famous "The Caporal and the Espanto", and "Florentino and the Devil", the legends of "Juan Machete", and "The Uverito". Some compositions were part of the oral tradition and later recorded in songs, enacted in plays, and recounted in folkloric books like "Around the Plains' Corners", a popular reference point for *llaneros* of all ages, written by the criollo Pedro Nel Suarez (2001).

central to *llanero* storytelling. The above passage describes them as part of cowboys' "vivacious imagination", the source of the oral tradition developing in the sociality of *caneyes* or ranches of the *hato*s. *Espantos*, then, have a connection to cowboys, the men producing the Plains through cattle ranching, and to *criollos*, the *llanero* storytellers *par excellence*.

Most iconic *llanero espantos*, "the Hat Lady", "The Weaver", "The Whistling Man", "The Sayona", and "Juan Machete" are human-like. This is unique compared to *espantos* in other territories, such as the famous "Mother Jungle" in the regions with tropical forests, an *espanto* described as an animal-like creature punishing greedy hunters. It is also the case for the "Cucacuy", a pig-gobbling creature and "The Golden Spade", an animated object inhabiting the colonial road that united the *llano* with Bogotá (Martinez 2019: 121-122), to name a few examples. Also, *espantos* in other regions are often associated with specific geographical features like mountains, rocks, lakes and riverbanks (Guava 2009, Martinez 2019: 133). The *llanero* human-like *espantos*, in contrast, live a "restless" life, roaming across the savannahs of the Plains. Thus, like cowboys, *espantos* are transhumant, a word that designates the entrenched connection between pastoralism and human movement across space (in a territory) and time (during certain seasons). Cowboys' nomadic life responds to the seasonal work in the extensive cattle ranches. Although their transhumance has been poetically sustained in their professed love for freedom in songs, poems and literature (c.f. Restrepo 1970: 159), it was ultimately convenient for those who started to accumulate land in the ninetieth century (Arias 2017: 31, 32). Cowboys, the wandering agency "humanising" the Plains and producing a pastoral society through the "*llano*'s work", find in the spectral bodies of the Plains human-like *espantos* a resonating chamber.[178]

Throughout my fieldwork, it was clear that *espantos* were not regarded as ordinary ghosts. Human-like spirits are not associated with historical characters, like the apparitions of the masters of the sugar cane plantations in the Cauca Valley (Taussig 1980) or the worshipped spirit of liberators like Simon Bolivar (Whitehead 2004). Neither of these are like spirits of the dead, inhabiting the place of their death. While watching a Colombian reality TV show

178. Unlike cosmologies where animals and plants are agencies producing the world, all agencies in the *llanero* pastoral universe are human-like: cowboys, *llaneros*, criollos and all the colonisers "taming" the Plains and producing them in music, dance, material culture and literature that celebrates the everyday life of cattle-ranching work.

called “They are here”, in which specialists in paranormal phenomena spend time in “haunted” places, I teased, “We should write to this show so that they can come and document *espantos*”. My host family, also watching the programme, turned and reprimanded me, for it was outrageous to affirm that *espantos* were ghosts that could be lured or hunted down. They explained that *espantos* are not attached to one place and select where and to whom to appear. Thus, *espantos* are special spirits with human-like agency inhabiting the Plains in all its breadth: "from Apure to Meta", as the passage from *Doña Barbara* above describes.

Although *espantos* instil fear, people commonly describe what they feel towards them as “respect” - an interesting word choice if we consider that these spirits are cursed for their terrible sins and can also kill. The "Whistling Man" is the spirit of a son who killed his father and ate his guts, "The Fireball" is fire from the spirits of two "compadres”[179] who became sexually involved, while the widely famous "Wailer" killed her children. The list goes on. The restless "Weaver", "The Sayona" or "Teeth Women", and "The Hat Lady" are female sinners due to their exacerbated sexual l*ibid*o, and in general, known for seducing men. With some variation, all *espantos* tell of the origins of sin in the transgressing kinship norms and traditional gender roles. In this sense, *espantos* are "respected" because, like the dead in the purgatory of the Catholic cosmos, they are purging their sins and thus uphold the vitality of the Christian moral.

Espantos can be understood as forms of "historical memory in religious language" – to use the words of anthropologist Losonczy (2001) – similar to the spirits of the dead in the purgatory or *animas* that she studied in Colombian urban cemeteries. She finds that “cults to the *animas*" multiplied in the cities after the violent uprooting of a vast proportion of the Colombian rural population in the aftermath of the civil war known as "The Violence" (see Introduction). According to Losonzcy, the veneration of *animas* in the city[180] progressively replaced people's relations with the spirits of their own dead, and the forms of domestic and community memory these spirits concentrated. "Cults to the *animas*"

179 "Compadres" are the godfather and godmother appointed during a child's baptism. The relationship of "compadrazgo" has been described in different parts of South America. It is particularly relevant in rural areas, where it extends into the sphere of kinship, duties, and rights to people outside the family network, such as the employers of a child's parents. In the Plains, "compadres" become like brothers and sisters; therefore, their union is regarded as incestuous.

180 Literature about the cult of *animas* in Colombia addresses the relationship between violence, memory, mourning and trauma (Villa, 1993, Losonczy, 2001; Peláez, 2001).

introduced novel forms of exchange with the "new" dead, thenceforth becoming forms of urban and national memories erected over those broken in the mass uprooting caused by "The Violence". As with *animas*, so *espantos* are memories in religious language. By eliciting the origins of sin, they recall the Plain's Christianisation.

Often dismissed as trivial and picturesque tales and seldom scrutinised as a significant part of a territory's history (c.f. Martinez 2019), the presence of *espantos* in everyday and canonical expressions of *llanero* pastoralism, like music and literary works, connect them with the world of values emerging from the "*llano*'s work". As I have shown, in their spectral bodies, *espantos* condense the converging of the two processes that gave shape to the Plains: on the one hand, the pastoral society produced by cowboys, and on the other, the Christianisation of the region. They are forms of memory of the Plains' formation, which are not fixed as chronological events but historical zones of transformation: the advent of a *llanero* way of producing the Plains. The centrality of *espantos* in *llanero* life reveals their ideological dimension, insofar as they are forms of memory. *Espantos*, like other expressions of *llanero* pastoralism, mystify the "*llano*'s work", naturalising it as the origins of the *llanero* people world while reproducing a *llanero* pastoral world as a worthy way of life.

Espantos and *Cruzados*

After having shown how they relate to *llanero* pastoralism, I can now begin to explain the relevance of *espantos'* proximity to *cruzados*.

Stories about *espantos* describe "encounters" with these scary sinners when travelling across the Plains, mainly during the "*llano*'s work". The stories tenor of mystery describes *espantos* with fascination and deliberate attempts to enhance disbelief. I first observed this during the discussions at the film club I organised in the town's library. Horror films over October's Halloween cycle were attended by people of different ages and recognised *criollos* whom I invited specially for this occasion. After the projection, the *criollos* entertained the attendees with stories of *espantos*. "The Hat Lady", "The Weaver", "The Whistling Man", "The Ghost Car", "The Lone Soul", and "The Bushman" were followed by

stories where protagonists thought they had seen or heard an *espanto*, only to find out later it was a bird or a horse scratching its back in a strange position. Stories of *espantos* metamorphosed into anecdotes about elaborate pranks that made someone believe they saw or heard an *espanto*. Twists in the *criollos'* narrative created an environment of enhanced disbelief, where *espantos* become just tales, yet engendering tales become the true power of *espantos*.

I observed the same concatenation of stories and anecdotes at other gatherings of *criollos*. On one occasion, one of the *criollos* attending grew exasperated by my interruptions aimed at clarifying what he "really" saw. He said, "Look" - standing in an authoritative position – "there are two types of *espantos,* the one I saw [while playing the prank] and the one they saw [the ones scared by the prank]". I learnt that, for *criollos*, when it comes to *espantos*, establishing what is real from what is not is inconsequential. Don Jose, my *criollo* friend, indicated something similar when we were discussing why he does not think of himself as a good storyteller: "Well, maybe that is why I never came across an *espanto*, nor anything strange has ever appeared to me, I am not good at telling stories!" Although I immediately started laughing, since this seemed absurd, I eventually understood the significance of his reflection. *Llaneros* like Don Jose do not dwell on the ultimate truth about *espantos* or the supernatural. *Llaneros*' phenomenology of *espantos* constantly blurs the line between believing and make-believe, an essential drive in their sense of humour, also expressed in other narrative forms.[181] As Don Jose, and all the other *criollos* I met taught me, *espantos* are stories about cowboys' encounters with *espantos*. They are part of cowboys' "vivid imagination", as described in the novel *Doña Barbara*. Consequently, *espantos* positions cowboys as storytellers and as world-makers.

Instead of dismissing *criollos*' attitudes towards *espantos* as a contradiction, I approach their disbelief as central to grasping *espantos'* significance for *llaneros*. For *criollos*, *espantos* are as real as their pastoral world, produced in the shared values deriving from the "*llano*'s work". Like the region's "self-evidence" and the artistic and everyday expressions elaborating the essence of the Plains in "el trabajo de *llano*", the attitudes

181 For example, the narrative forms are known as the "cacho", exuberant tales that people tell to pass the time, aimed at mixing reality and fiction to test the audience's gullibility. A "cacho" starts as a familiar story, an anecdote, but becomes more and more surreal, passing from improbable to ridiculous and bizarre with such speed that you are left with no other option but to laugh. Moreover, that is its purpose.

towards *espantos* unveil *llaneros'* pressing understanding of their world in-the-making; hence, the relevance that stories about *cruzados* occur in the same social space as *espantos*.

Stories about *cruzados* are frequently told as addenda to stories of *espantos*. On some social occasions I attended, *criollos* started to talk about *espantos,* creating a storytelling space that, after a while, younger *llaneros* turned into a marathon of stories about *brujeria* and *cruzados.* As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, I had several opportunities to observe *criollos'* defiant silence when younger people turned the conversation to *cruzados*.

To test my observations, I did a small social experiment and contacted a schoolteacher friend in town to ask him if I could run a workshop about *espantos* at the school. I conducted two workshops and provided a scenario for young people to talk explicitly about *espantos*. Prepared with photos, songs and books about the Plains with references to *espantos*, I asked them about the stories they knew and if they or someone close to them had ever seen *espantos*. Sooner than I expected, the youngsters were bored. They knew some stories and recognised some *espantos* but did not identify any personal connection with them: neither close encounters nor emotions when recalling stories – not even mischief. As I suspected, the young were holding off to get into *brujeria*. Embedded in *brujeria* stories were references to *cruzados* that they had heard in their families or neighbourhoods, some directly from ex-paramilitaries. The workshop with urban *llanero* youth corroborated my previous observations: unlike stories about *espantos,* stories of *cruzados* came natural to them. Their relation to the world where *cruzados* emerge reflects that their life has probably been touched by the paramilitary presence and not much by the environment of the "*llano*'s work".

My experiment resonates with the findings of Martinez's work on the oral history of the colonial road connecting Bogotá to the Plains. She describes that people affirm that *espantos* and other mythical beings rarely appear nowadays, for they have been displaced by witches and spirits linked to killings during "The Violence" and paramilitary massacres (Martinez 2019: 114-117). She states that people are eager to talk about the new spirits, which are connected to the precise locations of violent killings and thus serve as reminders of the armed violence that shaped the history of the towns connected by the road (*ibid*., 114).

Similar to Martinez's findings, the attitude of the young *llaneros* suggests that stories about *cruzados* recall paramilitaries' presence in town, a presence that transformed their families, neighbourhoods and the public space, and that is much more important for them than the stories recollecting the "*llano*'s work".

Stories about *cruzados* are simple accounts that often refer generically to *cruzados* rather than a named, individual paramilitary fighter. People talk about *cruzados* as fierce fighters like "Rambo", the famous Vietnam veteran soldier, flying from tree to tree in combat, like the warriors in the film the *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*[182] or "like wolverine, with their sharp black claws" – says Camilo, the ex-paramilitary introduced in chapter one. As the youth in my workshop mentioned, stories about supernatural bulletproof men are about "observing" or having met someone who "witnessed" their bulletproof powers. This talk puts the listener in the place of a "witness" of the supernatural arising from paramilitary violence. The stories underline situations of battle, escapes or violent confrontation. Therefore, references to *cruzados* bring the "spectacular" bravery and luck of the paramilitary into ordinary talk in social life, bravery that greatly differs from the strength and determination developed through the "*llano*'s work".

The juxtaposition of *cruzados* with *espantos* is a statement of the increasing importance of the paramilitary in the Plains. It positions younger *llaneros* and paramilitaries as new storytellers, alienating cowboys and silencing *criollo*s. Furthermore, this alienation speaks of a new form of producing the Plains, a form that does not involve the "*llano*'s work" nor its mystification, but the world of unhuman war and the multiple business opportunities it allows.

As mystical memories of *llaneros*' origins, the ideological dimension of *espantos* is further revealed in their current retreat from the region. This retreat is attributed to the disarticulation of traditional cattle ranching, the accelerated growth of urban centres and the concurrent increasing influence of Pentecostal churches, whose religious *Doxa* dismiss *espantos* altogether, along with the purgatory and the entire Catholic cosmos. These

182 Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon is an epic martial arts film directed by Ang Lee, released in 2000, featuring majestic fights between flying warriors.

changes are attributed to the consolidation of the paramilitaries in the region. in the next two sections, I explore further how the *espantos'* disappearance relates to the paramilitaries' presence.

Espantos' Disappearance

People often preface *espantos*' stories with the expression "back in the day",[183] following with a description of rural life on the *hato*, when cattle ranching demanded a great deal of time travelling across the Plains' wilderness. They claim that nowadays *espantos* are disappearing from the Plains, thus no longer appearing to people. Recognised *criollos* Pedro Nel Suarez, book author and researcher, and Cachi Betancourt, composer and writer, have poetically articulate in their work people's nostalgic outcries about *espantos* disappearance. In conversation, Cachi affirmed that *espantos* "are not going to appear where there is lighting, where there are many people or in African Palm plantations; they like the open and solitary savannahs, like all good *llaneros*". With his characteristic wittiness, Cachi blatantly expresses what others merely hint: *espantos'* existence stands in opposition to the development of urban centres and economies competing with cattle ranching and changing the landscape of the Plains (like African Palm, oil extraction, and drug trafficking). Consequently, the disappearance of *espantos* is directly associated with regional changes that can be traced back to "The Violence" in 1950, changes that accelerated in the 1980s with the consolidation of new economies under the influence of paramilitarism. I will now lay out some important aspects of these changes.

Official narratives explain the modernisation of the *llanos* in the Liberal reforms of 1930, the first consistent effort of the Colombian State to integrate the region (Rausch 1999, Gómez 2015). However, *llanero* historians and *criollos* identify "The Violence" - a civil war between Conservative and Liberal party affiliates - as the beginning of the *llano's* transformation (see Introduction). Their expression "back in the day" refers to the times before "The Violence", when San Martin was a secluded and self-sufficient town with a strong egalitarian ethos, where people preserved tight kinship networks, cohesive

183 In Spanish, this expression can be a translation of "antiguamente" or "en los tiempos de antes", but people in the Plains often say: "Cuando el *llano* era *llano*", which literally translates as "When the *llano* was the *llano*", meaning that the *llano* of today, is not real *llano*.

economic practices, and the shared value of the "*llano*'s work".[184] This Edenic view is widespread among San Martineros, who insist on a narrative of the Plains' transformation that starts with the arrival of displaced families from the Santander, Antioquia, and Boyacá regions after "The Violence". Coming from farming traditions, the new settlers created pressure over land and resources, enforcing land-titling and the use of fences.[185] They brought in very different conceptions of land use, productivity, and capital accumulation. Even when invested in cattle ranching, they modified the pastures, breeds and techniques that *llaneros* had developed over centuries (Rausch 1984, 1999; Gómez 2015; Barbosa 1988; Arias 2017). For reasons of space, this chapter will not discuss these transformations further. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that they not only refer to the region's productive activities, for cattle ranching is still important in the Plains, but to the revolution in the system of production.[186]

Specifically for *llaneros,* changing from a system where wealth was measured in the number of cattle to one where the measure of wealth was land ownership, from a world of work as the generator of wealth, engendering riches and values, to one of capital as the key to wealth creation. Those transformations, commonly defined as the modernisation of the economy, occurred in parallel with State-sponsored institutional frameworks. For example, raising taxes on land and strict regulations on the commercialisation of beef, all of which further contributed to making the *llanero* mode of production unsustainable. The "*llano's* work" is a seasonal and extensive form of cattle herding that has been progressively displaced by intensive and industrialised cattle-ranching for outside consumption, what people call "the work of the *hato*s" (Duran 2012: 210; Bjork-James 2015: 116; Rausch 1984: 329).

In *llaneros'* accounts, paramilitarism appears as a prolongation of "The Violence". Paramilitary groups dispossessed people of their lands and made *hato*s unsustainable by constraining/forcing them to compete with the production of coca crops. They irrupted the town's collectiveness and strengthened drug trafficking, oil extraction and African

184 The historian Gómez (2015) calls the San Martin territory an "Eden for Colombia in the other side of Civilisation", for it was prosperous, self-sufficient and better connected with Andean Colombia than any other region of the Plains.
185 Fences hold a special place in people's memories of the times before "the Violence". Fences changed the landscape and the conception of property but also threatened the cowboys' freedom to circulate in the territory.
186 Dispossession and armed rule also impacted agricultural economies in the region, such as rice, watermelon, and pineapple, which could not compete with the profits of coca crops or pay the paramilitaries' high taxes.

Palm economies. Importantly, paramilitarism prompted new waves of migration to the region (a theme addressed in chapter five). Although this thesis is not concerned with detailing the numerous changes that paramilitarism has produced in Colombia, it is important to emphasise that the destruction of regional economies across the country has been one of its constant effects (Gill 2016).

While multiple historical factors have played a role in the decay of extensive cattle ranching, people in San Martin identify the paramilitaries as a determinant force in displacing traditional ways of working with cattle, the subsequent disintegration of large *hato*s, and rising urbanisation. This is probably because San Martin was the paramilitary headquarters in the region and experienced paramilitary operations earlier and more intensively than other areas of the Plains controlled by the FARC and ELN guerrillas. Therefore, Sanmartineros quickly establish a connection between paramilitarism and the diminishing importance of cattle ranching, the devaluation of cowboys' work, *criollos*' knowledge and the *llanero* mode of producing the Plains. Paramilitaries, rather than abstract forces of modernity, are the palpable force behind the decline of the "*llano*'s work" and the concomitant transformation of the Plains.

The disappearance of *espantos* from the savannahs of the Plains is directly associated with these transformations, thus, linked to the paramilitaries' presence. Their retreat is significant for *llaneros* because, as explained earlier, in their spectral bodies, *espantos* store memories of the Plains' origins in working with cattle. *Espantos* no longer appear to people in the "modern" Plains, yet *criollos* and older *llaneros* continue to tell stories about them from "back in the day". The stories' nostalgic endurance suggests that *espantos* are still relevant, despite no longer "living" in the *llanos*. *Espantos* have become memories "flashing up in a moment of danger" (Walter Benjamin, cited in Taussig 1987: 368), images of the fading world of "*llanos'* work", of the diminishing power of *llaneros* to produce their distinctive mode of being.

Nothing raises *espantos* as memories "flashing up in a moment of danger" as much as the recent annexation of stories of *cruzados*. In their proximity to *espantos*, *cruzados* elicit the presence of the paramilitaries silencing *criollos* and alienating them from their capacity to

reproduce their world. Unlike the open vision of the *llanero* pastoral world offered in *espantos, cruzados* rendition of the paramilitary "war machine" is not currently disappearing .

The New Men in Town

In their contiguity with *espantos,* stories of *cruzados* and parallel the onset of paramilitaries as what I call the "new men in town".

Although the "*llano*'s work" is not what it used to be and *espantos* are disappearing from the savannahs, narratives asserting cowboys as archetypes of bravery and freedom remain central in *llanero* sociality. Nowadays most cowboys live in town, picking up occasional contracts for working in *hatos*, and, not many of this generation are regarded as *criollos*. However, there is little else to the *llanero* identity than a claim to know and value all things *criollo*. *Criollos* are not just respected like cowboys, the engine of *hatos*' productivity, but revered as gatekeepers of *llanero* traditions expressed through storytelling and artistic creativity.

Renowned paramilitary commandants "Don Mario", "Piraban", and "Cuchillo" (mentioned in the previous chapter) often invited *criollos* to sit around the table and tell their stories of bravery in the open Plains. Even though some commandants, like "Cuchillo", were *llaneros*, most joined the groups at a young age, separating themselves from "el trabajo de *llano*". They were not cowboys, yet, like many *llaneros*, they had an appreciation of the "*llano*'s work" and, thus, of the *criollos*' stories. "You could not say no to them", said Don Jose, who often received invitations from commandants. On these occasions, paramilitaries told their stories of bravery, using paramilitary life as a backdrop in crossfire, battles, ambushes and military training. While these "new men" were putting *llaneros*' bravery at work on the same footing as their bravery at war – equating cowboys' to paramilitaries' strength – *criollos* were well aware that they were simultaneously eroding the cattle-ranching economy and contributing to the disarticulation of the "*llano*'s work". The fool-proof intellect of *criollos* never convinced itself of having the paramilitaries' "respect", and many negatively assess their prolonged presence in the *llanos*.

“Here, only we cowards are alive”, tells me Leo, a *criollo* expert on all matters of the region's culinary history. With the characteristic *criollo* refusal to elaborate on events during the paramilitaries’ consolidation or, for that matter, on *cruzado brujeria*, Leo used this sentence to abruptly end a story about a *criollo* killed by a paramilitary. Though generally respectful of each other, clashes between *criollos* and paramilitaries were inevitable. The guns and number of paramilitaries defeated the knives of solitary *criollos*, who, as Leo’s sentence suggests, learnt to occupy a new, silent place in a male hierarchy.

The “new men” intruded on the town’s social life in many ways. In conversation with older *llaneros* and *criollos*, I collected accounts about how paramilitaries transformed the town’s "atmosphere". One recurrent example was paramilitaries’ gradual displacement of the import of cowboys. “Back in the day”, cowboys’ arrival from the *vaquerias* was a joyful event in town, as they crowded local businesses, met new partners, or reunited with their families. However, with the arrival of the paramilitary multitude, cowboys ceased to be the privileged customers and the desirable bachelors. Paramilitaries arrived from battles and missions instead of *vaquerias* and competed with cowboys for romantic partners. Everyone I met in town vividly recalls that paramilitaries "got" all the women. I heard stories about young women seduced by paramilitaries' money and status, who became involved in romantic relationships and eventually formed families with them. Equally prevalent were the disturbing stories about mothers selling their daughters' virginity - voluntarily or coerced - to paramilitary commandants.

Women account for these happenings differently. They frequently emphasise how it was typical for cowboys to spend all of their income without giving their family's needs any thought. As gender roles go, being the "breadwinner" was not a positive quality attached to *llanero* men, whose reputation as trustworthy and respectable was forged at work, with other cowboys and their bosses, not from the opinions of their female partners. I heard stories from women about their hardships, raising their children with *llanero* men, particularly cowboys, who were often absent for months. In former times, cowboys’ wasteful disposition was eased by the existence of family support networks. As such networks diminished and the monetary system took over the economic practices such as

barter, poverty became excruciating. Cowboys crashed against the increased value of land and high rates of unemployment. In this context, when drug trafficking at the hands of paramilitaries made the latter's spending power greater than that of cowboys, and when women were no longer willing to endure the hardship of cowboys' prodigality, being the "breadwinner" became an important aspect of masculinity. According to many women, this is why paramilitaries, even if they were "foreigners", were preferred over cowboys to form new families.

Older men assert that the paramilitaries' presence changed the brothels, an essential space for the menfolk. Once a space of comradeship and celebration for adult men in town, brothels became dangerous places when the "new men" arrived and started monopolising the stalls and controlling sexual workers' activities. Paramilitaries changed the establishments' "atmosphere", displaying their guns in an intimidating fashion, demanding new musical rhythms and introducing whiskey and foreign brands of liqueur to a space that used to be about Colombian folk music and beer or *aguardiente*.[187] In San Martin, as in many other towns in the Plains, the "new men" eventually took over the business. They opened their brothels and accommodated the new demands. The former gender-making spaces became a class-making mechanism, adapted to the social differentiation that came with the new influx of money, and segregating men according to their budgets and tastes.

Consequently, like in other towns, in San Martin the paramilitary controlled women's sexuality by monopolising sexual workers, trading women's bodies and becoming desirable bachelors. This was sometimes attributed to the use of sorcery, a theme that lies beyond the scope of this thesis. The sexual sorcery or love magic deployed to monopolise women's sexuality and attain the powers of the old patriarchs retain similarities with the sorcery to attain supernatural bulletproof power: they both frame the presence of paramilitaries as "new men".

The "new men" refers to the ways paramilitaries displaced the cowboys' privileged position in the male hierarchy and became forces of social change. In one of the many conversations

187 *Aguardiente* is a Colombian alcoholic drink distilled from sugar cane.

where Don Jose was describing this change, he specified, "war came, the violence came, and they brought all the money, the money! They could not even manage it! They even brought the devil!". Don Jose's reasoning links paramilitary violence with the influx of money and the new economies that came with these groups, especially drug trafficking, which has displaced the "*llano*'s work" – not just cattle ranching as an economic activity, but as the source of social and aesthetic values. Despite what they shared with *criollos* at parties, the paramilitaries' priority was to increase their drug-trafficking empire and criminal networks at the expense of the "*llano*'s work". They triggered changes in gender and class relations, and even the music scene.[188] Paramilitaries embody the forces of modernity, the agents of the region's transformation.[189]

The presence of *cruzados* in the space of *espantos* alienates *criollos* as the storytellers who reproduce the *llanero* pastoral world in their stories. This alienation mirrors paramilitaries alienation of cowboys and *criollos* in social life: their displacement as the heart of the town's economy, the desirable bachelors, and the medium for incorporating foreign tastes and commodities. In other words, paramilitaries overtaking of cowboys as the producers of value.

Cruzados and the *Llanero* Mystique

> The Centaur is an entelechy
> (Gallegos 1985: 76).

188 Locals remember, for example, how Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha, the most powerful capo or drug-lord in the Plains during the golden age of cartels in the '80s, changed the musical landscape. The capo was fond of popular Mexican music, so he introduced mariachis, positioning the genre in the San Martin area by paying famous artists to play at festivals and private parties. Known nationwide as "the Mexican", Gacha transformed the hegemony of San Martin folkloric music and paved the way for "Norteña" music, a Mexican style that fully incorporated lyrics glorifying *capos* and criminal life, and became very popular across Colombia. Although these genres were not a novel musical phenomenon, the way they spread and were positively received in the traditionalist San Martin was tied to the consolidation of drug trafficking and paramilitarism: "because of their influence, of all the people who came from outside, so people here wanted to bond with them, to please them, they became vallenato lovers, *Norteña*-music lovers, all those musical styles and lifestyles", affirms Wilson -recognised musician and cultural agent in San Martin. The flip-side of positioning these and other musical styles was the progressive displacement of *llanero* music for the generations who grew up in town, where now "everyone had to listen to their [the paramilitaries'] music, otherwise, you were a fool (...)".

189 Gender division of labour in the *hato* was well defined. Women were "respected" insofar as they embraced such a role, associated with obedience to their fathers, brothers and husbands, skill in the kitchen and domestic shores, dutifulness towards family and certain forms of public behaviour that included showing a disposition to religious activities, abnegation and quietness. This silence opposes their behaviour at home, where they dominate the conversation and their tendency to tell stories and jokes in public about their male counterparts. Femininity ideal types included having a strong character, endurance and resilience, qualities considered suitable for raising a family. Although changes in gender relations have appeared across the country and throughout Latin America, shaping the subjectivity of men and women through different ideas of sexuality, family and freedom, in San Martin, such modern ideas developed under the permanent presence of paramilitaries. Challenges to patriarchy in the context of paramilitarism are closely linked to a new aspirational ethos, fashioned through the influx of money from drug trafficking.

The words are from a character in the novel *Doña Barbara*, who is inviting the young protagonist of the novel, a *llanero* raised in the city, to search his soul for his *llanero* essence, for the brave "centaur" living for the beauty and danger of the "*llano*'s work". As I have described in this chapter, this essence results from *llaneros'* mystifying their ways of life – hence, the "entelechy". *Llaneros* produced the Plains and created themselves through the "*llano*'s work".

This chapter has shown that *espantos* affirm this *llanero* essence, also articulated in music, literature and other art forms. For *llaneros, espantos* are as important as cowboys, the "centaurs" producing the Plains through cattle ranching; therefore, the restless spirits bear an ideological quality. It manifests in the fact that *espantos* are disappearing due to the decline of cattle ranching. This decline has intensified since paramilitary-fuelled economies have been competing with the tenets of the "*llano*'s work". The retreat of the *espantos* is a statement of the many changes in their habitat – the Plains – transformations in which paramilitaries have played a fundamental role.

The ongoing disappearance of *espantos* is as inconspicuous as the silence of *criollos*. Both were difficult to grasp ethnographically, for they reside concealed in people's attitudes and contradictions towards something as quotidian as it is the talk about *espantos* and *cruzados*. I realised that stories about *cruzados* not only inspire fear, but imbue paramilitaries with a transcendental significance, recollecting their presence and force to enact deep transformations in the region.

References to the supernatural bulletproof men are a murmured declaration of the import of "new men in town", that is, paramilitaries power to shatter the spell of the *llaneros'* mystique by banishing *espantos,* silencing *criollos* and displacing cowboys. *Cruzados* are not exactly the "new men in town", yet their presence in people's talk grasps paramilitaries' power to produce the Plains outside *llanero* pastoralism. Although there are not *cruzado* combatants walking in town, their virtual presence captures the menace that looms over the centaur as an entelechy. *Criollos* out of all people, understand this very well. Their silence not only manifest but endures their alienation as storytellers and

producers of value. It is a tenacious incantation, furtively sheltering the *llanero* world that created them.

Chapter Five- *Cruzados:* Inhumanity and Paramilitarism

As explored in chapter three, *cruzados* were the multitude of combatants that gave up their humanity, in a literal and mystical sense, during the critical times of the paramilitary expansion. This chapter explores the association of the supernatural bulletproof men with the most violent events of this expansion. It draws on ethnographic observations, interviews with *llaneros*, ex-combatants, and institutional accounts about paramilitaries in the region and nationwide.

The chapter explores how *cruzados* powered the paramilitary "war machine" as a force of transformation of the Plains. It is divided into two parts. The first one focuses on the *cruzados'* presence in the violent events called *limpiezas* or "social cleansings". It describes how *cruzados* became the terror of paramilitaries' violent overtaking of the territories. The second part explains the social processes triggered by these violent events in the case of San Martin. It reflects upon the relationship between *cruzados* and the predatory nature of paramilitarism.

"Pursuing Greatness"

Even though protective magic is commonly practised by armed groups in Colombia and beyond (Garcia 2016: 138-143, Ferrer 2014), I wondered why, if it could be used as a weapon for attacking enemies with its "poisons" and "burials" (chapter two), it was used so often only to protect combatants from bullets. In one of our many conversations about *cruzados*, I asked Doña Bella, the sorcerer introduced in previous chapters: "If you can kill with *brujeria*, why in the context of war was it used for protection and not for attacking?"

> Because they were pursuing greatness, they protected themselves so that they could attack. For example, I am the commandant here, and I got 5, 10, 300 or 500 boys, I want this group to last and for nothing to happen to them, me to be victorious. Then, I am the commandant and tell her [the sorcerer]. 'Do me a favour, 'reconstruct' them up all.[190] Thus, that bloc [group] did not suffer any sorrow in combat any sorrow, what is going to happen? They are going to take over a town, a rural ward, a region.

190 The word in Spanish is "arreglado", meaning repaired, "reconstructed", organised, fixed or set up.

Doña Bella said this after telling me that *brujeria* - referring to "occult aggression"- "was about killing (…) doing that is like to be someone's hitman". Yet, in the very same conversation, the experienced sorcerer states that the bulletproof men were not hitmen, rangers on a homicide mission, but the invulnerable or "reconstructed" bodies of combatants "fighting standing up" and holding the ground in battle (chapter three). In groups of "5, 10, 300 or 500 boys" - as Doña Bella suggests - the *cruzados'* protective armour made battles successful and their commandants victorious, albeit or maybe precisely because many of them died. Although they are described as fierce warriors, like the fictional Wolverine or Rambo, *cruzados* do not seize "greatness" for themselves but confer it to their commandants, offering their humanity to the various interests of paramilitary higher ranks but not to the "ideals" of the armed organisation.

Doña Bella continued in her appreciation of *cruzados*, explaining that she knew everything about the ritual to create supernatural bulletproof men but that she did not like to practice it because "the person has to die like a sausage, chopped in little pieces so that they can die". This was a widespread idea about *cruzados*: their death was difficult, painful, and never from "natural causes". Doña Bella's reasoning returns us to the experiences of the lower ranks in the deadly atmosphere of paramilitary life described in chapter three, where signalling that they were "hard to kill" was important for the combatants. As demonstrated in that chapter, *cruzados* are the fuel for the "war machine", and - as I discuss here - they were also the devastation that the "machine" caused.

Cruzados' presence, widely reported during paramilitaries' nationwide expansion, is associated with the arrival of the Centauros bloc in the Plains, which came to be the largest group in the region with more than 5.600 active combatants in 1998.[191] This arrival is thus linked with the terror of the paramilitaries "taking over a town, a rural ward, a region" -in Doña Bella's words. Paramilitaries had to demonstrate their endurance if they were to seize the territories controlled by guerrillas for decades before the Centauros arrived. According to Baldomero Linares - initiator of the Self-defences of Meta and Vichada group - when the Centaurs arrived, the indiscriminate assassination of civilians increased: "when it was

191 Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Justice and Peace Court, 2016, Clause 819

only the small groups, it did not happen like that, but when the group from Urabá [Centauros]arrived it begun, like, if you kill one, well, I kill two".[192] Paramilitaries raced to demonstrate their bravery in one of the most violent episodes of the Colombian armed conflict by asserting their lack of fear and lack of "humanity". These dynamics characterised the events during the paramilitaries' expansion and made the war between the paramilitary groups the Centauros and Buitragos one of the deadliest in the region. As "Piraban", commandant of the then Self-defences of San Martin, described, during this war, "the *Llano* dressed in blood".[193] From this bloodbath, *cruzados* surfaced in great numbers as the mark of paramilitaries' "inhuman" violence.

Cruzados' presence, pervasive in San Martin during the bloodiest paramilitary expansion, captures the dialectic of fuel and machine, the terror of combatants' vulnerability as the fuel of an organisation taking over the territory by killing, displacing, and dispossessing. As Doña Bella suggests, the supernatural bulletproof bodies were translated into commandants' "greatness", into the terror of the expansion. This chapter explores *cruzados* as the terror of paramilitary troops "taking over" the territory and transforming the Plains.[194]

192 My translation from Spanish: "Cuando el grupo era pequeño no se presentaba eso, pero cuando llegaron los de Urabá empezo como si usted mata uno pues yo mato dos" Op.Cit. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Clauses 290

193 Op.Cit. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Clause 395.

194 As mentioned in chapter three, stories about bulletproof paramilitary were not the only ones circulating in town. Stories of paramilitaries who broke a pact with the devil - also called *endiablados* – were as common as the *cruzado* stories. These stories, which refer to the pact as the most individualised form of magical action, are typically associated with the powers of the high-ranking paramilitary individuals to get money, obtain women, and in some cases, attain immortality. Stories about the pact describe the *endiablados* as infamous commandants and "devilish" or treacherous, erratic, and mad individuals. I do not explore the *endiablados* any further, for the ritual and symbology of the devil and its place in *llanero* society would require a separate thesis to explain fully. This thesis explores the *cruzados* beyond the instrumentalisation of *brujeria* by certain paramilitaries to attain a reputation and rule over the territories. However, it is necessary to remember that such instrumentalisation could be better appreciated by studying other *brujeria* practices, not the *cruzados*.

Limpiezas: The Business of Terror

Figure 16: Catatumbo Group – AUC, Tibú Norte de Santander, 2004. This image captures the spectacular multitude of paramilitaries during their expansion across the country. From recognised photojournalist Jesus Abad Colorado.

Cruzados were "inhuman" paramilitaries that made the expansion possible. They are associated with events of extreme violence, like the Cooperative battle described in chapter three and the massacres called *Limpiezas* or "social cleansings". These atrocious acts spike in the history of paramilitarism between 1997 and 2003 during their consolidation.[195] The paramilitaries justified them as the "cleansing" of a neighbourhood, town or area from "enemies": guerrillas and their potential supporters, people they deemed "deviant" individuals, like homosexuals, thieves, homeless people or "indecent" women, and everyone who was in the way of capitalist activities such as the inhabitants of fertile lands, areas rich in natural resources, or people mobilising for labour rights and denouncing human rights abuses (Hristov 2009, Taussig 2005, Kalyvas and Arjona 2005;

195 Paramilitaries' expansion was characterised by the increase in the number of massacres throughout the country. For example, in Tocaima – Cundinamarca on the 21st November 1997, around 70 members of the self-defence groups murdered 14 people and wounded three more in La Horqueta village, a site located to the east and a few minutes by car from the urban area of this municipality. Another case is Rio Sucio – Choco (17th December 1997). Around 200 Self-Defence members killed 14 peasants for several days, and nine others were forcibly taken away near the rivers. *Jiguamiandó y Arrastradero*. See: https://rutasdelconflicto.com/masacres

Civico 2016). In some cases, *limpiezas* were required by local politicians seeking to "clean" their towns of petty criminals and, in one go, their political counterparts (Zabala 2009: 60). *Limpiezas'* terror was paramilitaries' signature move, acting upon their vague definition of "enemy" (see Introduction).

To understand what is at stake in *cruzados brujeria* is necessary to approach the prominence of *cruzados'* presence in these violent events that marked the paramilitary expansion. I will start with an example of one of the most infamous *limpiezas* in the Plains' history.

Mapiripan: A Town in the Heart of Guerrillas Territory

The *Limpieza* called "the Mapiripan massacre" is an event that engraved paramilitary terror in the Plains' history. It occurred in July 1997 when a group of paramilitaries, who later became the Centauros, were moved from the Northeast Urabá region to the Plains. Together with the regional paramilitary groups the Buitragos or the ACMV (Meta and Vichada Peasants Self-Defence) and ACC (Casanare Peasants Self-Defences), the paramilitary managed to get to Mapiripan, a town in the Meta department, at the heart of the FARC guerrillas' territories. While Colombian armed forces secured the perimeter, the paramilitaries killed alleged guerrilla supporters and "deviant" individuals, torturing, beheading, dismembering, and eviscerating people, infamously playing a football match with the head of a young man that they had killed. Paramilitaries slaughtered people for five days and managed to escape with impunity.[196]

After the massacre, some paramilitaries returned to Urabá while others came to San Martin. Many San Martin villagers vividly remember this massacre even though Mapiripan is far away. They remember the troops' "movement" before and after the event, the terrifying stories coming out from the town, and the arrival of many *Urabeños*: black and

196 CNH (2018)"Masacre de Mapiripan" In: "Violencia paramilitar en la Altillanura: Autodefensas Campesinas de Meta y Vichada" p. 284-291. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights condemned the Colombian State in 2005 for the proven complicity of the Colombian armed forces in the Mapiripan Massacre. The armed forces provided information from the intelligence services and were negligent in attending to the situation when it was happening and later succoured the victims. There were two sentences against high-ranked military officers for this event. See: "Colombia jails death squad general over massacre". BBC. 2009-11-26 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8380025.stm (Last accessed March 2020); "Former Colombian general jailed for role in Mapiripán massacre". The Guardian. 2009-11-26. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/26/former-colombian-general-jailed-massacre (Last accessed March 2020)

tall *cruzados* who had just committed atrocious inhuman acts. Like for the "Cooperative" battle, *cruzados* are present in peoples' accounts o*f the limpieza* in Mapiripan.

The Mapiripan massacre introduced a new era of collaboration between the armed forces and paramilitary groups, inaugurating the bloody AUC chapter in the history of paramilitarism in the Plains.[197] The powerful alliances facilitated the nationwide configuration of the AUC and directly translated into further clashes with guerrillas and conflicts among the paramilitary for the control of the "cleaned" territories. They disputed better access to the drug-traffic economy and the business opportunities opened up by the dynamics of land accumulation. This was possible through the recapitalisation of land where the paramilitaries displaced entire populations and produced insecurity which purposefully devalued the land and forced or coerced people to sell it cheaply to their "figureheads" or allies, using their political connections to formalise them (c.f. Bejarano 1997, Ballve 2020). Recognised national business groups and multinational companies bought land in the Mapiripan areas as they have done in other areas of the Plains (and the country), substituting pastures for "*llano's* work" and crops for human consumption for African Palm (Ramirez 2012: 172, Cubides 1998: 75).[198]

Cruzados' presence is associated with this massacre and other key events of paramilitary expansion, like the Naya massacre in the Cauca region (see chapter three). They were the troops holding the ground in battles and the "inhuman" excess of violence that consolidated paramilitarism at the expense of human life.

Limpiezas and *Cruzados'* Sorcery

In *Diary of a Limpieza*, Taussig draws an analogy between this form of paramilitary violence and magical "cleansings". "Cleansings" comprise the various techniques that prepare the body for a magical action, such as healing rituals, attracting luck, expelling a spirit, and, in the case of *cruzados*, receiving one. When examining what occurred in Mapiripan *limpieza*, it seems that this parallel stands. Paramilitary *limpiezas* prepared the

197 Op. Cit. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Clause, 819
198 About the resources of the paramilitary structures, see: CMH (2018) *Violencia paramilitar en la Altillanura: Autodefensas Campesinas de Meta y Vichada*, pp. 473-503

terrain for what can be experienced as a magical event: the radical transformation of the territory and the peoples' way of life. *Limpiezas,* a powerful demonstration of the paramilitaries' inhumanity, were vital for their expansion:

> Like angels of death carrying out divine violence, paramilitaries extended their shadow of terror over the targeted population. There was no show of mercy, no second thoughts, no hesitation, but only spectacular death. When they retreated, they left behind corpses lying still warm on the pavement and towns frozen in fear, windows and doors shut. In the paramilitaries' spectacle, the guilty verdict pronounced upon the town was displayed for all to accept and on their knees. Such events played out across Colombia over the past three decades every time the paramilitaries 'broke a territory' (Civico 2016: 89).

Like Civico describes, the otherworldly violence of *limpiezas* paint paramilitaries as transcendent figures, "angels of death carrying out divine violence". *Cruzados* were the protagonists of this "spectacle", the "unhumans" indicted of committing inhuman violence and the 'shadows of terror' it produced: the terror that yielded grotesque economic benefits, enforced new normative orders, and produced political transformations in the region and across the country (see Introduction). *Limpiezas* are what Civico (2016) calls paramilitaries "expenditure of spectacular violence" (*ibid*. 89)

> *Limpieza* is not the act that preceded domination and opened the gate to hegemony. Rather, it is *Limpieza* itself- as a violent discharge of energy, as expenditure, as violence done for the sake of violence- that both contains and reveals the power and the exuberance of the paramilitaries (Civico 2016: 117).

*Limpieza*s are the epitome of paramilitaries' excessive and arbitrary use of violence with impunity (Civico 2016: 108). Their inhumanity is how they enacted "de facto sovereignty" (Hansen and Stepputat 2006), that is, the violence that creates a "state of exception" from where an order can be constituted. *Limpiezas* were *cruzados'* primal sorcery: the power of the paramilitaries to "brake" the territories- to use Civico's words.

As anthropologist Paramo explains (1999), the "cleansing" was a paramilitary strategy to "break" the territory, a way to start from cero after the barbaric sacrifice of the *limpiezas* that constitutes a mythical return to the origins. By appealing to this "expenditure of violence", paramilitaries - argues Paramo - resemble the postulates of fascism (*ibid*. 201). Their protagonists, *cruzados,* the "unhuman" troops carrying the "inhuman" violence of

limpiezas, render the paramilitaries as transcendental forces that, more than following an economic "rationale", launch a "state of exception", the apocalypses that engender a genesis or the civilisation that can be erected after the barbarity. *Cruzados brujeria* enhances the significance of *limpiezas* as historical events: they are at once the "unhuman" bodies inchoating its "inhuman" violence and also the forces the 'breaking' a territory, which are political, economic and mythical at once.

…

During my 14 months of fieldwork, I registered four events framed as "social cleansings" or *limpiezas*. Two happened in my neighbourhood, an area loathed by many Sanmartineros for its association with *patrulleros* that settled in the town after demobilisation. Like in other *limpiezas* (c.f. Taussig 2005), the killings were preceded by virtual pamphlets and WhatsApp messages imposing curfews and announcing the purging of the town of all "evils". Threats, curfews, and the subsequent killings were normalised and while there was an ominous silence, for some, it was an occasion to celebrate. "They were just drug addicts", "that is what happens to people who just laze around", and "finally, in a few months this neighbourhood is going to be all clean, like before!" were some of the responses to *limpiezas* that I registered in my diaries. Like the people who said these things expressed in conversation, many long for the paramilitaries' former control over the area, not only because they provided "security" but also because they brought prosperity, as in plenty of jobs and money. Although these *limpiezas* or selective killings of young men were framed as routine, they did not bring back those plentiful times. These normalised *limpiezas* reveal the latent presence of paramilitaries in the aftermath of their expansion. This is the theme of the second half of this chapter.

The Shadows of Terror

During the paramilitary expansion, characterised by the national consolidation of the AUC in 1990 and 2000, troops arrived from the Urabá and Cordoba regions to the Plains and subsumed the existing paramilitary structures there (Zabala 2009: 362). These troops, initially itinerant, progressively took over San Martin. Like Taussig points out for the Valle

del Cauca region (2005), itinerant and ghostly paramilitaries changed their forms of "occupation" during the expansion:

> Their earlier tactic of appearing out of the blue in an isolated village, assassinating the inhabitants in grotesque ways, and then pulling out of hours or a few days has given way to this bizarre form of permanent occupation. What before was a silent attack across a rural landscape bleached by fear is now movement spinning in on itself like a child's top, emitting clouds of dust and confusion (Taussig 2003: 22).

During their expansion, paramilitary troops freely circulated in San Martin and its surrounding areas, giving way to a "bizarre form of permanent occupation". As explained in the Introduction, paramilitaries were not clandestine in San Martin for the town was their centre of operations during this time. They had a visible, active presence everywhere until the demobilisation process in 2006.[199] At the time of my fieldwork, the paramilitaries had withdrawn from the earlier forms of "permanent occupation". There were not any *cruzado* combatants flashing their black nail polish around town. However, their terror looms heavily over San Martin and its surrounding area. Across the Plains, the town's reputation remains a fortress of paramilitarism. This section focuses on the relation between the *cruzados* and the shadow cast by the paramilitaries' permanent occupation of San Martin.

"There Everyone Respected Us, Admired Us, Loved Us"

As explained in the Introduction, San Martin was the epicentre of the Plains' colonisation and one of the oldest settlements in Colombia. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the town became the axis of the cattle-ranching economy, commerce, missionary campaigns, housing the region's economic elite and hosting the region's first music and cultural festivals (Chaquea 1979). Sanmartineros think of themselves as the most cultured *llaneros*. Like the missionaries and military leaders since early colonial times, paramilitaries took advantage of the town's strategic location, controlling the roads to Bogotá and the south of Colombia. The town was the first paramilitary centre of operations in the Plains, the base of three of the biggest training camps or "escuelas", and

199 Op. Cit. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Clause 788.

the home of communication, legal, financial, and logistic teams assisting the largest groups.[200] (Zabala 2009: 362). San Martin was very important for the highest paramilitary commandants, who bought cattle ranches nearby, built luxurious houses, and invested in businesses in town.[201] All *patrulleros* came there at some point in their training or service, whether on a mission or vacation. "It all passed through San Martin" – asserts Camilo, the ex-paramilitary introduced in previous chapters. San Martin was the power site of "the new men" colonising the Plains. The place where the commandants' "greatness" was tangible: "there everyone respected us, admired us, loved us" - states Camilo – a sentence illustrating the extent to which the town was "taken" by the presence of the paramilitary.

People in town and ex-combatants like Camilo remark that *patrulleros* Sanmartinero were proud, for they who were considered automatically fierce *llaneros*. This contrasts with the attitude when describing the paramilitaries regarded as *Urabeños*, a word used to refer to the Centauros block troops, combatants who came mainly from the Urabá region throughout the 1990s and 2000s. While Centauros commandants - like "Don Mario" and "Arroyave" - were from Antioquia and Bogotá and were predominantly white, *patrulleros* from the Urabá and Cordoba regions arriving in great numbers to San Martin were predominantly Afro-Colombian. People like Don Eduardo, a *llanero* cattle rancher from the area, recall the arrival of the troops of *Urabeños* as an "invasion" of town. His perspective as an older Sanmartinero contrasts with Camilo's "there everyone (…) loved us" perception as a combatant arriving in San Martin during the expansion.

People's most common expression to refer to the "invasion" of *Urabeños* is that paramilitaries, like a horde of spirits, "took possession of town" ("se tomaron el pueblo"). Paramilitaries were the "new men" in town (chapter four), the desirable bachelors to whom many Sanmartineras definitely "loved" – as Camilo affirms. Don Eduardo, the *llanero* quoted above, says that the "invasion" resulted in a *cruce* or "mixing" of peoples that menaced Sanmartineros "purity": "changing the town's phenotype forever" - he declares. The higher the social status, the more intense the claim to a Sanmartinero "purity" gets. Like most traditional Sanmartineros, Don Eduardo traces his ancestry in a lineage that

200 Op. Cit. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Clause 699
201 Op. Cit. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Clause 810. The list of properties owned by paramilitaries in San Martin is long.

goes three centuries back. He refers to *llaneros* from the other Plains areas like Casanare and Arauca as *cruzados* because they are mixed with indigenous peoples and Venezuelans "mulatos" respectively (c.f. Rausch 1984: 4-22). For him, like many other Sanmartineros, the paramilitary troops, especially the Afro-descendant *Urabeños* arriving in mass in the expansion, notably changed the town's "white" landscape. *Cruzados* refer to the presence of the racialised paramilitary "outsiders" as to their "mixing" with Sanmartineros during the expansion. Specifically, this *cruce* is attributed to the paramilitaries "capturing" the reproductive powers of San Martinero women using the means of sorcery and the lure of money. I will expand on this in the next section.

Figure 17. Cuadrillas of San Martin. The festival has been practised for over 284 years. It is described as an "equestrian ballet" where four groups of twelve men on horses engage in a series of choreographed "games" representing the Spaniards or Galanes, the indigenous or Guahibos, the Africans or Cachaceros, and the Islamic Arabs or Moros. The men inherit their place in the group from father to eldest son, or when this was not possible, to the nephew. "Cuadrilleros", as the performers of "cuadrillas" are known, trace their lineage as Sanmartineros. "Cuadrillas" is telling of the San Martineros ethos, with their fixation on lineages and ethnic hierarchies.

The *cruzados* were racialised paramilitary troops associated with the darkest forms of *brujeria*. The town's mayor asserts that the *Urabeños* brought in their own sorcerers and that "this mixed everything between the *Llano* and Urabá (…) accelerating and increasing mysticism in town during those years [consolidation of the Centaurs group]." The darkest forms of *brujeria* and "mysticism" refers to the widespread use of sorcery to seduce women and to the pervasive presence of the *cruzados,* combatants displaying the evidence of their participation in *brujeria* rituals. *Cruzados,* even those who were not *Urabeños,* are described as acting under the evil influence of people from "outside". Consequently, *cruzados* are the intruding presence of racialised and sorcerous "outsiders". They were the shadows left by inhuman paramilitary violence.

In this way, *cruzados* are the combatants who went through the rituals and, simultaneously, a *llanero* interpretation of their presence. Thus, *cruzados* are a concept that the ritual formulates: a "hybrid" are charged with an "otherness" that makes them "unhuman" or supernatural, and "outsiders", sorcerous beings instigators of *limpiezas* (chapter one).

The Alien-Nation

Cruzados were the expandable bodies affording victories in battle and the "the new men" in town (See chapter four), the troops of "outsiders" engaging in family relationships and transforming the San Martin population. Paramilitaries are "intertwined" with San Martin society in the biological sense referred to by Eduardo and in various social modes. During their "permanent occupation," paramilitaries became local authorities, businessmen, and main employers.

During their expansion, paramilitaries had an office in town with a secretary, computers, printer machines, and paperwork. They were local authorities intervening in most aspects of life, settling disputes between siblings, collecting personal debts, and punishing disobedient children.[202] People resorted to them to sort out all types of personal conflict, and even young children, invoked paramilitaries when fighting, affirming that they were going to call X or Y paramilitary to kill the other. Everyone in town is familiar with this aspect of paramilitary power which has been registered in the literature about paramilitarism in other regions (Taussig 2005: 9, Madarriaga 2006, Cruz Diaz and Moreno 2009, Civico 2016, Campuzano 2013).

Paramilitary involvement in San Martin was pronounced when the native commandants "Piraban" and "Knife" were in power. Their rule was charged with contradictions of their

202 I recall here Oscar's story, who had to confront the rumours circulating about him being a "Satanist", doing rites to drink dead babies' blood with a straw. Rumours were founded on Oscar's long hair and inclination for heavy metal music. Shocked by the surreal claims, my friend made an appointment with the commandant to dispel the rumours, emphasising his reputation at work and kinship with a well-known local family. The commandant confirmed to Oscar that he was on the list of people to be killed but that given his bravery to explain himself, he ordered his secretary to erase him from the list. My friend's story illustrates to what extent paramilitaries were involved with people's concerns, even with apprehensions from the town's religious zealots whose ideas about heavy metal had put Oscar's life at risk. It demonstrates the degree of intervention that the paramilitaries had in every aspect of life. The list was an Excel document which had in one column the victim's name (Oscar saw with horror his name), and in the other, the name of the assigned killer with the time and date of the commissioned homicide.

"intertwinement" with the *llanero* society they "invaded". Although they were local authorities, they also coerced business partnerships and, like many paramilitaries across the country, influenced electoral politics, imposing compulsory quotas of 30% from public contracts in the Mayor's Office.[203] The *parapolitica* or *paramilitary made politics* - as the paramilitary political influence was nationally known - was stronger in San Martin when the paramilitaries were in full force in terms of both troops and money.

Besides accessing public funds, taking political seats, and working in alliance with institutional powers and armed forces,[204] the paramilitary controlled commerce, becoming the main source of employment. As described by commandant "Don Mario" in his diary, paramilitary commandants collected money from stores, restaurants, hotels, bars, brothels and gas stations, charging fees for all transport, including cattle, oil, and African palm. Although they diversified their sources of funding, the main source of financing in the Plains was drug trafficking. The vast profits from drug trafficking, together with the support of the armed forces, were the "double muscle" of Centauros.[205] Alongside the troops, the town received a wave of workers needed to build and maintain paramilitary operation centres: cooks, cleaners, drivers, builders, dressmakers, merchants, and those working for the legal and illegal economies that the paramilitaries boosted in the area, including sex workers, labourers for the African Palm plantations, coca crops, and laboratories. Paramilitaries controlled the towns' economy, not just by taxing businesses but by boosting employment in the area (Zabala 2009: 35-38).

As I corroborated in my interactions with people in town, many workers from other regions in search of jobs settled in San Martin. Many settled in my neighbourhood, the first working-class area in town. Since its foundation, this neighbourhood was heavily associated with paramilitaries and "outsiders". The oral history of the district recalls its origins in an arbitrary plot allocation by a politician allied with a *capo* or mafia boss,

203 See the case of "the Casanare Pact". This case was renowned in the region because politicians, including majors, were condemned. The pact was not coercive but an open political and business agreement between politicians and paramilitary groups which benefited both (Zabala 2009; Op. Cit. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Clauses 305, 798). This is one of the best-studied and documented aspects of paramilitarism in Colombia (see Introduction).

204 (Op. Cit. Superior Court of the Judicial District of Bogota, Clause 782-788). Like occurred across the country, the consolidation of paramilitarism was not possible without the participation of people from political, social, economic, and institutional powers who not only supported and ideologised paramilitarism but who also obtained visible benefits like affordable access to land and political seats.

205 As explained in the Introduction, the influx of money from drug trafficking made the Colombian paramilitaries the most numerous and well-armed groups of this kind in Latin America at the time.

seeking to secure the votes from the people arriving to work in the African Palm Plantations that started in the area in 1980 (Jimenez 2012). The urban project benefited humble Sanmartinero families, like my host family, and the families of low-ranking paramilitary and African Palm plantation workers that kept arriving throughout the 1990s and 2000s. For some Sanmartineros, the influx of people that ended up settling in my neighbourhood was an "invasion" of *cruzados,* racialised "dangerous" "outsiders" that came with paramilitarism, both troops and mobile workers.

Figure 18. The Neighbourhood. The neighbourhood is still invigilated by the paramilitary groups who succeeded after the demobilisation of the larger structures in 2005. It is populated by African Palm plantation workers, some of whom are demobilised paramilitary. For many San Martineros, the neighbourhood is heavily associated with paramilitaries, dangerous "black" people, foreigners, poverty, and drug consumption. For them, it was absurd that I was staying there where I would not learn about the *llano*s.

Certainly, there is no clear distinction between the troops and the workers. I met people who had been both *patrulleros* and workers for the paramilitaries' empire. One of them was the only woman ex-paramilitary I met.[206] She used to be a combatant and merchant who got paid to supply the camps with elements ranging from essential medicines to socks. Among the "clouds of dust and confusion" of paramilitaries "movements spinning in on itself" - to paraphrase Taussig - *cruzados* appear to the likeness of the multitude of troops and migrants. The very term *cruzados* is deployed to describe the ill-defined multitude of rootless and "proletarian pariah" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002: 783) imputed of disrupting the social fabric by San Martineros like Don Eduardo.

206 Women in the FARC guerrillas where 40% of the total of the member of the organisation, while the number of women doesn't beat 20% of the total of composition of these groups. In the paramilitary groups, the total percentage of women is 12% . See: "El 40% de los combatientes de las FARC son mujeres". July 10th ,2017. .https://colombiacheck.com/chequeos/el-40-de-los-combatientes-de-las-farc-son-mujeres#:~:text=%C2%BFEl%2040%25%20de%20las%20Farc,mujeres%20son%20cerca%20del%2029%25 . "¿Quienes se unieron a los grupos a los grupos paramilitares y por que?". December 27th, 2019. https://pacifista.tv/notas/cuantos-paramilitares-colombia-cifras-paramilitarismo-ejercito/

Here again, *cruzados* resemble *zombies* (chapter three), "unhumans" whose presence has been documented across Africa (Geschiere 1997, Niehaus 2012, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2002). Comaroff and Comaroff (2002) address the "disquieting figure of the *zombie*, an embodied, dispirited phantasm" (*ibid*. 782) as the returning menace of "ghost workers" rising in periods of social disruption and threatening the local ways of life. Although counterintuitive at first, the parallel between South African "ghost workers" (*ibid*.) and Colombian "ghost" soldiers (Taussig 2005: x), even with the obvious limitations,[207] stretches beyond formal similarities. Like *zombies* seizing the social being of migrant workers (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002: 794), the *cruzados'* multitude of ghost recruits, troops and workers the same, resemble what Comaroff calls the "alien-nation":

> A growing mass, a shadowy alien-nation, of black immigrant workers from elsewhere in the continent. So overt in the xenophobic sentiment that these workers are disrupting local relations of production and reproduction (*ibid*. 789)

Cruzados, like *zombies*, are the "alien-nation", stirring xenophobic sentiments and threatening to overthrow San Martin *llanero* society. Materialising during paramilitaries' "permanent occupation", the "alien-nation" is the menacing presence of a multitude of combatants and migrant workers, humans reduced to instruments of production. Z*ombie*-like multitudes are alienated beings dispossessed from their labour force by others that enrich themselves through this monstrous misappropriation. *Cruzados* encloses the alienation of combatants' humanity and the alienation taking place in the advent of precarious workers for the new economies.

Like *zombies*, *cruzados* "are sourced in social and material transformation sparked by the rapid increase of neoliberal capitalism on a global scale" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002: 797). However, as mentioned in chapter three, unlike *zombies, cruzados* are not just figurations (*ibid*. 796). They are the bodies rooting paramilitary terror, the "unhumans" infringing "inhuman" violence of the *limpiezas* and, as I have demonstrated here, the terror's tangible effects: the multitude of paramilitary troops and workers, "dangerous", "sorcerous", racialised "outsiders" that settled in San Martin. *Cruzado's* shadows refer to

207 The parallel has evident limits. One is the intervention of the figure of the zombie-maker, comporting the qualities described for African witches, often old, barren, sexually deviant and evil individuals, with the capacity to affect the fertility of others (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002: 788, Niehaus 2012). Although they play a key role, one that I do not analyse in this thesis, sorcerers are intermediaries that differ considerably from African witches as depicted in the anthropological literature.

the population engendered by the paramilitary presence in town, accused of causing the town's pressing problems and producing the region's remarkable transformation.

Domesticating the Frontier

According to Civico (2016), over the past three decades, the Colombian military, businessmen and politicians have justified paramilitary *limpiezas* and other violence as the necessary force to "break a territory" and capture "untamed zones" or "exteriorities" (Deleuze and Guattari in Civico 2016: 22). These territories were "untamed" because they were "frontiers" occupied by "primitive" guerrillas, indigenous peoples, peasantry and were in "need" of economic development (Civico 2016: 8, Ballve 2020, Serge 2017, Hristov 2009). People in the Colombian frontier territories identify the arrival of new corporations, like oil companies, with military and paramilitary presence (Serge 2017: 662). This has been prominent since 1980 when regional paramilitary groups became the favoured option to undertake the historical role of "civiliser" of the frontiers using the violence of irregular armies to protect economic investments (Serge 2017: 661). Frontiers were reproduced in the discourses legitimising paramilitary intrusion, justifying the terror that allowed them to "take over a town, a rural ward, a region" - to use Doña Bella's words at the beginning of this chapter.

Like in other Colombian regions, the Plains' first local paramilitaries were linked to the remaining conservative armies that had operated since "The Violence". They were aligned with the large landowners seeking to protect their economic investments from guerrillas and peasant or indigenous revolts (see Introduction). Like the previous colonial officials and missionaries, paramilitaries were endowed by these alliances to undertake the task of "domesticating" the frontiers (Serge 2017: 658). As the Mapiripan massacre shows, they did so by "cleansing" the land of guerrillas, real and imaginary supporters, and all the "savages" hampering "economic development". As "civilisers" of the Plains frontier, paramilitaries disputed access to land and resources from "savages" and opened new business opportunities. As noted throughout this thesis, *cruzados* were the most notorious during the expansion, when the paramilitary gained a sharper edge as the inevitable cost of

"progress" in the region. In the Plains, this "progress" came at the expense of the traditional cattle ranching or the "*llano's* work" (see chapter four).

Figure 19. Mural in San Martin. In the everyday, businesses, houses and public spaces in town are adorned with images and objects stressing the importance of the "*llano*'s work". However, most llaneros today grew up separated from the "*llano*'s work" and under the economic and social transformations that came with the paramilitaries' consolidation.

Exploring the significance of *cruzados* is to disclose the paramilitaries' presence as the terror of the Plains' new "civilisers" and the large shadows they cast: the consolidation of drug trafficking and African Palm economies in the area, the concentration of land in fewer hands, the aggressive predation of natural resources, and the "hybrid social being" their presence engendered, manifested in substantial changes in the town's population. *Cruzados* connote paramilitarism as an economic, political, and social process which forged new spatial articulations, that is, the opening of the Plains as a neoliberal frontier.

From the *Llanero* to the Neoliberal Frontier

Frontiers are conceived as "unknown" and isolated lands with wild geography, lawless areas of endemic violence, and economic potential.[208] (Rausch 1984). As noted in the previous chapter, the *llanero* frontier is not an "unknown" territory; a space of projection of the fears and hopes of the Colombian economic and political elites (Serge 2017: 647, Ballve 2020: 19). The *llanero* frontier is a narrative through which *llaneros* have written the

208 These representations - originating in colonial discourses, rooted in the national imaginary and reproduced in academia - keep writing off the historical agency of the inhabitants of frontiers lands, often indigenous, peasants and afro-descendant peoples (Serge 2017: 654).

history of their territory. This is not to overlook that the Plains are part of the same economic and spatial regime that produces centres of power like Bogotá but to specify the Plains' significance for *llaneros*. For centuries, *llaneros* engaged in violent conflict to defend their "civilised" ways of life based on extensive cattle ranching against the evil forces of those threatening to destroy them, primordially represented by resilient "savage" indigenous populations (Gomez 1998, Bjork-James 2015, Barbosa 1988, Rausch 1999, Arias 2017). The *llanero* frontier producing *llaneros* as the Plains "civilisers" started weakening in the aftermath of "The Violence" with the uprooting of rural populations, the successive waves of migrants from other regions in the 1960s, the rising popularity of communist guerrillas in the 1970s, and the increasing influence of drug-lords in the 1980s. However, the *llanero* frontier receded when the neoliberal frontier took definitive shape through the all too literal paramilitary interpretation of "business is war" (Serge 2017: 662). Ironically, paramilitaries resemble *llaneros* as "civilisers" of frontier territories. The neoliberal frontier was made possible through mechanisms like those used by *llaneros* to extend their territory for cattle ranching: violently dispossessing "savage" indigenous people from their land (Jimenez 2012: 159).[209]

One telling example of the moral geography of the *llanero* frontier is the episode known as "the Planas affair". In this violent event, *Guahibo* indigenous communities protesting against the hostility of *llanero* ranch owners were crushed by Colombian armed forces in Planas, Meta department in 1976. The outcome of the alliance between the armed forces and wealthy *llaneros* was dispossessing the *Guahibos* from their lands. Planas epitomises the violence of the *Guahibiadas*, as the *llanero* raids of indigenous communities were called. Like the paramilitary *limpiezas*, *Guahibiadas* were violent events marking the *llanero* expansion of cattle ranching, the cosmogenesis of value in the "*llano*'s work" progressively taking over the territory[210] (Bjork-James 2015: 105; Gomez 1998).

209 The resonance of the *llaneros'* frontier violence with that of the paramilitaries is evident in the ways that the latter have repeated the terror of the Guahibiadas and the "Planas affair" in Betoyes, a *Guahibo* reserve, where paramilitaries killed indigenous people and dismembered a pregnant teenager, causing the entire community to abandon their lands in May 2003 (Bjork-James 2015: 123).

210 The *Guahibo* communities decided to defend themselves against the Planas ranch owners, whose hostility had increased after they successfully secured the allocation of an indigenous reserve. The ranch owners then sought the army's VII brigade intervention. The outcome of Planas was the dispossessing of the indigenous peoples from their lands (Bjork-James 2014: 105; Gomez 1998b). The case, taken to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights in 1973, demonstrated the human rights violations by the military: the torture of captives, including children, and 77 homicides. However, it did not proceed to trial and the perpetrators faced little accountability (Bjork-James 2015: 103-105).

Paramilitaries evoke the *llaneros'* colonisation of the Plains, a violent historical experience linked to the displacement of indigenous ways of producing the territory.

Although paramilitaries echoed the *llaneros* as frontiersmen, they did not reproduce the *llanero* frontier. They have been progressively displacing traditional cattle ranching, a change tearing "apart the existing world, emptying it of meaning to create a radically new environment" (Serge 2017: 657). This 'environment' that I am calling the neoliberal frontier was possible not only through the armed violence but also due to the global cyclical crisis of the centres' overaccumulation that either destroyed the *llanero* people in brutal disputes over land and labour (*ibid*. 20) or contributed to making the *llanero* way of life unsustainable. It was paramilitarism, the presence of paramilitary groups and these global transformative forces, what emptied the *llanero* world from meaning', making the *espantos* retreat, cowboys precarious, *criollos* alienated (chapter four), and *llaneros* fall as part of the mass of dispossessed Colombians.

The neoliberalisation of the Plains corresponds to what Comaroff and Comaroff (2002) call the "neoliberal turn": a "seismic mutation in the ontological experience of work, selfhood, gender, community and place" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002: 798). In Latin America, the "neoliberal turn" started when military governments in the 1960s and 1970s opened up the region's economies, setting in motion privatisation policies, de-regulation, and flexible labour markets that welcome multinational companies (see Gill 2015). The disarticulation of protectionism and the crisis caused by external debts was the price of integration of the Latin American states into the global economy. Ultraliberal measures imposed by international financial institutions arrived together with civilian democracy and the movement of people from rural to urban areas, devouring traditional economies, increasing poverty, and entrenching inequality (Martin 1990). All these factors are important to understand the reorganisation of the core components of capitalism in Colombia and Latin America. Nevertheless, in places like San Martin, the paramilitaries are the visible figures of the "neoliberal turn".

According to San Martin's mayor, paramilitarism in the region cast large shadows. It caused an increase of 80% of the population within ten years. After the Mapiripan

massacre, for example, there was a mass displacement of 511 families from the Mapiripan area, some of whom arrived at San Martin, where people from all over the Plains have relatives.[211] Displaced people kept coming to town and other urban centres in the region. The demographic explosion caused by the paramilitaries' violent uprooting of rural populations and the arrival of a mass of migrant workers lured by the thriving licit and illicit economies is accused of being the cause of the area's problems: the escalating levels of poverty, unemployment, a saturation of the health system, the construction of illegal neighbourhoods, shortages in sanitation and public services, drug consumption, and the transformation of *llanero* traditions. Although other factors are contributing to these problems, like the lack of social investment from the Colombian government, people in town attribute them to the paramilitary interventions in the region's economy, not to abstract forces of modernisation. Paramilitaries are the enablers of an all-encompassing transformation of the region, starting with the gradual displacement of the extensive cattle ranching, a mode of production of the territory developed throughout centuries.

The neoliberalisation of the Plains has been produced under the same mechanisms all around Colombia: through the disarticulation of local economies, the violent accumulation of land and dispossession (Serge 2017, Ballve 2020, Gill 2016, Hristov 2009). "A massive land grab"- anthropologist Ballve describes this process for the Urabá frontier, where violent dispossession preceded the sea of banana plantations that sealed the definitive transformation of this rainforest region (*ibid*. 2020: 17). Although a very different historical trajectory,[212] the destinies of the Urabá frontier and most Colombian frontiers coincide after "The Violence" with the 60 years of armed conflict, the rise of the drug trafficking economy, and the emergence of a new dispossessed class forced into proletarianisation.[213]

Cruzados mark the violent events that made expansion possible and thus capture the moment in which paramilitaries strengthened their partnerships with larger business groups, furthering their business models for advancing drug trafficking and enlarging

211 CNH (2018)"Masacre de Mapiripan" In: "Violencia paramilitar en la Altillanura: Autodefensas Campesinas de Meta y Vichada" p. 284-291.
212 Urabá has been defined since colonial times as a frontier through its satellite-metropole relation with the ultraconservative elites of the Antioquia department. Across Colombia, after "The Violence", economic interests outdid partisan divisions in determining the course of violence (Ballve 2020:16).
213 Marx calls this "primitive accumulation" when the powerful economic elites deploy illegal means to strip self-sufficient communities from their lands and means of production to enforce their proletarianisation.

agroindustry and oil extraction. As the Mapiripan case illustrates, agroindustry expansion in the Plains was possible through the recapitalisation of land (Ramirez 2012: 172; Cubides 1998: 75). Similarly, this occurred with oil extraction carried out by multinational companies such as Petrobras, Exxon, and Pacific Rubiales. This directly correlated with the consolidation of paramilitarism during 2000, whose protection allowed companies to operate across the Plains[214] (Ramirez 2012: 662). Because of the productivity of oil extraction and the potential for biofuels, the Plains is today upheld as a strategic region for positioning Colombia in the global economy (Jimenez 2012: 155-159; Duran 2012:203; Rausch 2007:35, Bjork-James 2014:116).

Cruzados: A Llanero Cosmology of Capitalism?

The idea of "cosmologies of capitalism" refers to the ways in which people interpret capitalism according to their worldviews. I will summarise some of the points raised in this chapter that will be relevant to the question of whether *cruzados* constitute a *llanero* "cosmology of capitalism", a question that I will discuss further in the conclusions.

Let us start with an example to understand the "cosmologies of capitalism". In her work on witchcraft, Shaw refers to the "witch-city", an invisible city described by people in Northern Sierra Leone as an ultra-modern place of cannibalistic consumption where witches, rich traders, and powerful men live in luxurious houses surrounded by expensive commodities. The "witch city" comprises images of Europeans and African economic elites as "witches" consumers of human life, linking wealth to the consumption of productive human value. In these visions, "a political economy is remembered", one linking transregional flows of foreign wealth to the trafficking of human lives. Shaw argues that "the witch city" "remembers" the violent historical experience of the slave trade that forged links between Sierra Leone's villages to a commercial system spanning three continents (Shaw 1997: 871). The "poetics" of the "witch-city" elaborates on the problematic forms of modern wealth, suggesting that the privileged access to its power is paid with "the lives

214 Paramilitaries and the army have provided protection to oil companies from guerrilla attacks in these areas. For example, the "Peasant Auto-defences of Meta and Vichada" has provided services for the trucks transporting oil from Pacific Rubiales in Puerto Gaitan, Puerto Lopez, Cumaribo, and other towns in the Vichada (Ramirez 2012: 156).

and wealth of others, misappropriated from an everyday African world" (Shaw 1997: 871). The "witch-city" is a "Sierra Leonean 'cosmology of capitalism'" - Shaw contends, quoting Sahlins (1988) -a form in which people in Sierra Leona have signified modernity and capitalism according to their historical experience of the slave trade, a cosmological construction capturing the predatory nature of global modernity.

The question at hand is whether *cruzados* - as I have described in this chapter - constitute a *llanero* "cosmology of capitalism". I have described how *cruzados*' presence has marked decisive violent events in the expansion of paramilitarism, like *limpiezas*. By expansion, I mean the armed violence that enabled the development of economies that have substantially modified *llaneros*' extensive cattle ranching, triggering waves of migration, renewing the urban populations, and producing tangible transformations in the social landscape of towns like San Martin. *Cruzados'* presence is correlated with the expansion's inhuman violence and the new episode in the development of capitalist relations in the region inaugurated by this violence. From this perspective, *cruzados* can be conceptualised as a *llanero* form to grasp paramilitary violence and its transcendence, that is, the social processes set in motion by this violence. Moreover, *cruzados* could be interpreted as a *llanero* form of rendering the paramilitaries' historical significance as the Plains' new "colonisers", "the new men" resignifying the *llanero* frontier.

Although *cruzados* formulate the paramilitary "business is war" overtaking the world of the "*llanos'* work", they are not a "cosmology of capitalism". At least not in the sense suggested by Shaw, as a *llanero* historical interpretation of paramilitarism. "Cosmologies of capitalism" preclude an understanding of *cruzados* as the multitude of combatants who ritually and socially alienated their humanity, and as the "alien-nation", the hordes of mobile workers transforming the regional economy. *Cruzados* are the alienated bodies of the troops and the migrant workers alienating the *llanero* world by advancing neoliberal economies. Thus, they are not essentially *llanero*. On the contrary, the *llanero* is what *cruzados* alienate, what lives in *criollo* silence, in the drive of *espantos* retreat, and the receding *llanero* frontier. As described in this chapter, *cruzados* are the mark of the paramilitary "war machine"; capitalism made flesh and phantasmagoria.

Chapter Six- *Cruzados'* Fate: to be Born-Again

Pastor Galeano has been serving in San Martin for 27 years. I met him for a series of interviews at his evangelical church, the oldest in town.[215] Talkative and charismatic, Pastor Galeano recounted his experiences from when he was a witchdoctor or *curandero* until his conversion to Pentecostalism. Amid the exuberance of his life story, he stressed his involvement in the demobilisation of the Centauros group in 2006,[216] where he ended up delivering a series of "liberation" rituals -commonly translated in English as deliverances- for combatants possessed by spirits, cursed by the *brujeria* used in the paramilitary. According to Pastor Galeano, after demobilisation (See Introduction), many *cruzados* and their families subjected themselves to deliverances. Pastor Galeano corroborated what I had observed by talking to ex-combatants and people who worked in demobilisation programmes: the *cruzados* who survived paramilitary life turned to evangelical churches to be "born-again" as Christians.

This might be an unexpected chapter to a thesis following *cruzados*' multiple relations to paramilitarism. However, it is necessary insofar evangelical churches are a significant part of *cruzados'* journey and life in San Martin. Previous chapters have focused on *cruzados brujeria* during paramilitaries' expansion (Chapters three, four and five). This one explores the fate of *cruzados* in the aftermath of the expansion: paramilitarism nationwide consolidation. The chapter is structured in a way that resembles the thesis: it starts with the ritual, exploring how the Pentecostal deliverances resignified *cruzados brujeria* in the theological concept of the "spiritual war". The second part describes how these churches offered to ex-combatants a way to "walkout" (Martin 1993: 6)- from paramilitary life. They did so while harmonising with the many changes that came with the consolidation of paramilitarism: the neoliberal frontier.

I focus on experiences of deliverance and conversion, as described by two Pastors, ex-combatants and people who worked in demobilisation programmes. The analysis is placed within larger considerations about the increasing importance of the "charismatic

215 "Evangelicals" or "evangelicos" in Spanish, is the term used to refer to all Pentecostals across Colombia. Unless I state otherwise, I will use both evangelic and Pentecostal as interchangeable terms.
216 The Centauros Block demobilised in a village close to San Martin as part of the Peace and Justice process.

penumbra" (Martin 2002: XVII) in Latin America and its relationship with the "neoliberal turn" (Meyer 1999, Comaroff 1999, 2009). However, to remain focused on paramilitarism and *brujeria*, it does not examine Pentecostalism history and central doctrines nor elaborate on the difference between *brujeria* and religion.

Victor's Possession

Victor -the ex-paramilitary introduced in chapter one- had joined the Centauros group in his early twenties and became *cruzado* under the orders of his commandant in a collective ritual, where he was instructed to summon a spirit every time he felt in danger (See chapter one). For years after he demobilised, Victor and his family were intimidated by the spirit whose name he refused to pronounce for me, a terrifying episode of spirit persecution that ceased only after deliverance ceremonies with Pastor Galeano. The symptoms of Victor's persecution were similar to those of "occult aggression" *victims:* illnesses, apparitions, conflicts in family relations and general misfortune. Pastor Ever, whom I interviewed in a Pentecostal church near San Martin, explained that *cruzados'* fate is the same that sorcerers' and all those who resort to "occult aggression". As explained in chapter two, the *cruzado brujeria* resembles "occult aggression" and thus is regarded as black magic, which always comes with a curse. As Victor's case illustrates, the burden of a lingering spirit is the curse resulting from their participation in the ritual to become *cruzado*. It added to the difficulties of rebuilding a life after demobilising from the paramilitary groups, difficulties I followed during my involvement with Victor's family.

The term "possession" has been used in anthropology to refer to an experience in which people are temporarily displaced or inhabited by spirits, experienced as discrete persons distinct from their hosts. In Victor's case, the spirit manifested in episodes of illness and persistent apparitions. However, in other more severe cases, the spirit possesses the body entirely, thinking, speaking and behaving differently from its host who then becomes undernourished, seriously ill and "crazy". Possession exists in a variety of cultural forms, embedded in languages of healing and illness, upon which the experience derives its

meaning and resolution.[217] This chapter does not directly address *cruzados'* possession but that this was resolved: Pentecostal deliverance, through which the experience of *brujeria* and possession is resignified in the language of the "spiritual war".

It is important to note that while *cruzado* survivors went through exorcisms, those who made a pact with the devil rarely came back alive. People say that they continue to work in the paramilitary somewhere else and that, in any case, they are too far gone to the devil's side and cannot be redeemed through exorcisms (See chapter three). It follows that, *cruzado*s like Victor were perceived as redeemable. *Cruzados* managed to retain some of their "humanity" alienated in the ritual and the "de-humanising" violence of the groups. Pentecostal exorcisms were part of restoring their humanity, as the expression "born-again" used by evangelical Christians accurately captures.

Cruzados and Deliverance

The main constituent of deliverance - Pentecostalism's "master image" (Martin 2002: 169) - is the affirmation of a demonic reality. *Curanderos* like Don David and Doña Rosa (introduced in chapters one and two), refer to the act of expunging spirits' evils as "cleansings" or "healing". They coincide with priests like Father Norberto, an active exorcist, in the belief that spirits possessing a person are not necessarily demonic but spirits in sorrow, lingering in places or manipulated through *brujeria*. Doña Bella describes these spirits as "beings who fall from grace", the same as Doña Rosa calls "the sufferers". By defining all spirits as demonic, Pastors differentiate their deliverance from the ritual actions of *curanderos* and priests. Therefore, deliverance implies acquiring a new language to recognise the experience of spirit possession. This implies recognising "the sufferers" and popular saints as demonic, which challenge the interpretation of sorcerers and Catholic priests, who regard demons as a discrete part of the spirits' realm. Pastors' deliverance stages the demonisation of the spirit realm, which is first couched in the diagnosis of the possession.

217 Literature exploring the therapeutic role of possession and exorcism (i.e Crapanzano and Garrison 1977; Crapanzano 1977, Obeyesekere 1981, Boddy 1989, Kapferer 1983) have successfully challenged models of spirit possession that explained it as expressions of illness or hysteria and have replaced them with more nuanced forms of analysis about possession's relation to cultural understandings of trauma and healing.

After the second interview with Pastor Galeano, he invited me to see the deliverance ceremonies he holds every Thursday morning. I attended several Thursdays and talked to people participating in the service. Although they are framed as a routine endeavour and differ greatly from the performative exuberance of exorcisms described in other ethnographical settings (Kapferer 1983; Obeyesekere 1981), deliverances are powerful ceremonies for churchgoers. What follows is a description of a typical deliverance ceremony and its "gestures", actions in the ceremony that predispose the possessed to perceive their experience of spirits in a certain way (e.g. Meyer 1999: 198, on Jacob's deliverance).

The ceremony starts with the Pastor praying to Jesus, asking for forgiveness and permission to free people from demons. While the Pastor tunes up, his helpers pace around the place, asking people to close their eyes during the ceremony, which often last approximately one hour. We enter the Pastor's panoptic with the "gesture" of closing the eyes, which creates an asymmetry of power where people are guided only through the sonorous modulation of the Pastor's voice. Not long after the ceremony's setting, the Pastor starts conjuring the demons. He calls the person or people to whom the ceremony is addressed, asking them to come to the stage. Conjuring is achieved by prayers and bible passages that speak about casting the demons out by the power of the Holy Spirit.[218] Sometimes the Pastor pronounces a speech referring to the specific problems of the ceremony recipients, calling them by their full name. This creates a sensation of closeness between the churchgoers and the possessed, whose predicaments, probably discussed in private beforehand, are disclosed via the Pastor's admonitions and, occasionally, demons' iterations. Conjuring is accompanied by chants and the concomitant rising of the Pastor's voice, modulated to command the demon to leave the person's body. As Jon Woltseth in Guatemala describes, the Pastor's voice is central to the ritual actions of Pentecostalism, and it is "a force to be reckoned with" (Wolseth 2008: 96).

218 Passages like Mark 16: 18-18: "then they say to them: go forth to every part of the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. Those who believe it and receive baptism will find salvation; those who do not believe will be condemned. Faith will bring with these miracles: believers will cast out devils in my name and speak in strange tongues; if they handle snakes or drink any deadly poison, they will come to no harm; and the sick on whom they lay their hands will recover". Also John 20: 21-23 " 'As the father send me, so I send you. Then he breathed on them, saying: 'receive the Holy Spirit! If you forgive any man's sins, they stand forgiven; if you pronounce them unforgiven, unforgiven they remain."

Amid a hurl of whispers and groans, with their eyes closed, churchgoers focus on the Pastor's imperative language, saying: "Get out!" or "In the name of Jesus, I order you to leave this body". At this point, the demon usually manifests itself by speaking through the possessed person's mouth, uttering insults, curses, disclosing secrets, wailing and shouting. The Pastor asks for the demon's name, which reveals itself together with its rank in the demonic realm. The "gesture" of conjuring singularises the possessed and the demon in the act of naming them. The naming of the demon induces the entity towards its full physical manifestation, which is sonorous and not visual like an apparition. In the interviews, the Pastor explained that demons have specific jurisdictions, for there is a demon linked to every situation and illness, from sexual problems to cancer and migraine. Unlike other Pastors from big church denominations, like Pastor Ever, Pastor Galeano has learnt this folk demonology from books and pamphlets rather than through formal training. The "gesture" of conjuring and naming is an opportunity for Pastors to display their knowledge of the demonic, key to establishing themselves as a religious authority and also to dislocate the representation of the spirit realm in the way of bones, blood, soil, images, communion bread, etc., used by sorcerers and priests (See chapter two).

As deliverance progresses and the intensity of the Pastor's voice reaches a peak, he orders the possessed person to kneel, a "gesture" expressing reverence, submissiveness and vulnerability. At this point, some participants kneel as well, for they learn, disclose or accept that they too are suffering from possession. The "gesture" that follows is the most documented action in deliverance: the laying of hands. Through this movement, the Pastor places himself in a dominant position, touching the possessed's head and ordering the demon to leave the body at once. Pastors' commanding voice and dominant position radically differ from the language of favours and exchange with spirits deployed by sorcerers (See chapter One). Pastors' "gesture" challenges *brujeria's* language, yet it speaks to it, redefining the rules of engagement with the spirits by identifying them as demons.

The kneeling and hand imposition seal the possessed experience of rendition to Pastors' authority to provide resolution for their predicament, which often leads to purging. For the Pastors and participants I interviewed, this was the most significant *experience* in the ceremony. The purging -common in "cleansing" rituals and shamanic healing (e.g. Taussig

1986: 395), is regarded as conclusive proof of the demonic intrusion. Victor recalls that when he first went to a ceremony, he suddenly started vomiting and consequently, his family decided that he should subject himself to more deliverances. Purging under the effects of hand imposition replaces the ritual destruction of *brujeria* objects and inversion rites of the "cleansings". It legitimises Pastor's authority over demons and over sorcerers' power to mediate with the spirits. The purging is the ceremony's climax, after which the possessed regain consciousness or rest exhausted.

Pastors Galeano seals the ceremony with prayers to Jesus, asking for protection and blessings. He provides instructions, for example, in Victor's case, never repeating the demon's name and a specific number of ceremonies. The Pastor usually visits the family of the possessed and expects them to become regulars in other services. Conversion does not always occur, and people frequently display a pragmatic attitude to religious ceremonies, attending deliverances when they need but not necessarily converting to the evangelic faith (Sharp 1996, Lozano 2009). Pastors often complain about this and praise it as "Jesus's miracle" the fact that many ex-combatants and their families often converted.

Staging the "Spiritual War"

Kapferer's account of the exorcism rituals in Sri Lanka (1983) is instructive in understanding what is at stake in *cruzados'* subjection to deliverances. Exorcism - he argues - aims to unveil the cause of human and social disturbances in a demonic influence and to restore a sense of "normality" by casting out the demons. Exorcism is a ritual of demystification concerned with changing the experiential condition of the possessed from a "demonic" reality back into a "normal" human experience of the world.[219] Even if lacking the variety of performative forms of other exorcisms (pictorial, poetical, musical and theatrical forms), deliverance enacts this "demystification" and becomes a transformative experience for *cruzados* and their families. Deliverances' performative elaboration of the

219 He examines the exorcism ritual process, arguing that aesthetic forms such as music and dance run for a temporising and spatialising reorganisation of the body in a dimension where the subjective and objective are unified. In this dimension, often described as "trance", the self is reduced to its pure experiencing "deprived of the capacity to reflect upon self at an objective distance, to expose self to the rationality of thought, a possibility is created for the emergence of a demonic mode of being-which is a self in restricted experience and beyond the objective control of reason" (Ibid. 237). Trance induced by dance and music gives way to comedy, a reflexive aesthetic form that places the objects of experience at a reflective distance, pointing to a world outside itself. Comedy in exorcism displays a rational world in the very irrationality of the comic movement and "reformulates the world to consciousness, so the patient can potentially reformulate a self, one following the multiple perspectives which comedy elaborates" (Ibid 237).

demonic is embedded in subtle aesthetic forms that I called "gestures", stereotyped actions that acquire their full meaning as embodied experience and public statements shifting the relationship between the spirits, the possessed and the wider community.

Deliverance "gestures" enclose a transformative process: from the initial panoptic experience to the imperative language of the ceremony and the physical surrendering of the possessed, deliverance contends for the possessed to recognise the demonic emerging in the enacting of Pastors' authority. Contrary to "trance" states observed by Kapferer, deliverance "gestures" brings a person's consciousness to act upon the demonic reality revealed as the "ordered" and "ordering" principle of the world. The "gesture" of identifying the demon discloses them as differentiated persons with names and living under an institutional order. Through this "gesture", the ceremony elaborates on a rationalised demonic reality, composed of separated and identifiable demons, organised in ranks and jurisdictions over distinct areas of human life. Pentecostal deliverance not only transmutes the spirit realm into a demonic reality but orientates the perception of the demonic as "normal" and omnipresent.

This demonic reality is different from Kapferer's (1983) focus on the "demonic" as a mystification of "normal" reality (*ibid*. 232). In Pentecostal deliverance, the demonic reality is not the disturbance of a "cosmic unity" (*ibid*. 233). but the normal state in a "cosmic war". Deliverance reveals reality as a "spiritual war", an eternal and immanent battle against an army of demons that intrude on all aspects of human existence. This demonic reality overtakes everything: it progressively encompasses all aspects of life, from the experience of illness and misfortune to political violence. The ceremony revelation of the "spiritual war" is a fundamental part of *cruzados*' life journey. According to Comaroff (2009), "revelation" is a central feature of reborn faith: "Revelation, then, is an event out of time. Its white heat re-establishes truth, realigns words and things, steams semiotic drift" (Comaroff 2009: 29). I will next examine further how "the spiritual war" "steam semiotic drift", for *cruzados*, providing closure from *brujeria*.

Ritual Closure and Religious Authority

According to ex-combatants and the testimonies of people working for the CMH,[220] Pastors, more often than priests and sorcerers, provided *cruzados* with exorcisms. The recurrence of deliverance performed over *cruzados* is not accidental. Deliverances displaces *brujeria* - a "popular cosmology" of Catholic inspiration, as I describe in chapter one - by introducing the demonic reality as an ordering principle in the world of the "spiritual war". Pentecostal deliverance stages this reality by transmuting all spirits, from *espantos* to *animas*, into demons. Deliverances' "gestures" displaces *brujeria*'s form of representation and engagement with the spirits' realm. Moreover, deliverance's theological concept of the "spiritual war" dislocates the "cosmologies of conflict", the "semiotic drifting" the focus from the concrete relationships and the affect powering *brujeria* towards the boundless forces of the demonic. As explained in chapter two, *brujeria* addresses misfortune by ritually reworking the social bond and the productive and reproductive relations of individuals and their families. In contrast, Pentecostals addresses misfortune and even economic downturns of entire countries (Barker 2007) as a demonic influence that must be forcefully deterred.

In the "spiritual war" there is no middle ground. Every malady has a demonic origin that "born-again Christians" must combat. This radicalism partly explains why *cruzados* sought to attain closure from *brujeria* by resorting to Pastors' "spiritual war" instead of priests and *curanderos*. The black-and-white logic of Pentecostalism's "spiritual war" offers something that Catholicism and its multiple intersections with *brujeria* cannot (See chapter one). Even though some priests like Father Norberto and Father Fernando[221] -introduced in chapter two- practices exorcism and healing ceremonies, liberating people from spirits is Pastor's speciality. Pastors Galeano and Eber, for example, define their ministry in antagonism to *brujeria*, and their authority rests entirely on their capacity to free people from their demons.

220 CMH, Centro de Memoria Historica, or Centre for Historical Memory.

221 As mentioned in chapter two, Father Norberto and Father Fernando were recognised healers who cleaned people from *brujeria*'s evils through ceremonies where people vomited and expelled the demons that caused their calamities. Despite having differences in their approach, they both claim that Pastors did not have real power over *brujeria*. Fernando and Norberto take *brujeria* very seriously, and, in fighting it, they have asserted themselves as spiritual authorities in their base communities. Father Fernando is remembered for his capacity for curing people by imposing hands, praying, and prescribing remedies for cleaning and protecting people, homes and businesses from *brujeria*. A "witch-priest" -as one of my friends defined him- Father Fernando fortified the Catholic faith by making witches redundant. His religious influence expanded as he proclaimed jurisdiction over spiritual agencies as the only legit mediator between them and the people.

The “spiritual war” stages a confrontation with *brujeria*, but instead of erasing it, enhances its “ontological plausibility”:

> As has been widely observed of Pentecostal in diverse global contexts, there is a tendency to contend with ‘traditional’ cultural and religious forms through the performative staging of confrontations or “ruptures” in a fashion that can serve to preserve rather than diminish their ontological plausibility (Kirby 2019: 578)

Pentecostal’s successful engagement with *cruzados* as victims of *brujeria* partially rests on this dialogical nature of Pentecostal deliverance. While offering a radical stance against *brujeria*, it does not use an oppositional logic, i.e. they do not deny the existence of spirits or demons.[222] According to Meyer (1999), Pentecostals' Christianity is better equipped to mediate with traditional religiosity, for they take peoples' protection from spiritual attacks very seriously.[223] As indicated in the articles in *Pentecostalism and Witchcraft* (Blanes., et.al 2017): "rather than eradicating it, Pentecostalism seems to universalise witchcraft by equating it with the devil, a cosmic figure par excellence" (Geschiere 2017: 284). Pentecostal's integration of *brujeria* and its reversal in the "spiritual war" is key to understanding why *cruzado*s resorted to deliverances instead of Catholic exorcisms.[224] The “spiritual war” offered ritual closure to *cruzados*.

In addition, as an outbreak of *brujeria*, *cruzados’* possession became an opportunity for Pastors to assert their authority over occult powers and the religious authority of priests, *curanderos*, and sorcerers. [225] Deliverance was the beginning of a journey for many demobilised combatants who wished to become “born-again” Christians, "new" humans integrated into the church. This is the topic of the second part of the chapter.

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222 Christian demonisation or "diabolisation" (Meyer 1999) of the spiritual realm served well to colonisation exploits everywhere, including in Europe (Bernard and Gruzinski 1992, Geschiere 1997: 14, Taussig 1980: 168-181; c.f. Ceriana cited in Geschiere 2016 in Central Africa). Like Christians evangelising during the colonial encounter across Latin America, Pentecostals engage in a permanent struggle with 'native' spirits, like those used in *brujeria*. Through this struggle, they reinforce these spirits' power, for they acknowledge their reality and their strength, ultimate creating a synergic relation between *brujeria* and Pentecostalism.

223 As Sharp noticed for Pentecostals in Madagascar, their Pastors “fully comprehend the meaning of possession in the lives of their patients. Thus, on one hand, exorcists successfully integrate two seemingly divergent or conflicting epistemologies. On the other, through conversionary tactics, they undermine indigenous logic” (Sharp 1996: 271).

224 Although they are not as eclectic in their approach as charismatic healers in Brazil who draw on Candomblé and other Brazilian religions (cf. Greenfield 1992, Birman 1996), the Pastors I visited develop their own ritual "style". For example, the use of "special oil" by Pastor Galeano resembled the use of "blessed" liquids by Catholic priests, the horn and the herbal smells reverberate in memories of the ambience of the hatos. Moreover, In the churches, there is a version of *llanero* culture they embrace, prominently *llanero* music rhythms and forms of composition and some old 'manners' like *criollos* chivalry and bold honesty. In parts of the Plains where Protestants arrived early in the 1950s, some Pastors affirm that the *llanero* character is more suitable for Pentecostalism than Catholicism. Pentecostals integrate the local identity and its negation using the same logic of acknowledgement and undermining *brujeria*.

225 Catholic priests and Pentecostal pastors uttered statements against each other in all the religious services I attended. "Ignorant Catholic, future Protestant" - a sentence that rhymes in Spanish ("Catholic ignorante, Futuro protestante"), was used often as a catchy saying by Father Cesar, one of the three priests from San Martin. They constantly compete with the Pastors' power to defeat *brujeria* evils.

Cruzados' Curse

Doña Bella, the sorcerer introduced in chapter one, explains that the possession of *brujeria*'s victims differs from *cruzados'* because the latter is "voluntary" and thus delves into the worst curses (See chapter two). *Cruzados'* power results from a deliberate act of subjection to "black magic" that causes a double entanglement: with the substance-spirit/demon and the sorcerer who performed the ritual. Victor told me that while recovering in the hospital from the gunshots that left him disabled, the sorcerer that performed the *cruzado* ritual for the troop was burned alive by other paramilitaries, and he almost died because he felt the killing heat in his own body. His deliverances with Pastor Galeano expelled the demon invoked in the *cruzamiento* and the tormented sorcerer's spirit. Similarly, Camilo saw *cruzados* going "mad" after the sorcerer who had performed the rituals for them was killed: "most *cruzados* died but those who survived [battle], their spirit was stirred, and they were like possessed when they [other paramilitaries] killed the sorcerer". Stories like this proliferate about *cruzados*, whose possession was particularly disgraceful, for it was "voluntary" and cast in a double entanglement with a spirit and a sorcerer. This is one of the reasons why, contrary to other types of possession caused by *brujeria,* sorcerers were not called to "cleanse" *cruzados*: they needed a clean break from *brujeria* and from the sorcerers to end with their curse.[226]

Consequently, *cruzados* were not ordinary victims of *brujeria,* for they were responsible for their curse. They practised the most socially sanctionable form of *brujeria*, alienating their humanity to acquire "unhuman" powers. This ritual caused the curse of possession on them and their families. One of the deliverance ceremonies I attended in Pastor Galeano's church was addressed to a small boy, not older than five years old, who was seriously ill. The Pastor told me that the boy was the son of a *cruzado* ex-combatant. He was wrestling against the demon that protected his father at war. According to Pastor Galeano, this is not an isolated case. He has provided deliverance for a handful of conjured relatives of ex-paramilitary *cruzados*. Although children are the most dangerously affected

226. In some parts of Latin America, like in-Brazil religions, disputes between Pentecostals and healers or sorcerers have turned violent (Da Silva Moreira 2018, Cuhna 2015). Violent attacks against Candomblé and Umbanda followers and the destruction of their altars in Brazil rose from 11 in 2011 to 776 in 2016. Some of the attacks in the favelas of Rio were perpetrated with guns by gangs close to Pentecostals (Moreira 2018: 6)

by possession, other relatives of *cruzados* suffered terribly. For example, I heard the case of a widow of a former *cruzado*, whose protector spirit/demon possessed her to the point of madness, preventing her from living a normal life. After her husband died a *cruzado*, she inherited his curse and started to rip her clothes off in public and have seizures, apparently possessed by the spirit/demon.

Some of these cases were treated through deliverance ceremonies, where the *cruzado* had to accept responsibility for the calamity that had befallen the family publicly. As mentioned in chapter three, feelings of shame were extremely tantalising when talking about being *cruzado* in a ritual. Victor, one of the two self-identified ex-*cruzado* I met, was reluctant to elaborate on his participation in the ritual. It took perseverance - even for Pastor Galeano - for the ex-paramilitary to admit that he was *cruzado*. Pentecostal's deliverances provide a space for *cruzados*' public confession of their participation in *brujeria*. Like other exorcisms, deliverance procured an opportunity to deal with the feelings of shame, ultimately reintegrating them in the eyes of their families and community. (e.g. Crapanzano and Garrison 1977, Obeyesekere 1981; Kapferer 1983). In *cruzados'* case, these feelings were associated with ex-combatants' voluntary involvement with *brujeria*.[227]

According to Pastor Galeano, the ex-combatant involvement with *brujeria* was causing the child's possession. I was surprised that on this and other occasions we talked about *cruzados*' curse, people would not mention combatants' trauma generated by their involvement with "inhuman" acts of violence. People mentioned guilt and psychological shock when talking about other possessions in the armed groups. Camilo, for example, told me about cases of possession he witnessed in the paramilitary training camps and the Army. Like others, Camilo differentiates *cruzados'* possession from possessions occurring when someone kills and is tormented by the spirit of the human killed. These spirits tormenting guerrilla fighters, paramilitary and Army troops are widely documented in the

227 Unlike Catholicism, where confession is confidential and a prerequisite for participating in the Communion, Pentecostals confessing happens in public during deliverances. Participants, helpers and churchgoers are not just witnesses of Jesus' powers entrusted to Pastors to exorcise demons. They receive the confession, the shameful accountability for the possession, and together with the family of the possessed, shape the possessed perception of others' perception. In this way, as Kapferer states, participants are more than spectators, for they are integral to the ritual process insofar as they decode the performances and become part of the exorcism transformational potential (1983: 137).

press.[228] An analysis of the types of possession in armed groups lies outside the scope of this thesis. However, it is important to highlight that *cruzados'* possession comprises combatants' sense of responsibility for their curse, which differs from the victimhood or randomness usually attributed to other types of possession in armed groups.

By over-emphasising *brujeria* as the cause of the possession, Pastors' deliverance deviates the focus from its relationship with violent actions endured or committed by the combatants in the groups. Deliverance addresses shame, the social sanction about having participated in *brujeria*, rather than guilt about involvement in the groups' actions. *Cruzados'* demons are thus ascribed to *brujeria* and not to paramilitary atrocious violence like *limpiezas* (chapter five). This causation model makes sense in contexts where many people benefited from and still live under the paramilitary.[229] It elaborates the shame associated with ex-combatants' participation in *brujeria* rather than the conflicted feelings they and their families might have about paramilitarism. The selective elaboration is important to understand Pentecostals successfully engagement with ex-paramilitaries. Through the "spiritual war", Pentecostals offered a resolution to their predicament, offering ex-combatants a path of transformation to live separately from the groups, while remained open or seemingly accepting of paramilitarism.

Sanctuaries

228. See Lozano 2009: 89. In the press: "Paramilitares acudieron a un exorcismo para romper supuesto maleficio de sus víctimas" In El Tiempo 24th of November 2007. https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-3830912 (Last accessed August 2020) The exorcism of combatants from the "heroes and Martyrs block" possessed by their victims' spirits in a rural area of the Risaralda department included the exhumation of 40 bodies of people who were buried without Christian blessings. A version of these events was rendered by Carlos Mario Jimenez, Nicknamed "Macaco" In Zabala 2009.

229 Guilt, more than shame, is a common theme in the study of possession, as it is commonly assumed that the possession experience lends itself as an outlet for repressed thoughts and emotions and works as a "release" of the possessed person's responsibility for their behaviour. (e.g. Obeyesekere 1981). Anthropologist Carolina Lozano (2009) followed exorcisms attributed to the use of *brujeria* by paramilitary groups, describing the possession as spatialisation in the body of the horrors of war in the north of Colombia. In these cases, she argues, exorcism, especially of children, has proven the difficulty of elaborating the guilt-ridden inner states rooted in the unconscious experience of war trauma, where death, fear, abandonment, and uncertainty are part of everyday life. However important, because focusing on guilt enables insight into morality and personhood or describes the workings of healing and trauma, I did not have the chance to follow *cruzados*' experience of possession as it happened. However, I focused on how their possession experience led to a transformation. While guilt could play a role in the possession experience, shame plays a crucial role in deliverance as exorcisms.

Figure 20. "Buenos Pastos" Christian Church. This church is near San Martin and formerly belonged to the supranational church "Asambleas de Dios". However, the church, located in a remote rural area, split from the big denomination and started a new stage as an independent religious community in the Plains.

According to Birgit Meyer: "deliverance is to ensure that a person is severed from all previous ties with spiritual entities, as well as from the social relations they imply" (Meyer 1999: 161). Deliverance offered *cruzados* a way to disentangle themselves from the spirits placed in them through *brujeria* by severing the ties with all social relations they imply: the connections with the sorcerers and, as I explain in this section, with paramilitary life. Nevertheless, what deliverance promised was attained in conversion (*ibid*. 178). For converted ex-paramilitaries, Pentecostal churches became "sanctuaries" in the sense proposed by Jon Wolseth (2008) to describe the churches' significance for young gang ex-members in Honduras. Wolseth finds that becoming "Cristiano" -as people in South America call to become neo-Pentecostal- was the only way for gang members to leave the criminal organisation.[230]

Like ex-gang members in Honduras, *cruzados* and other combatants found in Pentecostalism a strategy to leave paramilitary life beyond official demobilisation: "conversion lifts them out of everyday violence and reinscribes them in the protective social space of the church" (Wolseth 2008: 97). Converted ex-combatants strive for a deep transformation of their persona, constantly restating a close involvement with the church. Importantly, armed groups continuously monitor this conversion. As for ex-gang members in Honduras, demonstrating that they are "Pentecostal to the core" (Wolseth 2008: 102) is important for ex-combatants who are often suspected of betraying the 'secrets' of the organisation. The churches as guarantors of ex-combatants' stark transformation and lack of interest and involvement in criminal life was vital in a context where demobilised

230 Although paramilitarism violence is framed within the long-standing political conflict, Wolseth's (2008) observations about the juxtaposition between the prominence of Pentecostalism and the rise of youth violence in Honduras's urban context offer some valuable insights.

paramilitary assassination was rampant, as it was the case in the years following demobilisation.[231]

The menace of a horribly violent death tormented *cruzados* the most. As described in chapter five, it was common knowledge that *cruzados* "suffer a lot before dying" because they die "chopped in little pieces"- as Doña Bella annotates. *Cruzados'* curse contains both the horrible death of *brujeria* practitioners and the violent death of the criminal world. The menace of this curse was too real and caused permanent concern for demobilised people and their families, who warned me when I first manifested interest in their experiences that 'they' - active paramilitaries - were going to check me out as a result of our interactions. Among the cautions they recommended was to talk to the Pastors so they could vouch that I was researching *brujeria* and not serving other interests (hence this ethnographic gate).

Conversion for ex-paramilitary is a path of supervised transformation, inscribing ex-combatants in a new set of community relations and ethics, a "sanctuary" that saved them from possession and shielded them from the curse of a violent death. The "sanctuaries" offered them break from paramilitary life, a behavioural change appealing to demobilised paramilitaries.[232] In the following section, I describe what this change entails.

The Ethics of "Sentar Cabeza"

231 According to the agency for Demobilisation and Normalisation (ARN), from 2003 to 2019, there were 2202 ex-combatants in the programs of reintegration violently killed by active paramilitary structures. The Agencia document highlights that the most critical period was between 2008 and 2010, at the end of Alvaro Uribe's presidential period when 1.069 ex-combatants from the AUC were killed. Considering many ex-combatants did not enter a formal demobilisation process (case of Camilo and Camilo, for example), there is an ample sub-register in these figures. "Al menos 2.200 exparamilitares han sido asesinados en Colombia desde 2003" In *El Espectador*, July 25th, 2019. https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/al-menos-2200-exparamilitares-han-sido-asesinados-en-colombia-desde-2003/ (Last accessed August 2020). As to why the ex-combatants were killed, there is not one serious investigation. The most common explanation that I heard in the field is that they were suspected of revealing to the authorities or enemy groups, information about the organisation (i.e. the leaders locations, drug traffic routes, etc)

232 Unlike *cruzados*, whose experience of possession was linked to their involvement with paramilitary groups, a life they were aiming to leave behind, sorcerers' possession was an unwanted outcome of their regular occupation, a way of life that, although risky, was hard to abandon. After years of possession that almost kill her, Sandra sought the help of priests and Pastors. She subjected herself to exorcisms, where she would speak in tongues and display supernatural force. When I first met her, she was recovering from this episode of her life, and at the same time, she was dealings with a huge economic crisis after having enjoyed financial stability through her work with paramilitaries. Sandra had gone to "deliverances" and Catholic exorcisms, which helped her get rid of the spirits. However, she did not convert to Pentecostalism. Like the protagonist described in the famous novel by Jaime Caicedo (1990), Sandra has pledged a "renunciation", that is, a public promise to God, the Catholic priest and her family that she would never practice *brujeria* again. As the novel's protagonist and Sandra demonstrated, this promise was difficult to keep. Yet, it was much easier to pledge than follow Pentecostal conversion standards. Sandra was torn for many months and wondered if her economic situation was caused by the "renunciation". For sorcerers like Sandra, Catholicism and Pentecostal "deliverances" offered a solution for spirit possession; however, the former was preferred over the second, which was far too radical for them. In contrast to *cruzados*, who embraced Pentecostals' radical closure for their predicament, getting rid of spirits, the ambiguities of Catholicism and the liminality of their social position, sorcerers desire to retain their power by holding to *brujeria* cosmology, resorting to "deliverances" for they effectiveness but rejected Pentecostal Christian life.

Victor and Camilo, the ex-paramilitaries I spent the most time with during fieldwork, were becoming *Cristianos*. The ex-paramilitaries and their wives highlight the importance of the church in making a huge personal transformation and a "successful" return to civilian life. In Victor's case, the church helped him to fulfil the life-long dream of buying a parcel outside town. His family claimed this was possible thanks to the faith that made Victor "sentar cabeza" to use the money wisely. "Sentar cabeza" is an expression meaning "to lay down the head" and could be interpreted simultaneously as "to settle down", "to think straight", "to make the right decision", or "to better yourself". Victor -who was receiving financial support from the government demobilisation programme- told me that without the Pastor's guidance, that money would have probably been lost in partying or alcohol. The ethics of "sentar cabeza" is the necessary discipline to achieve what Pastors call the "true change" necessary for conversion, which greatly differs from Catholics' repentance. The "true change" entails -among other things- the prohibition of drinking, partying and sexual promiscuity. Pentecostal "sanctuary" separate the converted from what John Burdick (1996) calls "the male prestige arenas", the fiesta, the bars, the brothel, the street, known in Latin America as the *machista* ethos, exacerbated within the social life of paramilitary groups.[233] The ethics of “sentar cabeza” produces the “sanctuary” through a reformation of the male sphere (Brusco 1995, Martin 2002: 75, Chesnut 1997: 120-121).

Victor's "initiative" to buy a parcel and build a farm was praised by Pastor Galeano as proof of his real desire to "change", leaving behind the "male prestige arenas" and "walk away" from the drug traffic economy. The church not only encouraged "sentar cabeza" but also provided the necessary help to build a house in the parcel. Every time the family returned from the parcel, they showed me photos of the house they were building, pointing to the smiley 'brothers' and 'sisters' from the church, helping with resources and construction skills. While showing the photos, they would describe the plans for their future life in the countryside: the animals they will raise, the soil they will prepare for growing food, and the evangelisation they will carry out in the area. Victor and his wife frame this entrepreneurial venture as integral to the church's mission. The church not only provided encouragement, discipline and the necessary "practical skills" (c.f. Barker 2007: 418; Martin

233 There lies the appeal of these churches for women, who constitute the majority of churchgoers and wish to overcome a load of *machista* waste to establish marital discipline and certain domestic comfort (Burdick 1993; Martin 2002: 107).

2002: 79) but imbued their actions with a sense of greater purpose. "Sentar cabeza" is a form of discipline, a work ethics, as much as a world-making strategy.

Authors writing on the subject point outs that Pentecostalism fosters modes of behaviour that harmonise well with the demands of neoliberal restructuring in developing economies (Barker 2007: 427; Comaroff 2009, 2012, Martin 2002:15). For Victor, the church fostered the ethics of "sentar cabeza", which entails a discipline to build up money management and long-term planning mentality, a personal discipline that 'harmonise' with the desirable qualities that individuals need to prosper in modern neoliberal economies. As he and his family point out, "sentar cabeza" is part of the dynamics of the church as a "sanctuary", whereby churches foster personal discipline by setting both internal and institutional modes of monitoring "unwanted" and "wasteful" behaviours, such as drunkenness and partying. Ultimately, this discipline yields financially savvy individuals with initiative and a reputation for "honest" behaviour (Gooren 1999). These qualities constitute advantages for competing in the volatile labour market in a region hardened by decades of armed violence and the disarticulation of local economies.

The ethics of "sentar cabeza" is an example of how Pentecostal's "sanctuaries", while separated from paramilitary life, contributed to fostering values and practices normalising the changes and dislocations that ensue from neoliberal economies advanced in the Plains under paramilitarism. The "sanctuaries" not only helped *cruzados* ex-paramilitaries but the *mestizo* migrant labourers arriving in San Martin to work for the paramilitaries' legal and illegal economies, such as the African Palm plantations (See chapter five). Many ex-paramilitaries and other migrant workers in my neighbourhood work in the plantations, the economy displacing the world of the "*llano*'s work" and small-scale agriculture in San Martin. They work under harsh conditions in settings far from being labelled post-industrial service economies. I often saw them carrying their lunches in plastic containers while walking to the bus that picked them up at 5 am and returning at 6 pm with their faces undone by fatigue and their clothes and lunch containers splashed with mud. In conversations with neighbours, we spoke about their exploitation as precarious workers, the difficulty of enduring these jobs, and the pressure to value this steady income. The evangelic discipline of "sentar cabeza", encouraging obedience, sobriety, punctuality, and

trustworthiness in workers, provides for a new "economic discipline" (Martin 2002: 15) that workers need to endure this pressure, and, accordingly, to navigate the neoliberal economies displacing the world of the "*llano's* work".

Although ex-paramilitaries' conversion is a case in point to illustrate the relation between Pentecostalism and the "neoliberal turn", the multiple articulations of Pentecostalism and paramilitarism are yet to be studied. As the conversion of Victor demonstrates, the church as a "sanctuary" stages a rupture with paramilitary life. However, as the experiences of *cruzado* migrant workers suggest, the "sentar cabeza" also entails continuity with the outcomes of paramilitarism' consolidation, that is, the Plains neo-liberal frontier.

The New *Llaneros*

Pentecostal "sanctuaries" not only shield ex-combatants from paramilitary life but also strange them from the *llanero* world. Jhon, the gravedigger from San Martin (See chapter two), affirmed that Pentecostals do not visit their dead in the cemetery: "they do not care about their dead, they do not come to say hello or a say a prayer, they do not have a memory of their dead" - he said. His concern was voiced by other Sanmartineros, who asserted that Pentecostals do not resort to *llanero* healers called *rezanderas*, tell *espantos'* stories or participate in the town's main festivity, the Cuadrillas Festival. From the point of view of many Sanmartineros, Pentecostals are "strangers" whose current proliferation represents a threat to their *llanero* traditions. Regarding Pentecostals as "strangers" to local communities has been recurrently reported among scholars of this religion (e.g. Martin 2002:79; Miguez 1998 in Argentina, Burdick 1996 and Chesnut 1997 in Brazil, Lancaster 1989 in Nicaragua, page 95; Berker 2007: 424).

Joining a "community of strangers" (Sharp 1996: 273) is an important part of the experience of born-again Christians worldwide.[234] "Communities of strangers" are important for society marginal, like migrant workers and ex-combatants, vulnerable people facing the

234 Sharp discusses this theme in her study of possession in Madagascar in a town transformed by migrant labourers. After describing *tromba* or ancestors' spirits possession as a central cultural institution in Sakalava society, Sharp adds a chapter on Pentecostals' exorcism as an alternative performed when *tromba* possession attempted by migrant women was unattainable. By exorcising *tromba* spirits - Sharp states- the possessed migrant abandons all claims to belong to Sakalava society and joins the Pentecostal "community of strangers" (Ibid. 273).

neoliberal frontier, where *llanero* ways of life are no longer sustainable, and the social fabric has become undone. Like Berker (2007) points out:

> Forms of community that have cohered over decades, if not centuries, are undone due to neoliberal economic restructuring. Conditions of neoliberal economic restructuring have radically altered many communities, both by transforming the market and setting off numerous patterns of migration. (…) This speed, in turn, necessitates an equally swift adaptation of new means of deriving identity and a sense of meaning in a social context. Pentecostalism seems to provide tools for just such a creative rebuilding of social life, partly due to its highly adaptable nature to begin with. As such, Pentecostalism re-embeds neoliberalism by way of fostering social practices and forms of community (Berker 2007: 424).

Pentecostalism addresses people's quest for new forms of community building in the neoliberal frontier.[235] These churches detach people from "received identities" based on ethnicity and locality (Meyer 1999: 186), and thus offers to social pilgrims, like combatants and migrant workers, a spiritual idiom that facilitates their incorporation into a supportive community amid urban modernity that often excludes them (Burdick 1996, Miguez 1998, Sharp 1996, Barker 2007). For "outsiders" who settled in San Martin, joining a "community of strangers" (Sharp 1996: 273) marks the making of new kin. The churches offer to *cruzados,* ex-combatants and migrants the opportunity to acquire new "brothers" and "sisters" and become part of a close-knit collective in town. They provide a supportive environment for those who were otherwise socially, culturally or economically disenfranchised. This is important in a town transformed by armed violence and drug traffic economy, for it offers to marginal newcomers and those who cannot any longer live off the regional economies, a path of integration, one that seeks to remake the *llanero* world in new terms. Like Chesnut (1997) states in his study of evangelical's worldviews in Brazil, conversion is a path that offers a transition from economically disenfranchised to divine empowerment.[236] (Berenice Martin 1995)

235 This is not confined to Colombia or Pentecostalism. According to Comaroff and others (c.f. Barker 2007), neoliberal de-regularisation of the economy came along with new spatial articulations and the deconstruction of received identities, preparing the terrain for fundamentalists movements of all kinds and their quest for certainties and absolute sovereignties.

236 Marginality is a theme dominating studies of spirit possession, particularly in contexts of social disruption (Ong 1987, Lan 1985, Lewis 1971). Marginality and possession type of argument explains that possession -by displacing the responsibility for actions and behaviours- provides for the people in positions of subordination with a means to express social, economic or political oppression. Although not the type of analysis I have suggested, it is important to highlight that Pentecostal deliverance resignifies *cruzados*' possession, instances where they redefine their identity as migrants, ex-combatants deliverances and practitioners of *brujeria*, marginal people in San Martin society. Pentecostalism's force to assimilate into their churches these "marginal" populations attracted by paramilitary war, drug traffic, African Palm plantations, the economies enabled by paramilitarism in the Plains. These churches' success resides in their power to "create social capital out of nothing" (Martin 2002:79), successfully adapting to cultural contexts and embedding neoliberalism's rapid and violent transformation.

To summarise, Pentecostal churches became "sanctuaries", providing new forms of self-discipline and community building in the neoliberal frontier for ex-combatants and mobile workers working for the paramilitary economies. Pentecostals not only offered ex-paramilitary a "walk out" from the life in the groups but a way to live through the changes that came with the consolidation of paramilitarism in the region, changes triggered by their onslaught over *llanero* forms of life based on cattle ranching. I expand this topic in the next section without going further into the long history of affinity between evangelicalism and the spirit of capitalism (c.f. Kirby 2019).

Kindling the "Spiritual War"

The chapter started by unravelling the power of the deliverance ritual to provide closure for *cruzados brujeria* by embracing the "spiritual war". In contrast to other rituals, like those referring to life cycles or divine kinship, often regarded as "traditions" incongruent with modernity and globalisation, deliverances have straight ramifying effects throughout social and political space. They do not constitute a form of "native awareness" of the unequal relations of exploitation, oppression and violence of capitalistic systems drastically transforming people's ways of life. Deliverances, framed within the total institutions of Pentecostal churches, kindle their own socio-political realities.

According to Pastors and people working for demobilisation programmes, many ex-combatants who went through deliverances converted to Pentecostalism across the country. A topic for further research that leads us to ponder the fact that these churches proliferate in poor and violent areas of Latin America.[237] (Martin 1993, 2002, Wolseth 2008). In Colombia, Pentecostals have settled in impoverished rural areas since the civil war "The Violence" (Lozano 2009: 75), and, while they arrived at the Plains relatively late, by the 1980s, these churches now thrive. This boom could be credited to how they have harmonised with the world emerging after the consolidation of paramilitarism. That world

237 Henry Gooren and Berenice Martin's work on Pentecostalism ethos are set against impoverished and violent areas of Guatemala and Chile, respectively, where Pentecostalism offers people empowerment under limiting circumstances. However, these authors focus on evangelical discipline, attitudes to consumerism and family as aspects of Pentecostalism ethos 'harmonising' with the maladies of poverty produced by neoliberal restructuring. Pentecostalism's relation to violence and armed groups is approached tangentially in these works.

is one of extreme neoliberal restructuring and, as I will describe here, a polarised political climate. Pentecostal churches actively respond paramilitarism consolidation nationwide as a powerful political and economic force. The churches have grown side by side with paramilitarism entrenched connection with drug traffic, penetration of the State, the private sector and popularity among conservative sectors of Colombian society (See Introduction).

One way to think of the contiguity and parallel growth of Pentecostal churches and armed organisations is presented in the work of Cunha in Brazil (2014). In a study that spans over three decades in a *favela* in Rio, Da Cuhna describes the advent of a new generation of *Cristiano* criminals who changed the languages of saints and festivities for that of Jesus and the church's media platform.[238] These converted criminals regularly attend church, sponsor signs and murals with biblical messages, propagate their faith through radio stations and tattoos, promote the evangelic discipline of 'saving' among the organisation, and elaborate on the necessity of violence to 'protect' their communities. They have resignified "old criminal practices under a new religious code" -asserts Da Cuhna[239] (2014: 81). She concludes that this evangelical approximation to criminal worlds has been a "strategical shift" of small churches and big denominations in Brazil and has proven to be mutually beneficial: criminals use the churches to consolidate their authority, and the churches obtain legitimacy in the territories ruled by armed groups.

Cunha's work illustrates how Pentecostal churches' "sanctuaries" are embedded in the everyday of places ridden by organised crime and explains their success in violent territories. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to explore cooperation of the type described by Da Cunha. Documenting alliances between active paramilitaries and churches is a dangerous task that would have required a calculated approach I did not develop before entering San Martin. I interviewed only one active paramilitary in the

238 Vidal da Cuhna (2014) explains the relationship between evangelicals and drug traffickers. She argues that, in the same way, Pentecostalism is permeable to cultural forms and native cosmologies like Afro-Brazilian religions Candomblé and Umbanda, the movement is not completely detached from the criminal world. Cuhna describes the territory in the 1980s as populated by Catholic and popular Saints, crosses and Candomblé symbols, linked to drug-traffickers leaders bearing its images and sponsoring the symbols-monuments and festivities associated with them. Discourses of police authorities and press emphasised criminals' connexion to Afro-Brazilian religion as evidence of their association with the devil and dark magical forces.

239 My translation from Portuguese: "a ressignificacao de practicas criminosas ja antigas a partir da chave religiosa" . Although non-evangelicals attributed the relative peace to existing arrangements among criminal factions and their bribes to the authorities, peace was generally credited to the work of God in the favela, acting through the evangelical incorporation of criminal bosses into the church.

church, where he - let's call him Carlos - was helping to arrange the chairs before the service. In the single interview we arranged, Carlos told me about *brujeria*: "the paras [paramilitaries] of today are not in that game, those were the old ones". He was clearly disassociating himself and his group of "paras" from a previous generation of paramilitaries for whom *brujeria* was important. This change resounds with the one described by Da Cunha, suggesting that a new generation of criminals are invested in church work and evangelic discipline far-removed from *brujeria*. Carlos was not interested in discussing *brujeria*, his conversion to Pentecostalism or his "helper" role in the church. He, and probably other converted combatants like him, have swapped the language of *brujeria* for that of the "spiritual war" and live between the churches' "sanctuaries" and active paramilitarism.[240]

Given my limitations to collecting material, I focused on a "strategical shift" type that was easier to observe. It can be seen in the approximation of Pentecostalism and paramilitarism occurring in handling *cruzados*' possession. In this approximation Pentecostals procured to ex-paramilitaries closure from *brujeria* and a path to restore their humanity as born-again Christians. I contend that the relation between the boom of Pentecostal churches and the consolidation of paramilitarism as an economic and political force can be examined by the former's deployment of the "spiritual war", a theological concept staged in deliverance, lived in conversion and projected into multiple directions in a country where there is actual war (Lozano 2009: 77, Shaw 2007).

Living the "Spiritual War"

Pentecostal churches became "sanctuaries" for ex-paramilitaries, offering them protection from violence, separation of the "male prestige arenas", and the evangelic discipline to rebuild a life after demobilisation. However, they also maintained a degree of continuity with paramilitarism, still today powerful armed and political forces in the Plains. I argue that Pentecostals resignified *cruzados* sorcery and integrated ex-combatants, recodifying their experience of sorcery and war by enlisting them in the "spiritual war".

240There are cases of evangelical Pastors' direct links with drug traffic dynamics documented in the press. See for example, "Pastores Cristianos Lavando Plata para los Urabeños" (Christian Pastors doing Money Laundering for Urabeños) https://www.elcolombiano.com/antioquia/seguridad/pastores-cristianos-habrian-lavado-dinero-para-los-urabenos-KN1906590(Last accesed December 2021)

Ex-paramilitaries' involvement with Pentecostal churches usually starts in deliverance ceremonies, particularly important for *cruzados* suffering from spirit possession after demobilisation. As established in the first part of the chapter, in contrast with other exorcisms, Pentecostal deliverances do not bring the possessed back to "normality" (Kapferer 1983: 237). Instead, they reveal to the possessed that they have never been normal. Deliverance ceremonies unveil the world as a site of redemptive struggle, staging "the spiritual war" (Kirby 2019: 578, Miguez 1998), an eternal battle against demonic forces that menace all aspects of human existence, from health to prosperity and national security.

The revelation of the "spiritual war" fills the faithful with a powerful sense of agency by transforming them into direct bearers of divine grace and holding them accountable for fighting their opponents: demons, world-endangering antagonists to defeat (Meyer 1999: xxiii). The revelation of reality as a "spiritual war" offers moral certitude and accountability by simplifying and compartmentalising the cosmos. Correspondingly, by engaging believers in a war against globally powerful demons and uniting them under a cosmology shared by a global community. The personal revelation of the "spiritual war" is a "foundational truth" (Comaroff 2009: 29) projected from deliverances towards all realms of social life and propelling Pentecostals' religious militancy (Comaroff 2009: 29). "I am the warrior of God" (Sharlet 2005 quoted in Comaroff 2009: 29), is a common expression of Pentecostals which captures their empowerment to strive for worldly dominion: stable values and enforceable rules.

Demobilised paramilitaries found in the "spiritual war" a vehicle to continue fighting for the "good" of the nation and humanity. A telling example is their partaking in the church's campaigns against the "demons" behind same-sex marriage and feminist agendas, forms of political action often out of reach for disenfranchised young people like them.[241] (Wolseth 2008). Demobilised paramilitaries found in the "spiritual war" a militant quest to implement a moral order built upon the "conventional" family, heterosexuality and free-

241 Like many working-class young men who joined the Army in America (Graeber 2007), some paramilitary combatants joined the organisation hoping to make the country a "better place" by cleaning it from the threat of communist guerrillas. Deprived of the possibility of higher education, paramilitary groups offer these youngsters an option to pursue something noble and altruistic. Some paramilitary combatants joined the groups for the salaries, but they hoped to help the "Patria".

market economy. While this has been the case for most believers, this religious subjectivity was particularly important for ex-combatants and, as I suspect, for active paramilitaries. The militant religious path of the "spiritual war" allows them to live in the church's "sanctuaries" while retaining some degree of continuity with the ideological discourses justifying paramilitarism.

Pentecostals' "spiritual war" is part of what Comaroff calls the ontological dimension of Pentecostalism revival, the “theological-politics” offering absolute truths and cogent order amid the “increasing scale and abstraction of life under neoliberal conditions” (Comaroff. 29).

The Politics of the “Spiritual War”

The "spiritual war" provides a form of religious militancy appealing to a broad range of people living in marginal contexts across Latin America. Like Pentecostals in Brazil, the "warriors of God" in Colombia are more combative than Catholic activists when it comes to fighting “the devil” in political arenas (Burdick 1997). One telling example of this combativeness of Pentecostals in Colombia is the aggressive campaign against the same-sex partners' rights to adopt, for which these churches collected 2.3 million signatures for a referendum.[242] Although the referendum was ultimately judged unconstitutional, the campaign’s ample popular support was the beginning of a close alliance between evangelism and the conservative political spectrum.

The alliance was consolidated during the campaigns objecting to the Peace Agreement with the FARC guerrillas. In 2016, after extensive Peace talks for an agreement that would end 60 years of armed conflict with the communist FARC guerrillas, the then President Juan Manuel Santos wished to rally popular support for the agreement with a referendum. Pentecostal churches across the country run a campaign against it predicated on the basis that the peace agreement promoted a so-called "gender ideology". Sociologist Barthel summarises this evangelic notion as: "a socialist praxis that would permit constitutional

242 “Colombia Justa Libre, la Apuesta Electoral cristiana” In: EL Espectador, 28 Octubre 2017, https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/colombia-justa-libres-la-apuesta-electoral-cristiana/(LAst

amendments that would consecrate abortion, same-sex marriage, same-sex couple adoption rights, and would threaten the very social fabric of the nation" (Barthel 2016). Like in the referendum against same-sex couple adoption rights, Pentecostals ran the aggressive campaign weaponising the "spiritual war" to depict it as a struggle against the "demons" lurking in the "gender ideology" of the peace agreement. Their interventions helped to the victory of the "No" campaign, the objection promoted by a right-wing political bloc allied against the agreement.

The weight of Pentecostals' participation in the victory of the "No" is still to be revised, yet their campaign is telling about born-again Christians' strong sense of empowerment,[243] which propel them to respond to God's call to wrestle their country from the threats of demons, communism, progressive agendas and liberal humanism all the same. As the words of Pastor César Caste*llano*s after they won the "No" campaign clearly shows:

> We, 'Nosotros', we saved Colombia from being handed over to communists! We saved Colombia from the destructive power of the spirits of homosexuality. We saved the traditional family. We saved Colombia from the ideology of 'Homo-Castro-Chavismo' (quoted in Barthel 2016:1)

The words of the Pastor of the Misión Carismática Internacional (MCI) at a convention in Los Angeles,[244] is telling of Pentecostals' "sense of activism-in-time" (Comaroff 2009: 30). This is particularly appealing to those who, like ex-paramilitaries, find in the "spiritual war" a way to continue fighting against what they regard pollutes society: the "spirits of homosexuality" and "Castro-Chavismo", an expression used called by Colombian right-wing politicians to refer to the socialist governments of Cuban and Venezuela.

Pentecostalism is not necessarily aligned with the political right, as their involvement with Sandinistas in Nicaragua (Lancaster 1988) and Brazil's workers' party (Burdick 1997) demonstrates. However, most Pentecostal discourses in Colombia have aligned with the right-wing political spectrum. Like those Pentecostals supporting Pinochet in Chile to

243 "Underestimating the Force of The New evangelicals in the Public Sphere", Rebecca Barthel 2016, https://tif.ssrc.org/2016/11/15/underestimating-the-force-of-the-new-evangelicals-in-the-public-sphere-lessons-from-colombia-south-america/ See in press: "El Plebiscito por la Paz: el voto decisive de los evangelicos" In Revista Semana, 9/17/2016, https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/plebiscito-por-la-paz-el-voto-de-los-evangelicos-es-decisivo-para-la-campana/494042. (Last accessed December 2021)

244 The Send Us Your Rain convention of the MCI in Los Angeles.

fight the demons of communism (Gooren 2018), these discourses conflate socialism, progressist movements and left-wing parties with the demonic reality they must fight.

As described in the first part of this chapter, Pastors' integration of ex-combatants was not conducive to a critical stance against paramilitarism. When examining Pentecostals' political participation, it seems clear that the churches have channelled the anti-communist sentiment that constituted the base of paramilitarism popular support in the 1980s. They have fixed this sentiment in the "spiritual war", a transcendental reality transposed to the polarised political climate of a country torn by sixty years of armed conflict.

Fixing the “spiritual war” in this way resembles paramilitary attempts to impose a normative order through the *limpiezas or* “social cleansings”. Though *limpiezas* had consequences for the region’s political economy, they were not conducted only accordingly to economic rationale or a political ideology but also to a conservative ethos (See chapter five). Paramilitary *limpiezas* sought to eradicate at gunpoint what they deemed the moral "evils" incarnated in homosexuals, thieves, homeless people, and "indecent" women, same as any progressist or left-wing political associations (Taussig 2005, Kalyvas and Arjona 2005; Civico 2016). While Pentecostal churches offered ex-combatants a "walk out" of paramilitary life, the "spiritual war" enabled them to retain a degree of continuity with the conservative discourses behind paramilitaries' inhuman violence.

Churches' political visibility is part of a larger trend in Latin American politics that shows how Pentecostals have abandoned the old protestant sectarian ethos of political abstinence, actively mobilising the vote, campaigning against key moral issues like abortion laws or, like in the case of Guatemala and Brazil, openly supporting political parties and running for office (Gooren 2018). In Colombia, this visibility started with the alliances that formed the political block that won parliamentary and presidential elections in 2018.

Pentecostalism and Para-Politics

The two churches I visited in my field site, attended by demobilised paramilitaries and their families, campaigned for the Christian political party "Fair and Free Colombia" (Colombia Justa y Libre) for the elections in 2018. The party was founded in 2017 by the political movement "A Free Colombia" and the party "A Fair Colombia", notorious supporters of the "No" campaign in the referendum to sanction the Peace agreement with the guerrillas. "Fair and Free Colombia" reunited the largest number of evangelic denominations in the country, including some charismatic Catholic communities.[245] I observed Pastors actively campaigning for this party, organising informative meetings with the extended church community and managing committees for distributing promotional materials to rural areas. The churches functioned as the party headquarters in town during the 2018 electoral race. The party managed to put two governors, 14 mayors and three senators in parliament, mobilising more than half a million votes. Together with the older Christian political party MIRA,[246] "Fair and Free Colombia" combined big churches like "Manantial de Vida Eterna", "Misión Paz a las Naciones", "Tabernaculo de la Fe" and "El Lugar de su Presencia". The party is now an important political force, something evident for the right-wing presidential candidates who disputed their support, finally won by the candidate of the "Democratic Centre" party, Ivan Duque (2018-2022).[247]

By supporting Duque, "Fair and Free Colombia" ratified their support of "Uribismo", populism concentrated on Alvaro Uribe's figure and characterised by a strong anti-communist sentiment. At the head of the "Democratic Centre" party, Alvaro Uribe, the twice president of Colombia and mentor of President Duque, has a political career suspected of links with paramilitarism. Uribe rose to power by promising to defeat the guerrillas militarily, and once in office, he broke a Peace process with paramilitary groups.

245 See: "Colombia Justa Libre, la Apuesta Electoral cristiana" In EL Espectador, 28 Octubre 2017, https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/colombia-justa-libres-la-apuesta-electoral-cristiana/. See also: "Siete Pastores Poderosos que Pensan en Colombia" in Las Dos Orillas, 23 Diciembre 2019.
https://www.las2orillas.co/siete-poderosos-pastores-que-pesan-en-colombia/; http://www.quienesquien.co/glosario/partido-colombia-justa-libres/

246 Composed mainly of the "International Charismatic Mission" and the "Ministerial International church of Jesus Christ."

247 "Colombia Justa y Libre se decide por Duque" In: Revista Semana, 2018/05/09; https://www.semana.com/elecciones-presidenciales-2018/noticias/colombia-justa-libres-se-decide-por-duque-566653. They also supported other right-wing coalitions, like Bogota's candidacy for mayor. "Cristianos de Colombian Justa y Libre anuncian su apoyo a Miguel Uribe" in El Tiempo, 18 Julio 2019. https://www.eltiempo.com/bogota/cristianos-de-colombia-justa-libres-anuncian-su-apoyo-a-miguel-uribe-390288 (Last accessed July 2020). Duque's agreement with the leaders of "Fair and Just Colombia" focuses on strengthening the family as the fundamental nucleus of society, educational and health reform and the defence of religious freedoms. The party's ideological platform emphasises the strengthening of heterosexual marriage as the base of the nuclear family. This emphasis is a transversal issue in other areas, such as religious freedoms, sustainable development, and health and education reform. https://colombiajustalibres.org/plataforma-ideologica-proyecto-dignidad/

To date, more than 259 of his political allies have been sentenced to jail time for their ties with paramilitary groups.[248] Moreover, as documented in a plethora of journalist investigations and some of the 276 ongoing investigations levelled against him, Uribe is seriously suspected of having nexus with the paramilitary, the Colombian and Mexican Mafia bosses.[249] Despite all of this, Uribe yields a great political power that extends to different sectors of society, including a great part of Pentecostal communities. "Fair and Free Colombia", the largest Pentecostal coalition in Colombia, campaigned with the "Democratic Centre" party and thus became strategical allies of "Uribismo". Although there are dissenting voices within the churches and the disastrous Duque administration has maimed Uribismo's popular appeal, Pentecostals in "Fair and Free Colombia" support their *caudillo*. In doing so, they fusion with the paramilitary shadow that this populism cast over Colombian politics and the country's peacebuilding efforts.

Figure 21. Many Pentecostals in Colombia are allied with "Uribismo" and often represent Uribe political adversaries as demons, like left-wing presidential candidate Gustavo Petro in the photo.

The electoral activity of Pentecostal churches under "Fair and Free" Colombia demonstrates how the "spiritual war" propels religious militancy that move across various political arenas. As I have shown, Pentecostals' "spiritual war" dynamise the churches' social conservativism and anti-communism, a key element for their joining in a right-wing political coalition aligned with "Uribismo". This is not to say that Pentecostal churches in Colombia cooperate with armed organisations like in Brazil (Da Cunha 2014). It means

248 . See: "¿Quienes son los congresistas condenados por paramilitarismo?" In El Espectador, July 11th, 2018. https://www.elespectador.com/politica/quienes-son-los-congresistas-condenados-por-paramilitarismo-article-797648/See: Claudia Lopez and Sevi*llano* "Balance Politico de la Parapolitica" Report Observatorio de Conflicto Armado CNAI, august, 2018 http://www.ideaspaz.org/tools/download/54297. There are currently 519 ongoing investigations of politicians and government official nexus with paramilitaries, see: "El informe que indica que la parapolítica no es cosa del pasado" In Revista Semana, 4/17/2006, https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/procuraduria-adelanta-519-investicaciones-por-parapolitica-y-bacrimpolitica/470010

249 The "Electoral Observation Mission" (Misión de Observación Electoral MOE) revealed that the ex-president has 276 ongoing legal investigation from 1991 to 2013. See: "Uribe tiene 270 procesos Abiertsos por delitos graves" in Detector, La silla Vacia, 24, Julio 2019. https://lasillavacia.com/detector-uribe-tiene-270-procesos-abiertos-delitos-graves-72692; also: "Congreso tene mas de 276 investigacion en contra expresidente Uribe" In: LE Heraldo, Noviembre 9 2013; https://www.elheraldo.co/nacional/congreso-tiene-276-investigaciones-contra-expresidente-uribe-131537

that their theological concept of "spiritual war" has served as an echo chamber to the neo-conservative discourses in the "Uribismo", catapulting Pentecostal churches into the *para politics or parapolitica* -as the press call to the connexion of politics and paramilitarism.[250]

The "spiritual war" is part of Pentecostalism's "theological-politics" (Comaroff 2009: 17), and its "muscular Christianity" (*ibid*. 18) aligns with fundamentalism's need for confrontation with the secular world. While it is not new or confined to Colombia, my exploration suggests that th "spiritual war" takes spectacular proportions for ex-combatants in a country torn apart by decades of political violence. Pentecostals' "spiritual war" is a powerful way to do politics in times of extreme political polarisation, like the ones that came after paramilitarism' consolidation.

Pentecostalism and Paramilitarism: A Relationship to Explore

San Martin central church is the oldest in the Plains; its bells remind San Martineros of their long presence in the region. However, the prominent presence of evangelical churches has challenged the vested influence of the Catholic church. Nowadays, Catholics mass attendance has decreased while Pentecostals' is on the rise. San Martin Pentecostalization stands someplace in-between the "neo-Pentecostals" and the "Bronto-Pentecostals"–the latter characterised by churches that, according to Moreira (2018): "work as individual-centred religious start-ups, they emerge and disappear and can easily close, move away" *(ibid*. 4).[251] At the time of my fieldwork, there were 11 large churches officially registered,[252] and dozens of independent churches emerging in garages (literally). These churches' expansion has been rapid and sweeping. Summoning people through WhatsApp messages and loudspeakers announcing the arrival of a new Pastor, these churches are

250 There have been corruption scandals involving some of the Pastors "Uribistas", Notoriously Pastor Wilson Enrique Gaitán González from *Iglesia Pentecostés Movimiento Misionero Mundial*, indicted in 2012 for leading a criminal organisation to scam people. (See: "Escandanlos que Han Salpicado a las Iglesias Evangelicas en Colombia" in *El Espectador*, 25/01/2014, https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/escandalos-que-han-salpicado-a-las-iglesias-evangelicas-de-colombia/. Such scandals are not isolated incidents in Pastor's politicians or "Pentepolitcians" -as Moreira calls them (2018)- who are not alien to money and electoral frauds in places like Brazil and Nicaragua (Ibid. 7)

251 Pentecostal churches were established in some areas of Latin America as early as 1910 when there have been other than three waves of this movement penetrating the continent (Da Silva Moreira 2018). What we know as neo-Pentecostalism started in 1970 when churches broke with the sectarian ethos to become more international, incorporating a managerial culture, ample use of media, intensive preaching of prosperity gospel and the spiritual war

252 Registers in the local administration office.

difficult to ignore. Their success is part of a larger trend: the global growth of Pentecostalism and its "charismatic penumbra" -to paraphrase Martin (2002). [253]

While this expansion cannot be reduced to one factor, I contend that the integration of *cruzados,* ex-combatants and migrant workers alike, is telling example of how Pentecostals adapt to local contexts and foster social practices addressing people's quest for identity and meaning amid violence and rapid neoliberal structuring. Certainly, ex-paramilitaries' relationship with Pentecostals was a spiritual alliance, aiding in consolidating evangelicals' presence in social life in town. In the words of Jean Comaroff: "The genius of the new holistic faiths is to address the displacements and desires of the current world, to make its pathologies and terrors the portents of imminent transcendence" (2009: 33). No doubt that in this corner of polarised and violent Colombia, Pentecostals make of paramilitaries' "gangster capitalism" (Gill 2016: 97) "the portents of imminent transcendence".

Pentecostals resignified *cruzados* sorcery and integrated ex-combatants, not denying but recodifying their experience of sorcery and war in the theological concept of the "spiritual war". On one hand, the churches resignified the "unhuman" *cruzado* and reconstructed combatants as "born-again" Christians. Like other concepts of Pentecostal theology, "the spiritual war" is grounded in praxis and not concerned with abstract intellection or dogma but with personal religious experience and imagery (Wolfgang Vondey 2018). It emerged from the experiences of deliverance and conversion, predicating a personal transformation that has ramifications in various social, economic and political arenas (Martin 2002: 167). This transformation refers to the "true change" predicated by Pastor Galeano, modes of behaviour enacting a "rupture" with the social milieu of the paramilitary groups.

In addition, Pentecostals complemented the world of neoliberal restructuring emerging through the consolidation of paramilitarism. That world is one of increased migration, rapid urbanisation, disarticulation of traditional economies and deconstruction of "received identities". The chapter describes how the conversion of ex-*cruzados* -as in ex-

253 Calculated in approximately one-quarter of a billion people around the globe (Martin 2002: 1), this growth has prompted a large body of scholarship in response to the magnitude, evolution and impact of Pentecostalism (c.f. Robins 2018 revision on the increase of academic work on Pentecostalism since 1960). Its expansion is a matter of concern in the daily conversation for priest and for many *San Martineros*, who often voice their reservation about the lack of regulation of what Da Silva Moreira calls an "ultraliberal religious market" (2018: 10)

combatants and "outsiders" -"harmonise" with the neoliberal restructuring, fostering forms of practical behaviour and community building that suit the displacement of cattle ranching and the town's urban growth. Moreover, Pentecostals' "spiritual war" has propelled a militant religious subject mobilising these churches to participate in politics. In other words, Pentecostalism stage “continuities” with the transformations produced by paramilitarism.[254]

To be "born-again" is the final stop of *cruzados*' journey. Combatants' humanity is restored in a rupture with the manufacture of their "inhumanity". They are reinstalled as humans in the ritual revelation of the "spiritual war", rooted in their incorporation into a community and society as religious subjects. They become human through the ritual undoing of the "unhuman" cursed body crafted in *brujeria* and by dethatching them from the paramilitary groups, thus no longer connoting the dehumanised combatant capable of inhuman violence. These "born-again" Christians are no longer supernatural cursed beings. They no longer produce paramilitarism's spectacular inhumanity but normalise the changes it brought about.

This fast-paced chapter poses more questions than it answers. To start understanding Pentecostalism's rise is necessary to explore the history of the arrival of these churches to the Plains in the 1980s and its coincidence with the early paramilitary occupation. Little do we know about the relationship of these churches and Pastors with armed actors during these decades. This chapter only glimpses at this relationship in the aftermath of paramilitaries' demobilisation, when Pastors engaged with ex-paramilitaries in their service of deliverances.[255] However, we need further investigation regarding ex-

254 Paramilitaries resemble Pentecostals in many ways. For example, in their "glocal" nature characterised by "hybridity and fracture" (Robbins 2018: 368). As Robbins and others point out, Pentecostals have grown from a sectarian ethos to a proud religious movement, characterised by a continuous process of differentiation or 'denominational fragmentation' that is often mistaken for religious pluralism (Moreira 2018: 14). This fragmentation looks like paramilitaries continuous *esquismogénesis*, which advanced from localised groups to a patched national organisation that then broke down into a multitude of "criminal gangs".

255 Another research theme is that conversion does not turn out as a magical formula to attain the ideals of the nuclear family, community and financial stability it wishes to address. When I first met Camilo in 2018, he faced a dilemma: to rejoin paramilitary structures that were becoming stronger again across the country or to continue under the tutelage of his Pentecostal church. The church had helped him to become a "decent" person to get a job in the private security sector and regain custody rights over the children of his first marriage. Still, overcoming poverty proved so extenuating that Camilo contemplated breaking his promise to Jesus to make the extra money to be lifted out of poverty. Meyer (1999) argues that in deliverance, people wrestle against the incapability to live up to the ideal of financial independence, of exiting the "demonic" past behind: "Pentecostalism, rather than representing a haven of modern religion in which people permanently remain, enable people to move back and forth between the way of life they wish to have left behind and the one to which they aspire (Meyer 1999: 212). By focusing on the idea of "sanctuaries," this chapter does not address deliverance as a space for confrontation with the disturbing ongoing dynamics of paramilitarism, which were not completely in the 'past' as they were still 'outside' the church. The ongoing dynamics of paramilitarism were a threat in the killings of sorcerers, ex-combatants and active paramilitaries in the region. They were also seductive temptations. As illustrated in Camilo's dilemma, Pentecostalism and paramilitarism present captivating promises of financial stability.

combatants' conversion and the paths they have followed after the implementation of the Peace agreement with the guerrillas started in 2017.

To conclude, there is no work about spirituality and violence in Colombia complete without looking at the Pentecostal phenomena. Like in other parts of Latin America, Pentecostal churches are rising across the country, in cities and small towns. Further research is necessary to understand how this raising occurs in contexts pervaded by the presence of armed groups that yield great economic and political power nationally.

Conclusions - *Brujeria*, Capitalism and Spectacular Inhumanity

> The violence itself says that there is 'dark magic', that the person is not a human being because a human being does not act that way.
>
> Father Norberto

Father Norberto was talking about *cruzados* in the way that I have described them throughout this thesis: in a loop crossing from the "unhuman" produced in 'black magic' and the "inhuman" produced in paramilitaries' violence. *Cruzados brujeria* is "a play-within-the-play" (Taussig 2016:469), which - as Father Norberto hints - discloses while produces the "anti-human" machinery powering paramilitary war.

In the words of Taussig (2016) *brujeria* or sorcery is an "intercultural text" (*ibid*. 465). As I explained in chapter one, this is evident in the very term and what it points to, as a group of practices forged in the colonial mixing of indigenous, Spaniards and African peoples, their knowledge, healing practices, forms of religiosity and understandings of the spiritual forces. The *brujeria* of supernatural bulletproof men is not an exception. As I have analysed, it is not an essential *llanero* expression or conscious paramilitary strategy to instil fear in the population, but a practice emerging within the dynamics of paramilitarism in the Plains. *Cruzados brujeria* unfolds the "multiple realities" (Taussig 2005) of paramilitarism: "meaning heterogeneity as reality, the world as a cosmic jigsaw puzzle with parts missing and others that will never fit" (*ibid*. 127). Each of the thesis' six chapters offers a piece of the puzzle of paramilitary power in the Plains.

Chapters one and two show the interaction between the ritual to become *cruzados* and the paramilitaries' presence. They describe how the ritual language creates a liminal and sorcerous being with the potential to become "unhuman" as in supernatural and cursed. These chapters explore the idea of the "unhuman", as the bodies embodying and magnifying paramilitary terror. Chapter three explains the correspondence between the "unhuman" beings and the experiences of "dehumanised" combatants inside paramilitary troops. Chapter four examines the presence of the *cruzados* in people's talk and how these relate to the presence of paramilitaries as agents of transformation of *llaneros'* ways of life. Chapter five further explores the association of *cruzados* to the paramilitaries' "inhuman"

violence enabling such transformations. Finally, chapter six shows us the *cruzados* who survived paramilitary war and - with the help of Pentecostal churches - were leaving behind their "unhuman" "inhumanity" in order to live in a renewed *llanero* world.

In its "multiple realities", *cruzados* seldom remit us to the radical alterity of *llaneros,* or an identarian paramilitary practice. Instead, they always remit us to the social field that paramilitarism was opening in the Plains through their presence in the form of the combatants' bodies, the shapeless troops, their terrible violence and force to operate decisive transformations in towns like San Martin. The supernatural bulletproof men compel us to look at paramilitaries' armed presence and the forms in which it becomes "unhuman". In doing so, they offer a perspective of *brujeria* as a dialogical and creative practice forged through multifaceted social interactions.

Cruzados are the presence of the paramilitary and their capacities for violence as an armed force, what I call, paramilitarism *de facto* power. This theme, addressed in chapters two and three, unravels the correspondence between the ritually crafted "unhuman" and the socially engineered "dehumanised" beings in the harsh sociality of the paramilitary groups. *Cruzados* were combatants in the multitude of the troops, "unhuman" in the sense of being the cannon fodder necessary to run and expand the organisation. Thus, the sorcery of supernatural bulletproof men not only inspired terror in the enemy and the population, which it certainly did, but comprises the 'spectacular inhumanity' of the combatant and the troop. *Cruzados* objectivise the making of people into instruments for warfare, weapons, precarious workers with capacities for violence. This sorcery confronts us with the permanent supply of humans to reproduce paramilitarism, that is, the production of organised armed violence to maintain the status quo and advance neoliberal agendas in countries like Colombia.

Cruzados were ritually produced as "unhuman", powerful supernatural beings, while they were socially produced as "inhuman", "dehumanised" beings capable of "inhuman" violence. *Cruzados* gave up their humanity in a mystical and literal sense, ritually and socially; however, I ethnographic pinpointed these distinctions that I made only for analytic purposes. *Brujeria* collapse the two so that even the combatants who did not go

through the ritual could become *cruzados*, for their unhuman power resided in the mere social existence of the ritual.

Chapter five enlarges these considerations. It describes how paramilitaries *de facto* power provoked unprecedented changes in the Plains. *Cruzados* were prominent during the violent times of paramilitary expansion across the country, when the groups were invested in taking control of drug traffic, accumulating land, entrenching their economic connections and consolidating their influence on electoral politics. The heightened presence of *cruzados* is a marker of this stage of paramilitarism development, connoting the "inhuman" violence set in motion by the forces of this "gangster capitalism" (Gill 2016). This is not to say that *cruzados* embody capitalism as an abstract force, but that they were part of the mechanisms enabling its intensification.

This perspective differs from other anthropological takes on the relationship between sorcery and violence. For example, the perspective named "modernity and witchcraft" which presupposes that sorcery functions to express the inequality and dispossession fuelling community conflict and violence. Under this perspective, *cruzados* would be regarded as a form to capture locally the abstract forces of capitalism fuelling violence**.** Although it served as a starting point, my argument developed in another direction. Capitalism is founded on an operation of alienation, yet it is not the underlying condition of such operation, it is constituted by it. Paramilitarism, as a form of "gangster capitalism", operates on an alienation essential to turn humans into weapons to wage war in the name of profit. The sorcery of *cruzados* entails such an operation, a supernatural alienation that is not an effect of global capitalism but is constitutive of its dynamics.

A similar perspective to sorcery and violence concerns the idea that the former entails a form of appropriation of the latter in "native's" terms. Throughout the thesis, I have described *cruzados* in *llanero* life, discussing how the meaning of *cruzados* relates to the significance of *mestizos* in the Plains (chapter one), how they have become part of a conversation about the supernatural (chapter four) and appeared when paramilitaries have consolidated their power to enact deep transformation in the Plains. However, at several points of my exposition, I have stopped to discuss whether *cruzados* are a *llanero*

form of understanding paramilitaries' power. In other words, I have examined if *cruzados* are a *llanero* "cosmology of capitalism" (See chapter five).

“Cosmologies of conflict" has often been used to describe the incorporation of goods and commodities in local value systems, embodying divine benefits or magical forces. It generally refers to how local peoples integrate the world-system into their own system of the world. This idea is in the work of Shaw (1997), who explains how witchcraft in Sierra Leone was shaped by the image of the slave trade in West Africa, crafted in their historical experience of the occult powers predating human lives and worlds. This image contrast with the economic logic of the slave trade that enabled Europeans to craft their own "cosmology of capitalism" and modernity in terms of "rationality" (*ibid*. 22). The idea features in the work of Comaroff and Comaroff, who argue that sorcery is a form of consciousness expressing discontent with the twisted outcomes of modernity. Far from a homogenising project, modernity comprises the plural local trajectories of "civilising" and "globalising" projects. The myriad of "mythic modernities" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xii), like the multiple "cosmologies of capitalism", refers to people's historical appropriation of their experience of modern predation.

I contend that this idea is limited to understand *cruzados. Cruzados* are the presence of the troops and swathes of "outsiders", racialised "others" that came to the Plains to work for paramilitarism. They are also the presence of paramilitaries "taking" all the women, monopolising the public space and the storytelling time. Therefore, *cruzados* are not a *llanero* “cosmology of capitalism” because what is *llanero* is precisely what *cruzados* alienate: what lives in *criollos* silences and in the drive of *espantos* retreating. Though they embody and magnify the presence of the paramilitary in the Plains*, cruzados* allude to the withdrawal of the cosmological dimensions of *llaneros'* world, receding under the force of the "new men" and their "troops", the forms of "gangster capitalism" displacing the "*llano's'* work". A *llanero* "cosmology of capitalism" precludes an understanding of the paramilitaries' "business is war" overtaking the world of the "*llano's* work”. The sorcery of supernatural bulletproof men emerges in the interaction of *llaneros* and paramilitaries, an interface that could be better correspond to a "phenomenology” than to a “cosmology of capitalism".

At times, it seems that "cosmologies of capitalism" is an intellectual effort of anthropologists to grasp the agency of the communities with whom they work, and the power that they retain even in the face of the violence and dispossession of colonialism and savage capitalism. In comparison, *cruzados* offer a reminding of the overwhelming power of inhuman violence, specifically armed violence, and its potential to devastate human life, by devouring combatants, communities and ways of life. My perspective in this thesis cast light on the relationship between armed violence and the concatenated alienation of the combatants who serve as cannon fodder and the "alien-nation" produced through paramilitarism modernisation of the regional economy. This perspective indicates how paramilitaries overtaking of the "*llano's* work" also implies the alienation of *llaneros'* power to recreate themselves as distinctive peoples. Furthermore, it elaborates on how *cruzados* foreshadowed the advent of the "warriors of God", the "born-again Christians" equipped to live in a world shaped by forces that they do not control.

The sorcery of *cruzados* renders evident the predatory nature of capitalism. It comprises what Comaroff and Comaroff call a "poetics of predation" (1993: xxvi), images through which peoples appropriated the violent experiences of colonisation, slavery, war, exploitation and dispossession as part of the history of capitalism of their territories. The "poetics of predation" comprises "full-bodied images of a world in which humans seem in constant danger of turning into commodities, of losing their lifeblood to the market (...)" (1993: xxix). I explained *cruzados'* relation to paramilitary's predatory nature through the notion of the "war machine": an "un-merciless force, constructed by civil society but always escaping its control, driven by the search for profit from even the most brutal kinds of economic and financial production" (Whitehead 2011: 7). The "war machine" describes paramilitarism world of unspeakable violence leading to vast profits, as operating on the production of "killable bodies" (Whitehead 2011: 15). Although they produce images, as in stories and evocations, *cruzados* are ritually and socially produced as "unhuman" in the sense of "killable bodies". They are not only "poetics of predation" but the means of predation and that what is predated. *Cruzados* produced paramilitaries' *de facto* power, the supernatural bulletproof men that, ironically, became fuel for the "war machine".

As an "intercultural text", *cruzados* enable us to see how we think about armed violence. Are *cruzados* making us think of how *llanero* people understand the paramilitary or are they making us think deeper about the forms in which contemporary forms of armed violence become ordinary ways to do politics and economic activities? These questions are posed by Graeber (2015) when deliberating with the exponents of the "ontological turn": “We appear to be in the presence of two quite different conceptions of what anthropology is ultimately about", -Says Graeber (2015: 6). Are we trying to understand radical alterities or reconsidering apparent exotic practices (like *brujeria)* to re-examine our assumptions and say something new about human beings in general? I believe this thesis lands more on the second position. *Cruzados* offer a counterpoint to the "banality of evil" (Arendt 1969), because they are a token of the "spectacular inhumanity" necessary to reproduce “war machines”. *Cruzados* compel a reflection of the ways in which the 'humans for war' must be carefully engineered. They disclose the inversion of values that paramilitarism represents.

Cruzados' “inhumanity” presents humans as a unit of nature maintaining or struggling to maintain the “mutuality of being” and placing value in human life and meaning in death. In other words, *cruzados'* "inhumanity" suggest that humans are so because their lack of natural inclination for the inhuman violence of war: "a human being does not act that way" -says wisely Father Norberto.

Annex 1: Paramilitary structures demobilised in the Eastern Plains

Estructura	Zona de Ubicación Temporal	Fechas de desmovilización	Número de armas	Número de desmovilizados
Autodefensas Campesinas de Meta y Vichada	Finca 'La María', vereda San Miguel, municipio de Puerto Gaitán, departamento de Meta	6 de agosto 2005	232	209
Bloque Centauros	Finca 'Corinto', corregimiento de Tilodirán, municipio de Yopal, departamento de Casanare	3 de septiembre 2005	705	1.134
Bloque Vencedores de Arauca	Vereda Puerto Gaitán, municipio de Tame, departamento de Arauca.	23 de diciembre 2005	548	399
Frentes Héroes del Llano y Héroes de Guaviare	Inspección de Policía de Casibare, municipio de Puerto Lleras, departamento de Meta	11 de abril 2006	1.024	1.765

Source: Desmovilización y Reintegración, ODDR, Informe región Orinoquia 2013: 90

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