

# LANGUAGES OF STATENESS

## A Study of Space and El Pueblo in the Colombian State\*

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El Pueblo unido jamás será vencido.

—Popular Protest Slogan

In the Colombian case, it [the crisis and disintegration of the state] has more to do with a loss of centrality and normative capacity of the state principally caused by the loss of the monopoly of coercion and the simultaneous erosion of the state apparatuses responsible for providing defense, security, and protecting citizens, added to the corollary emergency of strong non-state actors that challenge the state's monopoly for control both of the territory and of the population.

—Ana María Bejarano and Eduardo Pizarro

In the postcolonial period, the project of Latin American nation building has been a profoundly *spatial* project, in which a lack of physical integration has been compounded by regional conflicts over the nature of the state project.

—Sarah Radcliffe

*Abstract: In this paper I move beyond binary conceptions of the Colombian state as either strong or weak, failed or successful. Instead, I analyze particular sublime and gross qualities of the state as they are expressed through contestations over the space of el pueblo. I argue that this space—el pueblo—has been constructed around an internal contradiction. On one hand, it is figured as distant and in opposition to the city-state. On the other hand, it occupies the center of the nation. Marginalized by the official state, competing actors have incorporated el pueblo into “shadow states” that subvert the sublime image of the state. Lacking legitimacy within el pueblo, both the official and shadow states employ institutionalized violences in order to assert symbolic, discursive, and physical control over it. The result is the creation of a “culture of terror” that marks the real and*

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*imaginary space of el pueblo. The “spatialized vocabularies of citizenship” articulated by each actor—the state, shadow states, and el pueblo itself—from these margins mutually constitute Colombia’s competing and intertwining “languages of stateness.”*

#### INTRODUCTION: SUBLIME AND GROSS STATE CHARACTERISTICS

According to scholar Achille Mbembe (2000, 269), development studies has largely been the study of crises. In Colombia, the government’s inability to maintain a monopoly over the use of violence, to reign in rogue “independent republics” or to establish a rule of law throughout its “sovereign” territory has been well studied by scholars of Latin American political development seeking to understand and typologize the exact “crisis” of the state (e.g., F. González 2002; Richani 2002; Bejarano and Pizarro 2000; Sousa Santos and García Villegas 2001; Centeno 2002). On one hand, Colombia has a long-reputed formal democracy based on power sharing and political negotiations. On the other, the country is in an acute state of war marked by high levels of violence, extra-state armed actors, corruption, poverty, impunity, wealth concentration, political exclusion, regionalization, and illegal activity such as drug trafficking, all of which render it unable to provide its inhabitants with a minimum of security, social well-being, or state presence.<sup>1</sup> The Colombian state thus defies simple categorization as either successful or failed.

Contemporary theories of the state conceptualize state making as either a success or a failure building almost singularly on Max Weber’s definition of the state that endows it with two fundamental capabilities: to monopolize violence and control a sovereign territory. For Weber, “a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory*” (1958, 82, italics in original). A “successful” state, then, must exhibit total control over violence within an absolutely sovereign territory. This territory is understood as a fixed entity that serves as a container for a natural, eternal “human community,” the nation (Agnew 1999, 175). The Weberian state is seen as a modern and rational individual, displaying omnipotence, justness, decision, strength, and control (Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Mbembe 2001; Migdal 2001). Oscillating between rationality and magic, legitimate states are often deified through fantastic displays of power, dazzling development projects, the miraculous domination of natural resources, or the ability to incite citizens to action against their own

1. Most scholars identify the origins of this unrest in the 1948 assassination of populist leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Mary Roldán (2002), however, demonstrates the high level of turbulence long before the assassination.

better judgment (Coronil 1997; Das and Poole 2004). "Relatively autonomous" from civil society, the sublime state appears as "an agency capable of creating a definite and authorized nation-space materialized in boundaries, infrastructure, monuments, and authoritative institutions" (Hansen and Stepputat 2001, 2; see also Migdal 2001; Mitchell 1991). The sublime Weberian state must present an image free of profanities such as incoherence, brutality, partiality, banality, incompetence, technicality, and/or self-interest, as only through ascription to the sublime and rejection of banality can the state earn the legitimacy needed to beget voluntary compliance with its rules and avoid resorting to coercion. Marked thus by absolute sovereignty, legitimate authority, and a monopoly over violence in a clearly defined territory with a common temporality, the Weberian state model forms the basis for the "myth of the state" (Hansen and Stepputat 2001, 2).

Yet few states, if any, meet Weber's ideal in absolute terms. When held up to this ahistorical myth, the "failure" of states is the rule rather than the exception. "Actual states are deviations from the ideal or corrupted versions of the ideal" (Hansen and Stepputat 2001, 14). In practice, states are not unitary or coherent actors easily distinguished from civil society, but rather decentralized, disaggregated, and multilayered amalgams of social structures deeply embedded in and produced by power relations in a multinational society (Cooper 1995; Gupta 1995; Mbembe 2001; Migdal 2001, Mitchell 1991). Internal disjunctures among and within state bureaucracy contribute to incoherent policies with inconsistent application, as well as the pitting of one arm of the state against the other (Gupta 1995; Migdal 2001). Scholars such as Akhil Gupta (1995), Veena Das (2004), and Fernando Coronil (1997) have demonstrated how state power is both reliant on and susceptible to irrational and uncontrollable processes such as gossip and rumor, further emphasizing the banality of the state. Moreover, despite necessary attempts to appear rational, actual states exemplify two levels of arbitrariness—simple irrationality and the arbitration of naming (Ferme 2004, 83; Mbembe 2001). When the state does act "rationally" and earnestly dedicates itself to planning, its plans seldom beget the desired outcomes, instead producing unintended, conflicting, and at times incoherent, results (Migdal 2001). Absolute territorial sovereignty has been eroded through processes of social and economic globalization accompanied by deterritorialization and decentralization spurred by ethnic mobilization, separatist movements, the (im)migration of peoples, international finance institutions, and the global movement of capital, accentuating the permeable and fluid nature of borders while undermining the state's "pretence of sovereignty" (Coronil 1997; Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Mbembe 2001). This assumed sovereignty is further challenged by "shadow" or "parallel" states that utilize existing structures of state

governance, combined with novel forms of local surveillance and organization, to administer state-like control in the margins of the state (Hansen and Stepputat 2001, 35–6; Roitman 2004).

The paradox of contemporary states, then, is that they continue to exist and exert such influence, by all measures maintaining their permanence and ubiquity, despite overarching failures to approximate Weber's mythical, sublime state. According to Mbembe (2001, 68), even the most "failed" or "stateless" of states will inevitably retain its title, while evolving qualities and modes of operation very unlike those of conventional states. Not only do states continue to be thought of as such even in light of myriad vulgarities, but they may not be undermined by profanities at all, but rather constituted by them, both physically and discursively (Gupta 1995; Roitman 2004). Tilly (1985), for instance, argues that the state is merely the ultimate form of organized crime, while numerous scholars have demonstrated how law functions as a second order violence that works to obscure originary violence, that is, the origins of the state in violence itself (Coronil 1997; Das and Poole 2004; Derrida 1976, 101–140; 2002, 230–298; Mbembe 2001; Poole 2004). In reference to the Indian state, Gupta (1995) demonstrates how corruption is not indicative of state dysfunction, but rather central to the discursive constitution of the state. Likewise, Janet Roitman (2004) argues that the pluralization of regulatory authorities and the flowering of parallel—that is, "informal" and "illegal"—economies in the Chad Basin do not undermine state power but rather are essential to its very (re)composition. Still others note the Janus-faced nature of state practices such as monopolizing violence, checkpoints, and identification and documentation procedures that simultaneously threaten and protect citizens (Das and Poole 2004).

Taking the paradoxical nature of the modern state as a starting point, this paper seeks to further our understanding of the particular power arrangements that produce the "state effect" (Mitchell 1991, 94–5). In doing so, it takes seriously the myth of the state as a sublime image consisting of absolute control over both territory and violence, an image to which the state must subscribe in order to maintain legitimacy. Departing from Joel Migdal's definition of the state as "a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) *the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory*, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts," this paper understands the modern state to be both sublime and gross, image and practice (2001, 15–16). Pushing beyond binary conceptions of the state as either strong or weak, successful or failed, I seek to situate the constant creation and subversion of the myth of the state within the repetitive invocation of globally understood registers of governance and authority that Hansen and Stepputat (2001) describe as

"languages of stateness": "Instead of deploring the crisis or even collapse of postcolonial states in terms of the repercussions for regional stability, we find it more pertinent to explore the local and historically embedded ideas of normality, order, intelligible authority, and other languages of stateness" (9). These languages of stateness and the particular "spatial vocabularies of citizenship" that constitute them are informed by both real and imaginary geographies and are ideally studied in the "margins" of the state where, at the interstices of social reproduction, power is entangled and popular geographies attempt to redraw the map of state power (Radcliffe 2004; Das and Poole 2004). From these margins it is possible to deconstruct false dichotomies that constitute the myth of the state such as legality/illegality, domination/resistance, state/civil society, public/private, margins/center, and popular/official discourse. Local state practices, such as documentation, mapping, drawing and reinforcing boundaries, establishing armies, and so on may alternately contradict or reinforce the ideal image of the state set forth, both marking the distance between the state and individuals as well as penetrating into everyday life, both creating and undermining national identity and control, producing the state as a structural effect while explaining its elusiveness (Cooper 2004; Coronil 1994, Das and Poole 2004; Gupta 1995; Mitchell 1991; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996; Scott 1998).

Locating this study within the contemporary space of *el pueblo*, I show how its spatial vocabulary of citizenship denounces the gross practices of states and shadow states alike while reconfiguring the sublime image of the state through local discourses and imaginaries of the nation-state. In the first section I argue that *el pueblo*<sup>2</sup> presents a paradox for the nation-state, as it is located at the extreme margins of the state while occupying the very center of the nation. In the second section, I explore the creation of shadow states by extra-state actors in *el pueblo* in order to fill the vacuum left by the official state. I posit that the existence of these illegitimate shadow states visibly challenges the official state's legitimacy and undermines its authority by revealing its profanity. In the third section I examine the state's reaction to this challenge to its legitimacy and sovereignty. In the subsequent section, I explore the effects of violences that states—both official and shadow—have institutionalized in order to impose control and authority over a space in which they have no legitimacy, marking the very space of the *pueblo* with a "culture of terror" that shapes the collective memories and physical landscape in the state's margins, thus mediating the relationship between the state and *el pueblo* (Taussig 1987). Finally, I demonstrate the agency

2. Incorporating "el pueblo" into our English vocabulary, I will no longer italicize the phrase.

of el pueblo in the production of the state by analyzing el pueblo's "spatial vocabulary of citizenship" (Radcliffe 2004). I aver that this localized vocabulary seeks the benefits of citizenship in the state while simultaneously preserving its status as the embodiment of the nation, all the while dialectically informing the states' languages of stateness.

#### THE CITY-STATE AND EL PUEBLO

The colloquial word in Spanish for a rural village is "el pueblo." Yet el pueblo has myriad meanings that span race, class, nationality, and space. According to the dictionary *El Mundo*, "el pueblo" means 1) a town or village, 2) a lesser population, 3) the totality of people with a common origin or culture, 4) the common, humble people of a population, and 5) a country with an independent government.<sup>3</sup> Each of these definitions has two fundamental components: a particular geographic place and body or community of people. Every assertion of el pueblo thus contains both spatial and sociological borders that identify the space and people within from that/those without while maintaining an inclusive character. Moreover, its meaning is highly contextual. The complexity of the term is reflected in the inability of finding one word in English that adequately conveys its implicit meanings such that most authors leave it untranslated.

The dual imagery of geographic setting/people implicit in el pueblo is abundantly utilized in discourses from the Americas on three geopolitical levels. Each state can be framed as a pueblo in and of itself, invoking a common national identity such as *el pueblo mexicano*. This understanding of el pueblo reinforces the conception of the nation-state, one that understands the state as a container for a naturally occurring social body, the nation.<sup>4</sup> These pueblos have geopolitical borders manifested in the state which is thought to surround the finite social, cultural, and economic systems of the people that inhabit it. In this sense, the pueblo *is* the nation, housed in the state, producing the holistic *nation-state*.

Inter/transnational invocations of el pueblo also exist, uniting peoples across national borders. Religion, race, geographic region, or social class may delineate the boundaries of el pueblo in these cases. *El pueblo latino*—the Latin people/town; *el pueblo católico*—the Catholic people/town; *el pueblo indígena*—the indigenous people/town, or *el pueblo trabajador*—the working people/town—these taxonomies challenge the dominant

3. *Diccionario de la lengua española*. 22nd ed., s.v., "pueblo."

4. Assuming the previously established definition of a state as per Migdal, I use 'nation' to indicate communities of people who share common identities and collective memories, which may or may not correspond to the boundaries of the state.

conception of geographic space as politically delineated into states, provinces, and cities. On a geopolitical map of modern states, such communities seem disperse and noncontiguous. Yet these pueblos are connected through alternate geographies based on common identity, altitude, mobility, access to water, or proximity to religious sites, to name a few (e.g. Robinson 1989). Finally, *el pueblo* may refer to various subdivisions of the state, such as *el pueblo boyacense*<sup>5</sup> or, in its most literal sense, an actual town or “small homeland” (*patria chica*).

Intergenerational and transnational processes of delocalization, deterritorialization, and globalization have challenged and expanded previous conceptions of *el pueblo* both geopolitically and sociologically. (Im)migration, urbanization, displacement, world travel, remittances, and speculative capital markets have challenged geopolitical understandings of states as having rigid borders and containing finite and individual systems such as national economies. These processes highlight the unstable and fluid nature of political borders and identities while emphasizing the importance of shared history, temporality, interests, and global economies. Such processes do not entail a clear strengthening, weakening, or shrinking of the nation-state, but rather are indicative of a rethinking of the modern nation-state and its corresponding malleability (Das and Poole 2004, 4).

Despite the increasingly evident porous nature of geopolitical borders, a much deeper discursive, imagined, and practiced boundary exists between *el pueblo* and the state. A fundamental aspect of the myth of the state locates the state in the city. This city-core where the state is located and concentrated is the “integrated locus of authority” from which the state is supposed to be able to extend its authority to the greater territory (Migdal 2001, 9). Consequently, states and cities have surprisingly proximate definitions. As expressed by FARC-EP (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo) member Francisco Voltaire (2003), urban centers are seen as dense spatial concentrations of political, economic, cultural, and military power. This understanding of urban centers correlates closely to Bourdieu’s definition of the state as the site of concentration of violent, informative, symbolic and economic capital (1999, 53–75). These spatial geographies locate the state in the city, or the city-state. “Thus state power and its urban center(s) grow in a parallel manner, jointly, State and City, State-City, City-State” (Voltaire 2003). In his study of the Guatemalan countryside, Finn Stepputat (2001) relates a story in which a man, when told of rights that could and should protect him from paramilitary death squads, pointed to a distant city and said he had heard of such things—rights—working over there in the city, but that they didn’t have them in the country where he was.

5. Boyacá is a central province northeast of Bogotá.

The story emphasizes much more than the physical distance, imagined and real, between city and pueblo. "It points toward a broader perception of the modern state as located in cities and towns, while the population in the rest of the national territory is represented as living under a different set of conditions" (Stepputat 2001, 284). Guerrilla groups have long recognized that the only way to "take the state" is to militarily conquer key urban centers, the sites not only of concentrated power over the nation, but the state itself. The insight found in the propagandist essay of one FARC member is (probably unwittingly) keenly accurate: the FARC will have subverted national order when they "take power for *el pueblo colombiano*" (Lozada 2003).

National order would be subverted if *el pueblo* took control of the state because it has been constructed outside of and in opposition to the city-state. Rather than the site of a concentration of capital like the city-state, *el pueblo* is not a center of power, culture, money, or military and political might; indeed, it is not the center of anything at all. The very essence of *el pueblo* is generic and disperse—a de-centered, amorphous place. *El pueblo* spatially occupies the realm of the small, stateless, rural village, far from the concentration of power and temporality of the city-state.<sup>6</sup> Not only is the pueblo geographically distant from the city-state, but it is only vicariously connected to the city-state. National infrastructures such as telephone lines, roads, and railways largely do not extend to rural areas of Colombia, leaving *los pueblos* without communication or transportation routes to the city, except by airplane in areas where private companies have built the occasional airport.

Having none of the capital concentrations used to describe either cities or states, *el pueblo*—the symbol of the nation—is constituted by the poor majority. The classed constitution of *el pueblo* is clear in the work of de la Cadena (2000), in which Cuzqueño elite starkly separate themselves from lower class *gente del pueblo*. Similarly, in his study of the construction of *el pueblo peruano* as rural and non-elite, Nugent (2001) notes how indigenous and *mestizo* Peruvians successfully promoted themselves as local embodiments of *el pueblo peruano*, committed to democracy, equality, and justice in direct opposition to the regional ruling elites who were associated with the corrupt government. Nugent points out how these poor, non-elite indigenous people/*mestizos* strove to portray themselves as a non-racialized national community, "but the state had neither extended to *el pueblo* its constitutional rights nor curbed the excesses of the elite.

6. This has certainly not always been the case. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Colombian countryside was marked by large farms that were concentrated not only spatially, but in terms of other capital as well, as regional caudillos and the rural militias they organized provided serious challenges to early state formation and the centralization of power in the city-state. See John Lynch (1992).



Once rid of the elite *el pueblo* would be free to become a true part of the Peruvian nation" (2001, 268). The study relates the centrality of a particular race-class to the construction of *el pueblo* while illustrating its contradictory nature as spatially located simultaneously on the margins of the state while occupying the center of the nation.

Yet *el pueblo* is not merely made up of poor and non-white subjects, but rather, space, socioeconomic class, and race/ethnicity are mutually constitutive. Since colonial times when indigenous peoples were forbidden from residing in urban centers, *el pueblo* has been racialized, closely associating it with darker-skinned people, be they indigenous or black, as opposed to the "whites" of European descent or mestizos that lived in urban centers (Robinson 1989, 165–66). In Guatemala, as other Latin American countries, national hierarchies were institutionalized through local military *commissioners* who ensured the continual reservation of cheap manual labor for (inter)national elites through the preservation of "indigenous villages" or "villages of servants" (M. González 2000, 320). Meanwhile, transgressing spatial boundaries such as that between *el pueblo* and the city often constitutes the perceived transgression of class or racial/ethnic boundaries (e.g., de la Cadena 2000). Such an example of the spatial constitution of ethnic identity in Colombia is obvious in the Constitutional Court's decision that, despite legal exemption from military service for all "indigenous" men, that indigenous men living in urban centers are not exempt from military service.<sup>7</sup> Thus, one cannot be both an indigenous man and an urban resident, as the process of urbanization connotes a loss of authentic indigeneity in the eyes of dominant society. As Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) argues in regards to Australian aboriginals, minority groups' access to rights is dependent on displaying "real" or "authentic" indigenous traits, an impossibility for present-day, socially-embedded individuals and communities. Black and indigenous Colombians are therefore by definition rural and poor, as any change in social or spatial status simultaneously connotes a change in race/ethnicity that would likely negate them not only access to identity-based rights, but access to said identity per se.

Given the inclusive nature of the term, *el pueblo* is often employed to include people and places that are not of these socioeconomic, racial, or geographic groups.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite its myriad referents, there is one space/

7. According to Constitutional Court Sentence C-058-94, members of the indigenous community are exempt from military service when and only when "they live in their community and with their own identity," but not if "they live with and as other Colombians." The Court determined that this would not violate equality in that indigenous deserve special state protections in order to guarantee their subsistence and survival.

8. As Coronil (1997, 99) points out, other similarly classed and raced symbolic categories, like that of Juan Bimba, are not so potentially inclusive, referring only to a particular class.

people that cannot appropriate el pueblo: the city-state/elites. For the city-state or elites to appropriate the domain of el pueblo would be a fundamental reconceptualization of what is meant by the term, as el pueblo has been socially and historically constructed in direct opposition to both. While either the city-state or elites might be subsumed within other pueblos, (as el pueblo colombiano includes both the city-state and elites while focusing on a popular national character), neither can aspire to be a pueblo in and of itself. Indeed, to the extent that el pueblo represents the nation and is the spatial language of such, the city represents the state and is the spatial language of statehood. In other words, as el pueblo and the city are constructed both in image and reality in direct opposition to one another, so too are the nation and the state. El pueblo is seen as an anti-modern, eternal body, prone to passion and irrationality, and resistant to the progress and reason embodied by the modern(izing) state (Cohen 2004; Coronil 1997; Robinson 1989, 172). The poor, indigenous pueblo thus embodies the nation while the white urban elite embodies citizenship.

As this section demonstrates, el pueblo simultaneously lies within the geographic boundaries of the state—thus theoretically awarding it protection, control, and occupation by the state—and falls outside—indeed, is opposed to—the discursive and symbolic construction of the city-state. El pueblo exists in the margins of the state while occupying the heart of the nation. Given this location in the margins of the state, el pueblo is the perfect site to study competing languages of stateness (Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). This highly symbolic space is neither stagnant nor uncontested, as competing actors vie for its control, each articulating differing “spatialized languages of citizenship” (Radcliffe 2004). In the following section I discuss the construction of shadow states in the margins of the profane city-state.

#### SHADOW STATES

Given the overwhelming indifference of the city-state towards el pueblo, it is no surprise that illegal armed actors belonging to guerrilla and paramilitary groups have effectively created shadow states in many rural areas of Colombia where they exercise state-like control over local populations, including “almost undisputed territorial control” and the “monopoly control of the use of force” (AI 2004, 89). Hansen and Stepputat describe the “shadow states” that exist in Africa, where “some warlords attempt to create zones of stability and to erect something resembling a state: taxation instead of random plunder, dispensation of “justice” through court-like ritual instead of instant killings, territorial control, and, in some cases, appeal to subjects in the name of a shared community or destiny” (2001, 16). This nearly perfectly describes the

situation in many Colombian pueblos, as illegal armed actors have been able to physically eliminate all potential opposition and successfully assert their authority in certain towns and rural areas, where they now boast of controlling commerce, transportation, the adjudication of social and personal conflicts, and the provision of health, educational, and other essential public services (Richani 2002, 78). Yet these “shadow” or “parallel” states do not exist outside of the official state, rather, they are mutually constitutive in discourse and practice as much as they are antagonistic, making them an ideal site for the study of the state effect (Roitman 2004).

Marxist guerrillas colonized the Colombian pueblo in the early 1950s when armed groups linked to the Liberal and Communist parties fled to remote parts of the country to garner support among the landless peasants, *colonos* (Richani 2002, 23–25). Taking advantage of (and exacerbating) the profanity of the state and its indifference toward el pueblo, guerrilla movements appropriated the space of el pueblo for their movement while filling the void left by the official state. “Rather than seize political power by assuming the state central apparatus and institutions, they [FARC-EP] deconstructed state power at the village and municipal levels and moved upward. The guerrillas are responding to the state’s failures in mitigating rural conflicts and are filling a hegemonic void left by the state” (Richani 2002, 89). Discursively and symbolically, leftist guerrillas united themselves with el pueblo, both as a people and as a geographical specificity, working for equality for rural, poor/landless communities and claiming to fight for regime change “*para nuestro pueblo*.” As one propaganda essay claims, “An anticommunist crusade is a crusade against our pueblo” (Lozada 2003). Thus communism and el pueblo are completely interdependent; communism *is* the pueblo, and that which opposes communism, opposes el pueblo.<sup>9</sup> The dependency of the guerrilla on el pueblo is evident as one *guerrillero* remembers his commander “taught us that to be far from el pueblo means death for a guerrillero” (quoted in Molano 2001, 358). Not merely reliant on el pueblo, the guerrilla forces also present themselves as representatives of el pueblo, thus marking it as implicitly communist. Che Guevara does exactly this when he claims that his slain revolutionary comrade, Camilo Cienfuegos, “had the natural intelligence of el pueblo,” and, in fact, is the eternal likeness of el pueblo: “En su renuevo continuo e inmortal, Camilo es la imagen del pueblo” (2002, 8–9).

9. The extent to which populism and populist regimes shaped and appropriated the imagery of el pueblo, while not the focus of the current discussion, can neither be overlooked nor understated. Long before and more successfully than possibly any Leftist movement, populists appropriated el pueblo to the extent that we cannot understand the term independently of some populist referent.

The concentration of guerrilla forces in rural areas was perpetuated and encouraged by the military counterinsurgency policy of "containment." The containment strategy was a U.S.-backed policy of "low-intensity war" reflecting limited funds and equipment and a prioritizing of urban centers. It focused on a policy of "political cleansing" to keep guerrillas out of the city-state. Union leaders, academics, activists, journalists, or any (suspected) political opposition were simply annihilated in urban centers, permitting "the adaptation of the dominant classes and the political elite to a civil war mainly fought in rural areas" (Richani 2002, 65). The conflict has been allowed to continue ever since in the amorphous, distant, non-state villages where it has not presented any real threat to the security of "the state" or primary economic base of the country as long as it stays relegated to the country (Richani 2002, 42). To this day, the FARC has a presence in 622 of 1071 total municipalities, and exercises a "great deal" of authority in at least 255, or 25 percent of all Colombian municipalities (AI 2004; Richani 2002, 90).

Guerrilla groups continue "consolidating their political power at the municipal and village levels, practically playing the role of de facto state dispensing justice, regulating market relations and protecting the environment" (Richani 2002, 89). Yet they are not the only illegal armed actors to do so. Since the mid-1980s, paramilitary groups have contested the dominance of guerrillas at the local level by imitating their methods. Both groups have established authority in their shadow states through the implementation of legal codes, frequently deemed "rules of coexistence." Often referred to as "*la ley del monte*" or "*la ley de los muchachos*"—these rules typically consist of ten points and function as the basic laws by which the local population must abide and are a mechanism for establishing control over the population (Molano 2001, 333). According to Taussig, "What is perhaps surprising is the alacrity with which legal codes were created by these groups. The 1953 guerrilla Law of the Llanos (the eastern plains) details 224 articles, including control of prices. In the guerrilla Law of Southern Tolima of 1957, one finds articles covering use of firearms, consumption of alcohol, restrictions on travel, (which requires a passport), pasturage of animals, public disturbances, and conformity to an already established "family code" (2003, 92). Indeed, the rules of coexistence serve as the basis to regulate nearly every detail of community life down to who possesses a license to sell liquor, the hours of operation for local businesses, and public curfews. "We had given them a license to work between 5:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. Then everyone had to go to bed" (Molano 2001, 344). The rules are publicly posted or announced and often accompanied by select killings in order to establish authority via terror.

The armed actors also function as police and judiciary in their areas of control, castigating 'criminal' activity, regulating weapon possession,

adjudicating social conflicts, and generally enforcing their rules of coexistence. "Currently, as it is the authority in some regions, people go to the guerrilla and spontaneously solicit that they act as judges in diverse conflicts. The guerrilla, for their part, responds to these demands and takes advantage of the situation in order to strengthen their authority" (Molano 2001, 333–34). Reflecting the agency of *el pueblo* in procuring a judiciary that the state has failed to provide, the people seek out and support anyone who will fill this role. More than the state, shadow states are sensitive to the fact that their legitimacy and authority lie in their ability to adjudicate conflicts: "When we discovered the whole situation, we swore to punish the government and avenge the people, who asked us, screaming, to defend them if we were capable, and if not, to turn our arms in to the government" (Molano 2001, 338). When asked to intervene in accusations of stolen goods, guerrilla forces acknowledged that "to not do anything would be to demonstrate that we didn't have authority and the guerrilla, what it has to do to live, is be the law wherever it arrives" (Molano 2001, 360). In order to gain the authority to function as shadow states, armed actors must only provide *el pueblo* with more security and swifter justice than the state which is marked by a 95 percent impunity rate (Aguilera Peña 2001, 422).

Punishments for transgressions, however, are not as clearly spelled out as the rules, instead relying on rumors to maintain effective levels of fear and control. This fear is a necessary tool for non-state actors, as it begets compliance in the absence of legitimacy. In the past, punishments have included flogging and other forms of physical abuse, fines, free labor, mutilation, disfigurement with acid or sharp instruments, public humiliation, rape, torture, and/or death (AI 2004, 18; Taussig 2003, 92). As is evident in the work of Aguilera Peña (2001) and Molano (2001), the role of the armed actors is often not to assess guilt, but rather to assign punishments.

Besides establishing legal codes and judiciary, Colombian shadow states oversee the management of local economies and taxation, an essential part of the modern state according to Charles Tilly (1992) and Margaret Levi (1988). In the states of Putumayo, Caquetá, and Guaviare, for example, FARC regulates market prices and narco-trafficking, sets wages for peasant coca growers (*raspachines*), provides technical assistance, and transports goods to market. It also imposes a progressive income tax in areas under its jurisdiction, a beer tax, and a 10 percent levy on anyone who makes over one million dollars a year. The armed actors often extract "rent" from local businesses and residents for providing "services" such as protection. Fining local residents for anything from "being quarrelsome" to not asking permission to take a certain course of action is yet another way armed shadow states appropriate resources (AI 2004, 17–18). According to one armed actor, "his movement performs

the role of a government in areas under its influence and extracts protection rent for this service from local merchants, narcotraffickers, medium-size and large land owners, and cattle raisers. Since 1996 written codes of taxation have facilitated accountability" (Richani 2002, 71; see also Aguilera Peña 2001, 418).

Moral and ethical controls, designed to increase the shadow state's legitimacy and demonstrate its effective control over the public by creating a "morally upstanding" community free of crime and filth, are employed to an extent rarely seen in other states.<sup>10</sup> "Both the paramilitaries and the guerrillas appear to be competing to demonstrate that they are the guardians of a traditional form of sexual morality associated with the idea of order" (AI 2004, 18). The armed actors regulate the most intimate aspects of people's daily lives by setting curfews, intervening in familial and communal disputes, regulating dress and physical appearance such as hair length, piercings, tattoos, the use of gendered apparel (skirts, dresses, suits, etc.), and monitoring public meetings and the use of communal space (AI 2004, 17). Paramilitary groups, in particular, have targeted women, regulating how they dress, their daily activities, and even their very bodies, turning them into corporal embodiments of political and militarized space (*Mujer* 2001, 39). Women's sexuality is closely regulated, with severe punishment for transgressions such as sexual relations outside the confines of marriage, not having a male partner, being a prostitute, or wearing "suggestive" clothing. "Social cleansing," involving the assassination or threat thereof in order to displace, of "undesirables" such as sex workers, homosexuals, transvestites, and people believed to be infected with HIV/AIDS, as well as beggars, thieves, recyclers, and drug addicts, is common (AI 2004, 13). These killings are used to sustain a culture of terror within communities, yet they are not counted as political assassinations, but rather as regular homicides, thus erasing the political nature—and solution—of the problem by attributing it to "the culture of violence" in Colombia (Sanford 2004, 253).

Shadow states and the illegal armed actors do not simply "weaken" the state, however. Rather, they reconstitute the material bases of social

10. Shadow states differ from real states in several other important ways. First, they have no international claim to territorial sovereignty or legitimacy. Second, their local legitimacy is highly questionable and transient because they have no contract with their constituents, *el pueblo*. Third, these shadow states have no identifiable, locatable nexus and, by primarily, if not only, occupying the space of *el pueblo* and the country, these shadow states do not have the necessary concentrations of capital described by Bourdieu needed to become (city)states. As Stepputat explains (2004, 294), "Unlike the 'real' state, the guerrilla state was a portable, partly invisible state with a minimum of physical infrastructure and an unlocatable center somewhere in the wilderness, from where authorization of representatives, rituals, actions, and ideas emanated."

power, forcing the state to reorganize and rearticulate itself. Shadow states and illegal armed actors directly overlap and engage with the official state and legally armed actors. Processes of decentralization that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as the local election of mayors and local financing of public services made it easier for armed actors to exercise control over *el pueblo* through the very institutions of the state. Illegal armed actors now frequently utilize local state structures as vehicles to implement their own authority, such as the guerrillas' frequent use of state-established and affiliated *Juntas de Acción Comunal* to invoke taxes and build public works. Paramilitary troops collaborate with and receive support from individual military members sympathetic to their cause, as well as the military as an institution in and of itself, while the ELN established a "constituent public assembly" in Mogotes, North Santander, to choose candidates for a free and open general election, but controlled the agenda, outcome, and debate (AI 2004, 5; Richani 2002, 80–89).<sup>11</sup> The armed actors manage local politics in their areas of control to the extent that "Now when the candidates move about freely in zones notorious for guerrilla influence, you can bet that there have been agreements, or at least talks, between the guerrilla and the candidates so that the electoral process can take place normally" (Aguilera Peña 2001, 413). Individual soldiers frequently work for both the state army and paramilitary troops, a form of "private, indirect government" (Mbembe 2001).<sup>12</sup> Thus while the existence of shadow states and illegal armed actors clearly undermines the sublime myth of state, they need to be thought about, not to the extent that they undermine or weaken the state, but to the extent that the state and shadow states are mutually constitutive in the margins of power.

#### DEMOCRATIC SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY

In response to the increasing notoriety of shadow states that challenge the myth of the state, the government under President Alvaro Uribe Vélez devised and implemented the Democratic Security and Defense Policy (Colombia 2003) after he took office on August 7, 2002. The policy's goal is to (re)assert the state's authority in its "sovereign" territory

11. It is not my purpose or intent to prove or detail at great length the connections between the paramilitaries and the state. This has been sufficiently done by numerous testimonies and hearings, perhaps the most recent of which is that of Lt. Colonel Hernán Orozco Castro under the court of law on August 15, 2001. Instead, I aim to emphasize the importance of local strongmen and state officials in implementing or impeding national policy as well as using state structures to their own ends.

12. Sanford (2004) argues that Colombian paramilitaries cannot be considered private forms of violence or governance given their close relation to the official state. Thus, she argues that they constitute a form of 'proxy' violence.

through the restoration of the “rule of law” (Colombia 2003, 7, 9, 13, 19). This includes restoring police presence in all municipalities; strengthening public institutions; reducing impunity, human rights violations, kidnappings, forced displacement, homicide, and extortion; regaining control of national roads; and fighting the drug trade through fumigation, interdiction, and court action. These efforts have focused mainly on the recovery and consolidation of territory from guerrilla control, putting *el pueblo*—the core of guerrilla power—at the heart of the battle.

Central to the policy is what the state calls the “active engagement of the civilian population” (Colombia 2003, 17), an effort to expand one portion of the state—the military—through incorporating more civilians, thus increasingly blurring the already permeable boundaries between state and non-state actors. The state encourages the active engagement of citizens in “fighting terror” by emphasizing the role and responsibility of non-state actors in enforcing law. Participants in a citizen spy network gather information on their neighbors, communities, and families, based on the assumption previously shared by the secret police in the Democratic Republic of Germany or the Guatemalan army that the subversive is everywhere. These civilian informants are meant to act as a “neighborhood watch” in both urban and rural areas, providing authorities “with information that will help in the prevention of crime and the pursuit of criminals” (DSDP 2003, 57–8). The Uribe administration seeks to build a network of 100,000 informants, creating “a disciplinary space like a human panopticon,” eventually transposing community life with military discipline (Stepputat 2004, 296; AI 2004, 18).

The DSDP also offers rewards to those that cooperate with the government by providing information leading to the arrest of “subversives” or “terrorists” (Colombia 2003, 58). The policy has led to the coercion of citizens and the outright manipulation of testimony, as the line between legality and illegality is further blurred. In one incident widely reported in the national press, the government arrested “subversives” based on the testimony of “witnesses” who were incarcerated at the time of the alleged crime. One “witness” whose testimony was used to incarcerate 185 “guerrilla collaborators” was later discovered to have been deceased at the time of the alleged incident and subsequent testimony. Many of the “witnesses” changed or withdrew their statements after further questioning, resulting in the release of the majority of the arrested without charges pending (*Colombia Week*, July 7, 2004).

The military state is also expanding in terms of how many people carry arms, are authorized to use force as a state agent, and identify as part of the state apparatus. Another integral feature of the DSDP is the establishment of “support soldiers” or peasant soldiers “that combine productive activities in the countryside with military service. These



support soldiers will be fully trained and will improve security in the more remote regions of the country" (Embassy of Colombia 2003). As previously discussed, "remote regions" refers to inherently rural villages, not the city-state. An earlier version of the DSDP, Law 48 of 1993 of the western province of Antioquia, "allows peasants to serve their mandatory military service in their areas of residence, rather than in other cities. The 'peasant-soldiers' are to perform civilian activities, gather military intelligence, and participate in combats" (Richani 2002, 52). The policy is meant to increase the number of combatants by reducing their perceived costs in enlisting and/or serving the one-year military requirement applicable to all males, and has indeed led to a 60-percent increase in combat-ready soldiers and an overall increase in security forces—counting civilian informants and peasant soldiers—from 250,000 to 850,000.<sup>13</sup>

This DSDP easily obfuscates the porous line between state military personnel and civilians in the hyphenated "peasant-soldiers" who perform both "civilian activities" and "participate in combat," thus relinquishing the state from culpability for human rights atrocities in the eyes of the international community. "As the distinction between civilians and combatants becomes increasingly blurred—through mechanisms such as the network of informants and the army of peasant soldiers, as well as the increasing use of mass and arbitrary detentions—the armed groups have placed even greater pressure on civilians to participate in some way in the conflict" (AI 2004, 5). As noted by Migdal, the state/military and society are never fully autonomous or enmeshed. Yet this example illustrates that the degree and type of interaction are key, as greater overlap increases very real security threats for civilians such that, in accordance with international law, a starker distinction should be maintained in order to minimize the number of people involved in the armed conflict. The DSDP claims that "the government will rigorously uphold human rights and International Humanitarian Law, as required by the Constitution and the law," while the policy enacted does just the opposite (Colombia 2003, 19). As UN Special Rapporteur Ambeyi Ligabo noted in his 2004 report on Colombia, the policy "is not in conformity with the provisions of a number of international human rights instruments ratified by Colombia, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (AI 2004, 3). In fact, the yet-incipient policy has produced an

13. Painting poor rural farmers as shirkers who avoid their national duty of serving in the army demonstrates the incredible classism of policy makers, as it is well known that escaping from military service is an impossibility for poor men who cannot afford to purchase their proof of military service like the sons of wealthy families.

increase in human rights violations and forced displacements while having no effect on the drug trade or impunity (AI 2004, 5).

The militarization of *el pueblo* manifests itself spatially in acute ways, beginning with the graffiti and notices armed actors use to announce their entrance into a village and ending in long-term constructions. Anthropologist Michael Taussig tells of the police station constructed in the center of a small village:

Then there's the size of the police station—three stories high, including the subterranean basement. It boasts thick walls like a medieval castle, built with "Arab technology," the locals tell me in awe as we muse over the growing shell of this fortress destined to take 60 cops for a village of maybe 3,000 people. A school had to be demolished to make room for it. (2003, 72)

In this case, militarization came at the price of the destruction of public space—a school. In other instances, militarization weakens cultural values and the exercise of justice while working to shape collective memories and identities of the conflict (M. González 2000, 335).

Incursions by state military forces meant to "take back the state" often resulted in increased violence in the region. Such was the case in the northeast province of Caquetá. In January 2004, the Colombian Army's Twelfth Brigade launched Operation New Year, intent upon recovering territory from the FARC, primarily in the "remote" villages of San Isidro and La Unión Peneya. Troops took the villages at night, invading in Blackhawk helicopters, armored cars, and personnel carriers. Unresisting residents were rounded up en masse and incarcerated as military officers "confiscated" their radios, CDs, speakers, and anything they deemed "subversive communication equipment" or "communist music." Twenty-seven "FARC militants" were reportedly captured. Hundreds of residents fled the region. When later forced to release the majority without charges and pressed to provide evidence of their relations with the guerrilla, army officials cited the civilians' clothing as proof of guilt, asserting that FARC often wear civilian clothing (Leech 2004).

A crucial irony of the policy is that, despite expressed desires to provide security and regain control in outlying territories, the only territory that has been secured through the policy has been the city-state. "While President Alvaro Uribe's democratic security agenda may be providing increased security for some of Colombia's urban population, it has massively destabilized many rural communities. This has been clearly illustrated by the Colombian Army's ongoing offensive in the southwest department of Caquetá. These operations have not only failed to provide additional security, they have actually dramatically escalated the levels of violence in the region, instilled fear in the local population, and led to massive displacement" (Leech 2004). Indeed, the policy itself notes that the approximately 25,000 homicides last year were "not evenly distributed throughout the country. Some

50 municipalities containing less than a quarter of the population account for more than half the total number of deaths. By contrast, Bogotá has managed to reduce its homicide rate by half in the last decade to well below the rate of many other major cities of the continent. Very often the municipalities where the homicide rate is the highest are those over which the illegal armed groups are fighting for control" (Colombia 2003, 30). Again it is apparent that while violence in los pueblos does not pose a direct threat to the state—as the state is not located in el pueblo—urban violence does.

Not only the policy effects, but the very discourses of the DSDP reinforce the pueblo/city-state dichotomy. Frequently, the document does this by falsely (desperately?) trying to make the two appear equal before the state, as in claims like the following: "All citizens, both those living in the country and those living in the city, are equal before the law and enjoy the same rights" (Colombia 2003, 13). This is clearly not true as el pueblo does not have the same rights as (city-state) citizens to state services such as education, health care, transportation, or basic bodily protection. The policy further entrenches the pueblo/city-state distinction by insisting that every policy will apply in both areas, instead of assuming the unity of the national territory: "A network of citizens *in both urban and rural areas* . . . will provide the authorities with information" (Colombia 2003, 57, italics added). At one point, the drafters urge every Colombian to show "as much solidarity towards those living in remote areas as he does towards his relatives or neighbors" (Colombia 2003, 17). This statement encourages solidarity *towards* el pueblo, assuming that el pueblo is *not* already one's relative or neighbor. Thus the policy situates "every Colombian" as an urban resident who shares neither family nor living space with "those living in remote areas." Yet perhaps the most telling part of the document poses members of the city-state *as under attack by the remote pueblo*. "The local authorities and the National Police will draw up security plans to encourage peaceful coexistence, reduce crime, and prevent the spread of the problems of the countryside into urban areas" (Colombia 2003, 43). Thus crime originates in el pueblo and then *spreads* to the previously crime-free state, attacking the urban center.

Framing el pueblo as the source of the conflict is not the state's only magic trick involved in maintaining its sublime image. Indeed, one more blatant effort was made as recently as June 2005, when the Uribe administration issued a memorandum to embassies, representatives of international organizations, and agencies that seek the cooperation and support of the government, instructing them of the terminology they must use to refer to the armed conflict and its protagonists if they expect support or collaboration from the national government. The memorandum specifically forbids the use of phrases such as "armed actors," "peace community," "internal armed conflict," or "civil protection," as though it could

convince everyone that no conflict were taking place through such an overt display of power.<sup>14</sup> Seeking to legitimate state security forces by distinguishing them from illegal armed forces, the memo declares that, "The expressions 'armed actors' or 'actors of the conflict' that are meant to include the members of the armed forces put the armed forces on the same level as the armed groups at the margins of the law. This situation is unacceptable to the national government" (*El Tiempo*, June 13, 2005). The document is correct on at least one level: terms such as "armed actors," as we will see, are precisely meant to include state troops and specifically indicts them of terrorist activity, a situation that is indeed unacceptable to the national government for the illegitimacy thus rendered to it as it fails to live up to the myth of the state.

#### STATES AND SHADOW STATES: COMPETING FORMS OF VIOLENCE

Both rendered illegitimate in the eyes of *el pueblo*—shadow states by definition and the official state by the existence of shadow states that expose the state's profanity—the state and shadow states institutionalize violence in order to establish authority over local populations through a culture of terror.<sup>15</sup> This violence inscribes itself upon *el pueblo* in myriad ways, marking it physically, emotionally, textually, and in memory, such that the fear and authority created by violent events persist, even between moments of acute violence. The violence and the collective memory of it subsequently affect the "spatialized vocabularies of citizenship" of the *pueblo*, thus mediating the relationship between *el pueblo* and state actors (Radcliffe 2004). The three forms of institutionalized violence I study are massacres, rape, and forced internal displacement.

According to the Ministry of Defense, massacres are defined as "The murder of 4 or more civilians at one time in one place," and illegal armed actors are responsible for them all (Colombia 2003, 23). Most experts, however, disagree with this attribution of responsibility. Richani, for

14. This attempt to adjust the discourse used to describe an event mirrors that attempted by the Venezuelan government following the police crackdown of the 1988 riots, as described by Coronil and Skurski (1991) and more generally by Coronil (1997).

15. The Weberian state naturalizes and institutionalizes *state* violence only. In contrast to this ideal, however, violence is institutionally performed by many more actors than merely the state. Violence is not often thought of as an institution. Jan Kubik defines institutions as "any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape human interaction" (1998, 34). A social practice or pattern of interaction is institutionalized when it is used frequently, widely taken for granted, and/or arranges life interactions. As an institution, violence is highly inert to change. Institutionalized violence is the opposite of the sporadic violence described by Coronil and Skurski (1991) that destroys meaning and understanding.

example, attributes 40 percent of all massacres to paramilitaries, 16 percent to guerrilla groups, and 44 percent to the state and non-identified actors (2002, 120). Richani admits a level of unknowability in failing to hold anyone accountable for those massacres attributed to “non-identified” actors that the sublime state cannot show. Furthermore, Richani deliberately includes state forces as perpetrators of massacres. Such a categorization is in direct competition with the vision presented by President Uribe, who insists in his introductory letter framing the DSDP that the armed forces and national police “are not ‘actors’ in a war or conflict and should not be put implicitly on the same level as the terrorist organisations which they confront” (Colombia 2003, 6). However, there was unanimous agreement among *all* other sources consulted that state forces are responsible for a significant portion of massacres.

El pueblo itself often challenges state discourse. When community leader Luis Eduardo Guerra and six others—including his young son—were tortured and cut up by members of the Eleventh Army Brigade on February 21, 2005, in the community of San José de Apartadó, the communication by the community and international witnesses decrying the event was entitled “Colombian Military Commits Massacre in the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó.”<sup>16</sup> In a statement riddled with profound sorrow, anger, and disappointment, the community makes evident the close connections between physical space and violence, the state and terror, while directly challenging the discourse of President Uribe and the DSDP: “In a demonstration of its incredible illegitimacy, the Colombian state has carried out another massacre that bathes our land in blood” (Peace Community 2005). Contrary to the data provided by the Ministry of Defense and President Uribe’s insistence that the armed forces are not terrorist organizations or actors in the war, *el pueblo* directly attributed this massacre to the state’s armed forces while indicating how the violence has changed their physical landscape as it was “bathed in blood.”

Massacres are not isolated acts of violence, but rather specific mechanisms used to displace communities thought to support the enemy or as a method of land concentration in regions where the land is desired by others for oil exploration, crop production, or other economic means (Richani 2002, 120). As one guerrilla testified, “One time, to give an example, in an outlying district they thought was infiltrated by the army, they shot (*ajusticiaron*) over a hundred farmers, more or less just because” (Molano 2001, 355). Massacres displace, on average, 224 people per

16. Peace Brigades International, FOR (Fellowship of Reconciliation) Concern America, and the Corporation for Judicial Liberty were all present and have similarly documented the massacre.

incidence (*Mujer* 2001, 19). Of the total 1.7 million hectares of land abandoned during the 1990s, nearly all of it is now occupied by armed actors and their patron clients. "Sixty-five percent of the persons that were forced to abandon their lands and homes as a direct result of the massacres and death threats lost their rights to the land. Prior to 1997, there was no law that protected the rights of the displaced peasant, particularly when their lots are occupied by paramilitary groups or by their sympathizers" (Richani 2002, 121).

Displacement is an institutional form of violence practised by the state, paramilitaries, and guerrilla groups alike. "Displacement is a deliberate strategy routinely used by the parties to the conflict to 'cleanse' civilians from areas which they perceive are controlled by their enemies" (AI 2004, 22). Thus like its counterpart the *reducción* in Guatemala, displacement is a means by which to submit rural populations to the space, structure, order, will, and logic imposed by the army while destroying all communal ties (M. González 2000, 326). Though displacement was originally perceived to occur primarily where the state was absent or weak, it is more and more frequently being observed where the state is attempting to "recover" territory lost to guerrillas or paramilitaries (ACNUR 2001, 2). Since the state adopted the DSDP, the number of displaced fell in 2003, only to rise again in the first quarter of 2004. Colombia now has about 3 million internally displaced, the third highest number in the world (AI 2004, 21).

Of these 3 million, Afro-Colombian and indigenous peoples, as well as women head-of-households, comprise a disproportionately high percentage.<sup>17</sup> For example, Afro-Colombians constitute one-third of internally displaced populations, while constituting only 11 percent of the total Colombian population. Reports on the displaced systematically note the high percentage of poor, rural-born, and racial/ethnic minorities, but often miss the way in which these groups intersect (e.g., ACNUR 2001). It is not simply that the poor, colored, and rural are most affected by institutionalized violence, but that the rural are colored and poor. Impoverished Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations are the 'furthest' from the city-state, a distance measured not only geographically, but also in terms of state institutions, policy, culture, identity, symbols, economy, and

17. As pointed out in *Mujer* (2001), women who are the heads of their households experience displacement uniquely. These women typically flee with their children alone, not in or with the support of a community, after witnessing the violent death of their male partners. The displacement is not planned and the women often suffer from acute post-traumatic stress syndrome. Moreover, once settled in the outskirts of a city, the woman often must undergo a painful transformation in self-identity and role, and she becomes both the primary caretaker and the primary breadwinner in a semi-urban environment unfamiliar to her.

temporality. Moreover, as previously described, it is virtually impossible to integrate non-whites into the urban setting, as they are either made invisible or ascribed a different race. Thus the unwillingness and fear of the city-state to incorporate *el pueblo*—those historically seen as ‘uncivilized,’ ‘savages,’ and even ‘cannibals,’—and meet its needs once displaced, instead relegating it to a situation of social, political, economic, and physical exclusion marked by an acute lack of services and physical expulsion to the furthest extremes of the city, is unsurprising (Taussig 1987).

Rape has become an institutionalized violence essential to the establishment of a regime of terror (M. González 2000, 327). Rape and mass rapes accompany both massacres and displacement as a form of torture, punishment, instilling fear, injuring the (male) enemy’s honor, eliminating the enemy *hasta la semilla*, and ordinary patriarchy.<sup>18</sup> “With their bodies viewed and treated as territory to be fought over by the warring parties, women are targeted for a number of reasons—to sow terror within communities making it easier for military control to be imposed, to force people to flee their homes to assist acquisition of territory, to wreak revenge on adversaries, to accumulate ‘trophies of war,’ and to exploit them as sexual slaves. Sexual violence has thus indelibly marked Colombian women’s lives” (AI 2004, 1). Armed actors “temporarily retain” women who are then repetitively raped while being forced to perform domestic work without compensation. Internally displaced women—36 percent of whom are reportedly raped by strangers—are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence due to their social, psychological, and economic conditions (*Mujer* 2001, 17–21).

Two years ago as we were leaving Neiva [department of Huila] the army made us get out of the bus. They killed the young man I was with. I was raped by eight or nine soldiers. They left me on the road and I eventually got a ride. When I got to Dabeiba [department of Antioquia], the paramilitaries were there. They said I was a guerrilla. The commander of the paramilitaries raped me. (victim testimony as quoted in AI 2004, 2)

This instance demonstrates the use of rape to silence women “with loose tongues” who have witnessed the murder, massacre, or disappearance of their partner through the absolute denigration of the woman physically, mentally, and morally, such that the shame they experience through psychologically assuming the guilt for their own rape effectively silences them (M. González 2000, 327–28).

18. Rape is illegal and punishable by death according to the FARC legal code. However, as demonstrated by Molano (2001), FARC members, mirroring larger Colombian society, blame women for the sexual violence they suffer and/or excuse men of any wrongdoing due to their natural, animal-like predisposition. In Colombia it only became impermissible to inquire into a rape victim’s sexual and “moral” history in order to justify male sexual transgressions in 2005.

Institutionalized violence establishes control over local populations by creating a culture of terror. Chris Ballard elaborates on how this “climate or culture of terror, the perpetual imminence of the threat of death, can create a ‘space of death,’ an imaginary zone in which fear locks the senses as violence and representations of violence achieve a near-perfect circle of mirrors reflecting terror back upon both perpetrators and victims” (2002, 13). This culture of terror serves to secure the authority of the shadow states between acute episodes of murder, rape, or displacement. As noted by Ballard in his study of the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, the violent acts that constitute massacres inscribe themselves on the landscape through the memory of *el pueblo*, thus reconfiguring the physical landscape and the very geographic space of *el pueblo* while lending to the culture of terror by constantly enacting violence in the very process of recalling the original violence.<sup>19</sup> “The growing number of these sites of murder, torture, of arrest, and of the disposal of bodies is sufficient to form a topographic grid or layer composed of the memories of these events of unaccountable violence” (Ballard 2002, 19). Thus each dead body found along the roadside and public killing forever scars the landscape in the memories of the witnesses, sometimes in central community spaces. The perpetrators of such crimes, well aware of how this climate of terror functions, specifically seek to profane sacred places with death and to make the killings and rapes so arbitrary that they cannot be rationalized in the minds of the survivors (M. González 2000, 324). Such was the case in the village of Mapiripán, Meta, when in July 1997 paramilitaries tortured, dismembered, and murdered 27–49 people in the local slaughterhouse and left their body parts littering the soccer field and Guaviare River. Graffiti, often accompanying the violence, has remained visible long after the blood and body parts have disappeared, providing a continual reminder of the violence that took place. “The few families that have stayed in Mapiripán are forced to read and reread the slogans that the paramilitary forces have

19. Geographic space is not the only space to contribute to a culture of terror. Das (2000) looks at how a violent event to which one is a witness/victim integrally shapes one’s subjectivity as violence signals the death/end of one period and the change inherent in that death that can only be mediated through the re-narration of the event itself. This re-narration happens from a liminal space in the aftermath of the trauma in an attempt to create some form of continuity between what was and what is. The way these re-narrations function within Colombia is made explicit by Taussig (2003) in a stirring account of the 2001 *limpieza* in a town 45 minutes south of Cali. Taussig reports the pervasiveness of the re-narration of violence through rumors, storytelling, and gossip. The continuous re-narration of “public secrets” functions both to reconcile the event with reality and continue in life and to increase and magnify the original fear and violence with each re-telling. As the memory of violence can be as violent and terrifying as the violence itself, the space that invokes the memory, too, is a space of violence.



scrawled on the walls of the town . . . [such as] ‘We came, and we won’t be going until we wipe out the guerrillas’” (Caballero 1997). The most permanent and pervasive physical impact on the landscape, however, is probably the decimation of communities, be it from massacres or displacement, such that the countryside is left barren of *el pueblo* altogether.

#### CREATING A SPACE FOR PEACE: A COMPETING LANGUAGE OF STATE

Institutionalized violences, state and non-state actors, and cultures of terror are not the only expressions of stateness to be found in *el pueblo colombiano*. Indeed, *el pueblo* itself has offered at least one alternative spatial vocabulary of citizenship: that of nonviolence, regional autonomy, and democratic participatory inclusion that constructs the nation from the locality up. Broadly defined, “peace communities”<sup>20</sup> offer spatial vocabularies of citizenship that, while not dominant or hegemonic, are different from the languages of stateness presented by the state and shadow states, and thus change and inform them in a dialectical process. As Florencia Mallon describes in emphasizing the importance of the process of forming discourse, “Through open-ended processes of articulation, nationalist discourses are formed from already existing elements and newly emerging ones. By connecting these elements along new lines of equivalence and antagonism, social and historical actors transform the meaning of both old and new” (1991, 60). Forced into a space and time in which no memory or national story can help them understand the violences they are experiencing, survivors of institutionalized violence must reinvent narratives that connect the past with the present in order to make sense of their experiences. These narratives re-imagine the nation, articulating new spatial vocabularies of citizenship that challenge and reconstitute existing understandings, informing the hegemonic language of stateness, and contributing “to the opening of political space in the middle of a polarised conflict” (Rohl 2004, xviii).

A wide variety of grassroots, community-based peace initiatives have arisen in Colombia in the last twenty years. Indigenous communities such as the Nasa, formerly known as Páez, are organized into “communities in resistance,” policing the borders of their pueblos with community members armed only with walkie-talkies and wooden staffs that designate leadership. Afro-Colombian and mestizo populations in the north-western region of Apartado in the states of Córdoba,

20. Although these communities do not each self-identify as peace communities, often giving other precise names to their initiatives, I will use “peace community” generically to designate any pueblo or group of pueblos that have publicly committed themselves to nonviolence and a nonviolent means to end the armed conflict.

Antioquia, and Chocó have formed peace communities, while other cities such as Mogotes have rallied behind constituent assemblies dedicated to the re-creation of democracy through citizen participation and consensual decision making. Various peace communities alternately focus on deepening participatory and deliberative democracy,<sup>21</sup> offering civil resistance to the conflict,<sup>22</sup> or protesting structural violences such as neoliberal development along with the armed conflict, and over fifty such communities in rural Colombia are currently involved in such peace initiatives (Rohl 2004, vi). Non-state actors such as the Catholic Church and local and international NGOs have been integral in assisting in the formation of many of these communities (Hernández Delgado 2004, 2).

While great diversity exists among these peace communities, they all share one central premise: active nonviolent response to the conflict. Instead of violence, peace communities commit themselves to a political and negotiated end to the armed conflict through the strengthening of participatory democracy as a protection strategy for the community. These pueblos pledge not to participate, either directly or indirectly, in the war by carrying firearms, offering tactical, logistical, or strategic assistance, or manipulating or producing information for any actor in the armed conflict. They further refuse to provide any armed actor with food, refuge, combustibles, transport, messenger services, or information—services often demanded of and taken from *el pueblo* by the armed actors.<sup>23</sup> These commitments specifically preclude men's completion of the mandatory one year of military service in the state's armed forces.

Land is a central interest for many peace communities. Indigenous communities demand that their constitutionally guaranteed rights to land be respected, including the recuperation of traditional landholdings and cultural, social, and political autonomy on those lands (e.g., ONIC 2002). Displaced pueblos form peace communities as a way of reclaiming the land they left behind and reasserting their rights to land ownership (Sanford 2004, 259). Many peace communities start with the ceremonial action of reclaiming the material space of their pueblo. From this physical space, peace communities articulate a unique language of

21. For example: Mogotes, Pensilvania Living Community, Caldas, Manizález; Municipal Constituent Assembly of Tarso, Antioquia.

22. For example: Peasant Workers' Association of Carare, the Active Neutrality of the Antioquia Organization, Peace Community of San Francisco de Asís, Chocó; communities of Self-Determination, Life and Dignity, Cacarcá, Chocó.

23. Many communities, such as those that belong to the Organización Indígena de Antioquia, have emphasized their neutrality in the conflict, while other groups, such as the indigenous organization of Cauca, believe it is impossible to remain truly neutral in a war zone.

stateness that emphasizes their right to autonomy. As indigenous communities of Cauca iterated in 2002, that includes their right “to guard and organize our social and political life inside the Resguardos, as well as to reject the policies imposed upon us from outside” (ONIC 2002, 63). These demands for autonomous lands stem from the need of both physical and cultural survival and sharply undermine the myth of the state that maintains territorial sovereignty and the efforts of shadow states to legitimize themselves through control of this space.

The spatial language of citizenship of the peace communities challenges President Uribe’s language of stateness in numerous ways. While the president continuously emphasizes that state armed forces should not be grouped with the other armed actors, and that they are not a terrorist organization, peace communities consistently group state forces under the term “armed actors” and specifically denounce the terrorist activities of the state (Colombia 2003, 6). In a collection of decrees and public statements made by the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC), these communities purposely emphasize that state armed forces are indeed included in their usage of armed actors by listing “the armed actors, institutional, insurgent, and counterinsurgent . . .” (ONIC 2002, 31). As earlier illustrated by the declaration from San José de Apartado announcing a massacre by state officials, *el pueblo* tends to highlight the gross, terrorist practices of the state. The insistence of some of the communities on calling themselves “peace communities” while all of them speak of the “armed conflict” despite the appropriate discourse identified by the presidential administration further challenges the state’s legitimacy by demonstrating that the state does not have control over violence or discourse: “Today we find ourselves at a crossroads, in total uncertainty regarding the future of our pueblos as a consequence of the armed conflict that is bleeding our country” (ONIC 2002, 26–7). Peace communities equally challenge the legitimacy of shadow states and resist appropriation by any armed actor while emphasizing their civilian status: “We demand this acknowledgement [of the indigenous pueblos as actors and subjects capable of presenting proposals and opposing the war] given that we do not delegate our sovereignty or autonomy as pueblos to anybody. Not to a corrupt state on its knees and at the service of the powerful, and not to those, who in the name of the pueblo, liberty and democracy impose upon us opinions that we do not share and for which they have declared us, unarmed, peaceful, and hard-working pueblos, as military objectives” (ONIC 2002, 31).

This does not mean that peace communities absolve the state of all responsibilities in their autonomous spaces. To the contrary, peace communities are highly critical of the historic absence of the state in the pueblo. “We know that the government is responsible for the situation of misery and abandon of our Resguardos, and we will continue

demanding from the state the resources necessary to promote programs in our communities. What we do demand is that these resources are regulated by the community and that the Cabildos control them" (ONIC 2002, 8–9). While emphasizing their autonomy and the right to manage their own resources, these communities insist on the increased presence of the state regarding education, health, infrastructure, land rights, and social services, and are very specific about the role the state should play in the protection of their economic, social, and cultural rights (ONIC 2002, 12).

Peace communities simultaneously denounce the gross practices of the state via the actual government and military while appealing to the sublime image of the state crafted in law by invoking the constitution and international law. "We demand that the state comply with its constitutional mandate to protect life, ethnic and cultural diversity, and the traditional territories of our pueblos, the basis of indigenous culture and our lives" (ONIC 2002, 30). As demonstrated here, the communities frequently invoke rights guaranteed in the 1991 constitution such as their right to land, life, education, work, and a society that respects ethnic diversity. Peace communities also seek protection under international human rights laws. "We demand that the actors in the armed conflict respect the International Humanitarian Law, the collective and fundamental rights of our pueblos, and the legitimate right to not take part in the war" (ONIC 2002, 38). By emphasizing their civilian, unarmed status, the communities have sought the involvement of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and other international agencies, as well as their full protection under international humanitarian law that guarantees non-combatant rights (Rohl 2004, v).

Peace communities are not questioning the existence or validity of the nation-state, but rather offering an alternative way to conceptualize it. Their spatialized language of stateness emphasizes non-violence, local autonomy, and the unity of many distinct pueblos colombianos in the construction of a democratic nation-state. "We are working to offer our own proposal (of peace) for all Colombians, to tell Colombians about how we think the country should be, how we understand democracy, how we believe the territory should be organized" (ONIC 2002, 71). This deep-seated belief in a highly participatory democracy is, again, backed by the Colombian constitution and sharply contrasts the exclusionary practices of the state. "As indigenous pueblos we will construct a new project of life underneath the principle of reciprocity and are disposed to receive and invest in other pueblos and cultures in order to enrich the process of constructing a truly democratic Colombia" (ONIC 2002, 13).

One of the state's responses to the efforts of peace communities has been to contest the very citizenship of community members. Men, in

particular, who refuse to serve their “mandatory” year in the armed forces that attack their own pueblos, are subsequently stripped of their citizenship. These men (formally) lose the basic rights (formally) granted by the state to citizens, such as the right to work, education, or protection. Though some have argued that this makes little difference in many of the remote regions where the state does not provide any of these services anyway, the symbolic and discursive reframing of men who will not bear arms as non-citizens relocates them outside the realm of the nation-state (Rohl 2004, iv). Such re-framing provides the state with a legal basis for denying accountability to these people while it denies the men access to invocations of the national identity.

While denying citizen rights to *el pueblo*, the DSDP focuses on rewarding the illegal armed actors with social and economic benefits that have never been available to *el pueblo*. Despite years of studies that recognize the state’s need to “integrate” *el pueblo* into the state in order to calm social unrest and violence and establish the state as the legitimate presence across the national territory, the only integration the state has done is that which is set forth in the Democratic Security and Defense Policy—a generous program of “reintegration” for *illegal armed actors*! While the state claims that it is “prepared to take in all those who abandon violence, to provide them with security and educational opportunities so that they may re-enter society,” the program only applies to previous members of the guerrilla and paramilitaries (Colombia 2003, 7). These “demobilized” combatants are eligible for psychological counseling, educational benefits, technical training for up to 18 months, and health services, all to enable them “to live a dignified life and to help their families and society in general” (Colombia 2003, 53–54). In short, the government is ready to provide all the services that are lacking and desperately needed in *el pueblo* to those who have historically terrorized civilians and compromised the very legitimacy of the state. Thus the policy militarizes *el pueblo* at the same time it civilizes armed militias.<sup>24</sup>

These peace initiatives “affirm that peace is not only built or provided by the state but also developed at the grassroots” (Hernández Delgado 2004, 5). As described by Sarah Radcliffe (2004) in her work on Ecuador, these grassroots attempts are “popular geographies” that attempt to “redraw the map” of state power—figuratively or literally—by generating a new spatial order that informs state power and sovereignty.

24. Programs designed to demobilize militants vary with each administration. They are commonly seen to favor one side or another and die out or are replaced when the proceeding administration takes over. The DSDP has been internationally and domestically criticized for favoring the “demobilization” of paramilitary forces. Moreover, as in the case of the Unión Patriótica, the state is no more capable or willing to protect the safety of demobilized militants than it is the rest of the pueblo. Thus their position is at best a precarious one, physically, socially, and politically.

"While state violence and surveillance at the margins continue to reconstitute state power and sovereignty, the agreements reached with the Peace Communities suggest that subaltern agency, by asserting citizenship rights and creating new sites for political action through local, national, and international alliances, also plays a role in the constitutions of state sovereignty and state legibility" (Sanford 2004, 266). As el pueblo appropriates the state's own discourse on citizenship, it is forging its own spatialized language of citizenship, which simultaneously undermines and reinforces the state. While not dominant, this "popular" geography has a dialectical effect on the other competing languages of stateness in Colombia (Radcliffe 2004; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996).

## CONCLUSION

In this article I have sought to decenter binary understandings of the state, such as state/society, strong/weak, consolidated/failed, by illuminating the "myth of the state" in the context of Colombia. I have argued that states, by and large, are "failed" states, and instead seek to understand the totality of the sublime and gross images and practices of the Colombian state. Located within but distant from the city-state, el pueblo has become the site of competing languages of stateness that challenge the myth of the state and thus the state's very legitimacy. I have demonstrated the role institutionalized violence plays in establishing authority over the pueblo where and when the state and/or shadow states lack legitimacy. Finally, I argue that from this space marked by violence, el pueblo is articulating an alternative language of citizenship that dialectically informs dominant languages of stateness.

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