“CIVIL WAR BY OTHER MEANS”: CONFLICT, RESISTANCE AND COEXISTENCE IN COLOMBIA

Exploring the Philosophy and Politics of Alasdair MacIntyre in a Conflict Setting

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ABSTRACT

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Colombia’s protracted civil war between Marxist insurgencies and the state has brought grave consequences for the civilian population and the prospects for constructing a viable political community in the country. With up to 5 million internally displaced people, rampant impunity for perpetrators of crimes against humanity and human rights and International Humanitarian Law violations, dozens of politicians and countless members of the armed forces linked to paramilitary organizations, along with increasing social injustices and inequalities, Colombia presents a troubling social-political panorama that has led to what is often referred to as a profound social and institutional “moral crisis”. Much discussion has centred on the question of achieving some degree of minimal moral and political consensus and “collective conscience” to humanize and slowly transform the conflict at local, regional and national levels. However, the philosophical and political parameters of this discussion have been and continue to be set firmly within variants of the liberal tradition which, it is argued, does not provide the necessary resources for adequately conceptualizing the problem and conceiving the task of addressing conflict, constructing moral consensus, and seeking social and political coexistence. The thesis argues that the philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre can provide such resources. MacIntyre provides a convincing account of the philosophical
problems that underlie ongoing intractable disagreement and the conflicts it breeds, offering a philosophy that can inform and underpin efforts at social transformation, resistance, and coexistence as well as aiding the necessary task of social scientific research and analysis of the conflict. The thesis analyses the moral dimensions of the conflict in light of MacIntyre’s philosophy but also critically explores the adequacy of his politics of local community for the Colombian context. MacIntyre argues that a rational political community can only be constructed through the praxis of local communities engaging in shared moral-political deliberation. Through an empirical case study of a Constituent Assembly process in a rural community that has suffered the impacts of armed conflict for decades, the thesis explores an attempt at constructing peaceful social and political coexistence in light of MacIntyre’s moral-sociological framework.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the moral dimensions of conflict and the search for peace in Colombia from the perspective of the philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre. I argue that MacIntyre’s work provides a rich and illuminating theoretical framework for analysing various aspects of Colombia’s deep “moral crisis” (Arango 2002; Gómez-Müller 2008; López 2005) and the ongoing problem of radical disagreement (see Giraldo 2003; MacIntyre 1988; Ramsbotham 2010), both of which are partly cause and effect of ongoing social and political conflict in the country. In studying the moral dimensions of the Colombian conflict through the work of MacIntyre I aim to problematise certain theoretical, philosophical and political stances in relation to constructing peace in Colombia, and to clarify some of the issues and dynamics involved. I also aim to make a more general contribution to the normative dimension of peace studies. As Bill McSweeney has argued, “Peace studies...rests on the claim that there are alternatives to any existing social order and that human agency and moral choice are fundamental...to their realization” (cited in Atack 2009).

1 In the Colombian philosophical literature the “moral crisis” variously refers to: the question of violence as a profound ethical problem (Tovar 2002); the crisis of state legitimacy (Arango 2002; Uribe 1993); the fracturing of the social fabric and the failure of social and political coexistence (Gómez-Müller 2008; López 2005; Pearce 1998); the linguistic dimensions of conflict (López 2005; López 2007; González 2009; Torres 1962; Uribe and López 2006); the challenge of reaching some degree of social and political consensus around the requirements of peace and coexistence (Giraldo 2003; Mejía 2004); the problem of “transitional justice” and “reconciliation” (Hoyos 2007; Orozco 2005). It also extends to the role of the social sciences in addressing or perpetuating conflict (García Durán 2008; González et al. 2002). It is therefore clear that what is referred to as “the” moral crisis encompasses a diverse albeit interrelated set of issues and problems. For the purposes of this thesis I use the term to denote the conjunction of four associated issues: the failure in Colombia to construct an inclusive state project and political community; the problem of radical disagreement in respect of politics, morality, characterizations of the conflict, and the linguistic failure to resolve conflicts due to the degradation and hyper-moralization and politicization of language; the problematic dimensions of social and political resistance associated with the armed left; and the normative dimensions of the social sciences in relation to conflict analysis and policy prescriptions for peace.
claim that MacIntyre’s philosophy is particularly relevant (and critically challenging) for peace theorists and practitioners in its critique of existing socio-economic arrangements combined with its emphasis on human agency. MacIntyre also illuminates the way moral concerns cut across, and are intertwined with, the social and political conflicts that are the subject matter of peace studies, and the theoretical level of conflict analysis and social scientific research that theorists engage in.

MacIntyre is an entirely neglected thinker in the Colombian philosophical discussion, therefore I aim to demonstrate the relevance of MacIntyre’s philosophy for theory and practice in relation to the Colombian conflict and the search for peace. MacIntyre’s work can help us to better understand the nature of continuing moral and political disagreement in Colombia (and of course in more general terms) as well as illuminating how human agency can be rationally effective and sidestep the vicious circle of conflict dynamics. However, it also offers a controversial social-political proposal for enabling such agency and overcoming moral-political disagreement and the conflicts it breeds.² Whilst arguing for the relevance of MacIntyre’s diagnosis of the contemporary state of moral-political disagreement and moral philosophy to the Colombian context, I critically explore, through empirical fieldwork, his call for an Aristotelian “politics of local community” and “resistance” as the only means for restoring rationality to moral and political commitments and arguments and for building political community and rationally grounded coexistence (MacIntyre 1985a; 1998d; 2001; 2006d).

² See Harman, 2009 for a critique of MacIntyre’s political proposals.
MacIntyre himself has called for empirical work to be done in order to build up a corpus of comparative studies on different forms of local community that embody what he calls “networks of giving and receiving” (MacIntyre 2001, p. 143). In such communities moral and political virtues (and vices) are ‘discovered’ in the pursuit of a politics of the common good. We need to find “examples of such communities at their best and at their worst, and most of all examples of communities that have been or are open to alternative possibilities and that sometimes move towards the better and sometimes towards the worse” (MacIntyre 2001, p. 143). What comparative study can provide us with is a picture of “the variety of social forms within which networks of giving and receiving can be institutionalized and the variety of ways in which such networks can be sustained and strengthened or weakened and destroyed” (ibid., p. 143). My empirical work aims to contribute to this task, but through it I also intend to critically assess the politics of local community as such. I want to enquire as to the adequacy of MacIntyre’s politics both to the philosophical problems MacIntyre himself diagnoses, and to the particular manifestations of these problems in the Colombian context. I shall elaborate in greater detail further on about the nature and challenges of my empirical work and the theoretical basis of MacIntyre's politics of local community. Beforehand, however, I need to elucidate my overall argument with reference to the title of my thesis.

MacIntyre argues that modern liberal politics is “civil war carried on by other means” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 253), which serves to mask the depths of

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3 I raise questions about the link between MacIntyre’s political-cum-sociological proposals for rationally addressing conflict via local communities and his proposals for channelling the macro moral, philosophical and sociological conflict of traditions that constitutes the theoretical level problem of radical disagreement (MacIntyre 1991).
conflict in peaceful societies and to conceal the extent of manipulation, co-
option and domination exercised by the state and sectoral interests. 
MacIntyre’s rejection of liberalism is based on his view that, contrary to its 
initial philosophical and political aspirations, it has failed to provide a coherent 
framework for reconciling different interests and conceptions of the good that 
can compel the rational assent of all. Liberalism merely suppresses conflict, 
whilst also covertly imposing a particular and contestable conception of the 
good (MacIntyre 1988). Therefore, for MacIntyre, liberal citizenship as a form 
of political coexistence serves an ideological function (Knight 2007, p. 170). As 
Kelvin Knight notes, for MacIntyre “one should refuse that minimal amount of 
participation which the state allows its subjects in the name of citizenship” 
(Knight 2007, p. 179). Hence MacIntyre’s call for “resistance” and a “politics of 
self-defense” (MacIntyre 2006d, p. 155) against the depredations of the 
‘neutral’ liberal state and its normative framework.

Thus MacIntyre provides a framework with which to understand the 
depths of modern moral-political conflict, the need for resistance to the state, 
and the challenges of constructing coexistence, which, as I shall substantiate 
further on, is what makes MacIntyre’s philosophy so relevant to the Colombian 
problematic: Deep-rooted social and moral conflict, state terror and 
authoritarianism, left-wing armed resistance to the state, right-wing armed 
counter-resistance to the guerrillas, and civil society attempts at constructing 
civilized coexistence, all point to the ostensible relevance of MacIntyre’s 
philosophical concerns and categories. Further, as I shall endeavour to show, 
MacIntyre also proposes concomitant political prescriptions that to some 
degree resonate with existing alternative social-political processes in 
Colombia. I shall presently turn to an initial elaboration of MacIntyre’s position,
but before that it is necessary to point out that MacIntyre’s philosophical diagnoses and political proposals are at odds with the general direction of philosophical analysis of the conflict and normative prescriptions in the Colombian discussion.

Colombian scholars are all too aware of the realities of civil war and the social fragmentation and fracturing it brings (Mejía et al. 2004; Safford and Palacios 2002; Uribe 1999; Uribe and López 2006), yet almost uniformly there is a consensus that some form of liberalism and liberal democratic state politics offer the required philosophical and political resources for addressing conflict and reconstructing “convivencia” (Duncan 2008; López 2005; Romero 2003; Uribe 1996). Conflict analysts, sociologists, philosophers and political scientists are agreed on the complex roots of the conflict, the way state construction in Colombia has encountered various forms of resistance (Bolivar 2006; González et al. 2002; Romero 2003; Uribe 1993, 1999; Uribe and López 2006), and on the need to rebuild political community and coexistence (Botero 2002; Gómez-Müller 2008; López 2005; Mejía et al. 2004), but they would be reluctant to advocate a politics of resistance and local community as the answer. For most Colombian scholars, liberalism, if properly understood and implemented via the modern state, can provide a framework for conducting civil war by other means. This was indeed the hope engendered in the early 1990s with the redaction of a new political charter and the decentralization of Colombia’s political system, which promoted and facilitated greater political participation. Yet despite the widely acknowledged limitations and failings of this political settlement, even relatively radical scholars maintain that some form of liberalism is the only means of addressing conflict and establishing a political community in Colombia (see Mejía et al. 2004).
My concern is to strongly question this assumption. I argue, following MacIntyre, that the dominant liberal paradigm does not sufficiently recognize the depths of contemporary moral and political disagreements, and that in continuing to advocate liberalism theorists and grassroots activists cannot adequately understand conflict or hope to chart ways out of it. Following my detailed exposition of MacIntyre’s philosophical project in chapter one, chapter two demonstrates several problems with various liberal approaches in the Colombian literature in light of MacIntyre’s central theses. One of the key weaknesses relates to the linguistic dimension of conflict and the search for consensus, which is deemed to be central to overcoming violent conflict (Mejía et al. 2004). As sociologist María Teresa Uribe argues, the ubiquity of violence in the Colombian context can be related to the loss of consensus and political legitimacy (Uribe 1990, p. 23). Colombian conflict analyst Javier Giraldo has written,

If we propose the exercise of seeking consensus about that which connects us as members of the same nation, we are talking about something essential for constructing possibilities of humanized coexistence, which up to now has been destructive. We need to find the most adequate means for ensuring that the search for consensus can authentically occur (Giraldo 2003, pp. 85-86).

The lack of state institutional presence and the emergence of guerrilla and paramilitary organizations have blocked the formation of a minimal form of consensus in respect of state legitimacy, national identity and political community (Uribe 1999, p. 263). De facto political consensuses have been established where state, guerrilla or paramilitary forces have been able to
represent certain collective interests, yet these have ostensibly been non-rational consensuses constructed more through coercion and fear than rational assent (ibid., p. 263).

Language is central to the task of constructing an “authentic” consensus (Giraldo 2003, pp 85-86). However, the languages used to express disagreements, to put forward political prescriptions, and to work towards agreed upon solutions are, on MacIntyre’s view, intimately bound up with rival philosophical traditions that are often “incommensurable” (MacIntyre 1985a, 1988). In light of this, if, as philosopher Gray Cox argues, peacebuilding means “cultivating the process of agreeing” (Cox 1986, p. 12), then liberalism as a paradigm for seeking peace is highly problematic from a MacIntyrean standpoint. Yet liberalism is also the paradigm in which Colombian civil society operates. In the early 1990s, as widespread fatigue with the grind of ongoing war set in and the collapse of the Soviet Union sparked a liberal renaissance with what we might refer to as an “option for civil society”, Colombian civil society appeared to place its hopes for addressing conflict through discussion and argumentation from the national to the local level (from the National Constituent Assembly that drew up the 1991 Constitution to regional and local assemblies).

Turning to different contractualist ethical theories, Colombian activists, philosophers and political theorists sought to elucidate a foundation of ethical norms for coexistence and a shared language based on the (Habermasian) presuppositions of intersubjective dialogue and a “shared rationality” (Fernández et al. 1996; Peña 1996; Uribe 1992). Colombian intellectuals once sympathetic to the armed left issued public moral critiques and denunciations of the armed struggle, expressing hope that the political opening they deemed
to be represented by the National Assembly and 1991 Constitution could serve to engender a discussion, and ultimately a consensus, on the ethical referents of Colombian society. Yet this panacea of open discussion, based on the various philosophical assumptions of liberalism, ignored what former Colombian priest and ELN\(^4\) guerrilla Camilo Torres pointed out in the 1960s (the decade in which Colombia’s principal guerrilla movements emerged):

> It is possible that in Colombia there are two incipient subcultures that are gradually becoming more independent, dissimilar, and antagonistic...Each has its own system of values, behavior, and attitudes, which are now becoming antagonistic. Whatever communication there is between these two classes is breaking down. (Torres 1964, p. 193)

In relation to the use of political and moral language Torres observed:

> The same expressions have different meanings for each class....The systems of communication between the two classes become ever more precarious, because the absence of common expressions makes dialogue impossible, and the lack of dialogue engenders incomprehension. When a cultural barrier of this kind arises, simple common sense is not sufficient to overcome it. Real contacts must be made in order to re-establish a dialogue. (Ibid., pp. 193-194)

This implicitly points to MacIntyre’s perspective. MacIntyre argues that the loss of a teleological perspective in ethics and politics, through the rejection of Aristotelianism at the threshold of the modern era, has left morality and moral-political language as an unintelligible, arbitrary melange of fragmented

\(^4\)The Cuban-inspired guerrilla movement known as the Ejército de Liberación Nacional
concepts and injunctions that prohibits rational engagement in conflict and the possibility of reaching consensus (MacIntyre 1985a). As a result, contemporary moral and political debates cannot be rationally resolved, only arbitrarily settled by the imposition of power or non-rational suasion (MacIntyre 1985a). In the contemporary social world, morality has become an instrument of emotivist manipulation. On the emotivist view, morality does not imply a realm of objective criteria to which our arguments make appeal in order to rationally convince others of the appropriateness or not of some action, but is merely a technique of emotional persuasion dressed up in the terms of an appeal to impersonal standards. The key to the social content of emotivism “is the fact that emotivism entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 23). I argue that this diagnosis of emotivism as central to the problematic nature of moral conflict usefully illuminates important aspects of the Colombian conflict in relation to its linguistic and political dimensions. For example, the increasingly shrill discourses and “parallel delegitimizations” (Giraldo 2003) of rival conflict actors and the “pathology” of moral and political language in Colombia, which has degenerated into “The use of terms that no longer convince anyone as they begin to be rendered meaningless by their abuse, misuse and dull repetition” (López 2005, p. 196), can be partly explained and elucidated by MacIntyre’s diagnosis of emotivism. It also problematises the various liberal positions in respect of seeking a shared ethical language and minimal set of norms for coexistence.

MacIntyre’s central thesis is that moral consensus is impossible in modern cultures because of the fragmentation of previous moral frameworks and modes of reasoning. According to MacIntyre,
[R]ational consensus upon central moral questions and a fortiori on central political questions has proved impossible within the framework provided by the dominant conception of rationality in modern cultures and...therefore in the arena of rational discussion there is radical dissensus. (MacIntyre 1985b, p. 238)

The failure to address radical incommensurability is a weakness of various neo-Kantian/Habermasian approaches to dialogue and conflict resolution in which free and open discussion is held to be the answer to radical conflict. These approaches appear to view ethics as ahistorical, as ultimately detached from particular interests and desires. Consensus is deemed to be possible under idealized conditions of communication and argumentation because of this ahistorical conception of morality. However, even if we assume that this might prove to be the case, the fact is that in order to even approach the creation of these conditions we have to get beyond and address the fact of rival moral-political standpoints that have partially led to and informed and justified the current state of affairs. Those in control of the media, of land, of the means of production and so forth hold to particular moral-political standpoints that are radically at odds with the standpoints of those from different strata of society. Part of the strength of MacIntyre’s thesis is that it directly faces up to this reality of endemic linguistic and social conflict. As MacIntyre notes, “it has been precisely at the level of language that the moral inadequacies and corruptions of our age have been evident, and certainly no less so by those with ideological stances than by others” (MacIntyre 1971d, p. 94).
MacIntyre’s insistence on the depths of linguistic and conceptual conflict recalls the recognition by Marxist and other radical scholars in the 1960s and 1970s that moral-political language could not be neutral or divorced from economic and social structures (Dussel 1973; Freire 1970; Gutiérrez 1973; Harvey 1973 (1988); Petras 1978). Within the Latin American context of the Cold War and National Security Doctrine, rival interpretations of human rights language abounded, with sharp differences between Western and US-aligned sectors and Latin American popular movements (Assman 1978). Ethical language was highly politicized (Comblin 1979), liberation theologians argued for a non-neutral “option for the poor” (Gutierrez 1973), and liberationist philosophers criticized the “Eurocentrism” of hegemonic philosophical categories (Dussel 1973, 1977). The shift by many intellectuals to the philosophical and political optimism of post-Soviet Union liberalism and civil society, however, simply left behind and did not address the philosophical problems of moral-political language that Marxists, liberation theologians and philosophers had highlighted. I argue that MacIntyre’s work returns us to these unresolved problems and posits a way of resolving them, whilst also offering an important critique of the ethical theories and approaches associated with liberalism, Marxism and other forms of political radicalism.

In the Colombian context, this radicalism led to the emergence of left-wing insurgencies that either appealed directly to Marxist notions of justice or to an amalgam of radical Christianity, Just War Theory and Marxism, amongst other permutations. When Camilo Torres joined the ELN guerrillas he was as convinced of the moral basis for his decision as were those who criticized him on the left and the right. Yet it is this moral certainty and conviction that has arguably contributed to conflict dynamics in Colombia. As philosopher Rodolfo
Arango observes, “Herein lies precisely the bankruptcy of Colombian political
culture: an appreciable number of people and social groups are persuaded of
the justice of their cause and therefore they believe the means they use to
achieve their objectives are legitimate” (Arango 2002, pp. 18-19). Where
everything is seen to be legitimate there is a moral crisis of distinctions that
urgently requires the formulation of an agreement about what is and is not
publicly legitimate (Gómez-Müller 2008, p. 59). However, trapped between the
so-called “ethics of conviction” and the “ethics of responsibility” (Giraldo 2003),
rival moral positions and arguments in relation to legitimacy and the
requirements for peace and coexistence are apparently irreconcilable. I
suggest that MacIntyre’s diagnosis of emotivism and incommensurability
illuminates the underlying philosophical dynamics of this phenomenon.

Torres’ views on morality and the possibilities of rational communication
between different classes were, of course, Marxist views. Marx observed that
in a class divided society it was pointless for workers to appeal to moral
arguments in order to convince the capitalist class of the need for justice
(MacIntyre 2002, p. 205). As one Marxist theorist has written,

A class which fights to preserve existing society has one set of notions about
what is necessary to keep society going, and attempts to impose on people
the moral notions that correspond to this. It has to portray the values it
propagates as the values necessary for society as a whole, what is good for
itself as absolutely ‘good’. By contrast, a class which feels its needs are not
met and presses for society to be reconstituted on a different basis necessarily

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5 See J. Giraldo (2003) on the "parallel delegitimizations" of conflict discourses and the moral
argument between Francisco de Roux and Javier Giraldo in relation to the question of
characterising the armed struggle as a "just war".
begins to advance different interpretations of moral notions. (Harman 2007-unpaginated)

Yet it is precisely this kind of imposition that is the problem. If there can be no rational agreement on moral norms and the presuppositions of moral and political community, then there can only be imposition of one moral scheme and political vision of society over another. Instead of Marxist or other impositions of moral notions, instead of power or violence as the arbiter of political disagreement, Colombia needs to find, in the words of one Colombian philosopher, “a juridical-moral language that demands of and engenders within individuals, groups and institutions a sense of social responsibility, respect for the ‘polis’, a sense of the ‘public’ and the common good” (Calderón 1996, p. 24).

However, such a language cannot simply be formulated in abstraction by “experts” or anyone else. On a MacIntyrean view, a condition for the discovery and formulation of such a language is shared social and political practice in local communities in which Aristotelian concepts can be embodied and reconstituted in contemporary forms. Yet it is not solely a question of developing a shared language in such spaces: shared discursive terms and dialogue also imply shared practical-material terms (Dussel 1999; MacIntyre 2006f, p. 39) and the importance of developing what MacIntyre calls the virtues. Moral language of itself cannot engender a sense of social responsibility or a respect for the public sphere. What is required is the right kind of motivation, the requisite link between discourse and practice, which for MacIntyre means the development of moral and political virtues in dialectical relationship to a conception of the good and a concomitant emerging ethical
theory (see Solomon 2003). As Kelvin Knight notes, abstract invocations of the “common good” are made from a variety of ideological standpoints (Knight 2007, p. 177). Therefore, as MacIntyre is well aware, simply formulating one more prescriptive theory and unmasking the incoherence of other theories and ideologies cannot achieve very much. The rational justification of any such theory and political prescription can only be demonstrated in practice. Debate about the best forms of political practice ultimately has to be debate between rival institutions as much as between rival theories (MacIntyre 1990a, p. 360).

Before elaborating further on MacIntyre’s politics of local community and my empirical investigation, I first need to outline an important, related component of my overall argument that connects empirical study, moral philosophy, sociology and conflict analysis. In chapter three I argue that study of the Colombian or any other conflict always implies some normative position that enters into our modes of analysis (cf. Jabri 2006). Further, in the Colombian case, social scientists have expressed the view that the aim is not merely to interpret the conflict, but to transform it (García Durán 2008). This takes us onto the contested terrain of social change, which is in significant part what has driven and continues to drive the Colombian conflict. The social sciences therefore cannot avoid participating in the very conflict they seek to analyse and transform. They are inextricably bound up with the problem of seeking some kind of moral consensus. In Colombia, the very characterization and analysis of the conflict “risks becoming yet another site of conflict” (González et al. 2002, p. 19), adding to the already complex nature of Colombia’s ongoing war. The politicization and moralization of the concrete conflict on the ground has fed into, and is often now subtly or not so subtly reflected in, social scientific analyses and prescriptions in relation to the
conflict and the attainment of “peace”. On a MacIntyrean view, due to the liberal philosophical assumptions of modern social science, this is inevitable.

MacIntyre’s central intervention in moral philosophy in his seminal work *After Virtue* offers more than a diagnosis of the parlous and incoherent state of modern morality and moral theory, extending to a historically informed philosophical analysis of social and philosophical thought that also encompasses a powerful critique of prevailing social science methodology and presuppositions. Starting from the Marxist premise that social and moral conflict is inherent to the social structure of modernity, MacIntyre shows how rival conceptual and theoretical frameworks for interpreting and analysing the social world provided by different philosophical schools of thought, political ideologies and social theories all presuppose a moral philosophy. Conversely, any moral philosophy presupposes a sociology and a philosophical psychology that can explain the basis and nature of human action. For MacIntyre, different accounts of human action and diverse conceptions of justice imply rival accounts of rationality in general and of practical rationality in particular (MacIntyre 1988), which constitutes the problem of radical disagreement in moral and political matters and the failure to rationally resolve conflicts at the concrete social level as well as at the level of theory.

MacIntyre shows how different accounts of rationality are located within broad “traditions” of moral and philosophical/social enquiry, with liberalism constituting merely one tradition amongst others despite its claims to have provided a neutral account of rationality and morality that could claim the allegiance of any rational person *qua* individual embedded or not within some form of social or theoretical tradition. In MacIntyre’s view, the Aristotelian tradition provides the most intellectually compelling account of rationality,
morality and politics, as well as implying a superior modality of conducting social science. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre identifies the central intellectual and moral conflict of the age as that between Nietzsche and Aristotle, between the rival traditions that embody the central theses and presuppositions of these giants of philosophy. As he explains, “The differences between the two run very deep. They extend beyond ethics and morality to the understanding of human action, so that rival conceptions of the social sciences, of their limits and their possibilities, are intimately bound up with the antagonistic confrontation of these two alternative ways of viewing the human world” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 259). Thus any description of the conflict and the “facts” in relation to it is inevitably theory-laden and therefore implies some contestable philosophical, epistemological, and normative account of the social world (cf. MacIntyre 1988, pp. 332-333).

In modern ethics, the separation of facts from values and the subsequent view that questions of moral truth cannot be rationally investigated are partly what have led to the relegation of moral philosophy to the margins of academic enquiry (MacIntyre 1985a, 1991), with important implications for those who aim to understand the nature of contemporary social and political conflicts. The separation of facts from values embodied in prevailing conceptions of social science (MacIntyre 1998a; Sayer 2003) has contributed to a positivist notion of conflict resolution as a “toolkit” approach (Jabri 2006). Because normative judgements have ostensibly been removed from sociology and the social sciences (Sayer 2003), in the Colombian case I argue this has led to the covert imposition of particular normative standpoints in the guise of value neutrality, and to a lack of awareness of the way the social sciences and conflict analysis therefore offer contestable accounts of conflict and
prescriptions for social transformation and peace, thereby actually perpetuating conflict rather than transforming it. The modern prescriptions of policymakers and their consultants in the social sciences have broken free of any shared normative and discursive framework and are justified through the various modern modes of manipulative moral and managerialist discourse (see MacIntyre 1998a, 1973b).

In social scientific analysis of the conflict, its causes, consequences, and prospects, different moral positions are clearly present (see Chaparro 2007; Hoyos 2007; Mockus and Corzo 2003; Orozco 2005; Posada 2008). Diverse theoretical frameworks lead to rival conclusions and policy prescriptions in respect of the legitimacy or not of political violence, state-building, land reform, and other issues (see Guáqueta 2006). For example, regarding insurgent violence and the armed struggle, rational choice theory has been used to discredit insurgent motives, leading to theories about the civil war that entail strong prescriptive conclusions and which implicitly relegate the importance of negotiation and addressing social injustices (see Collier and Hoeffler 2001). Just War Theory has been used to justify insurgent claims, which runs the risk of painting an equally one-sided picture of reality, overlooking the many “grey areas” in relation to violence and motives (see De Roux 2001; Giraldo 2003). Hobbesian readings of the conflict imply a particular framework for interpreting social action, leading to strong (and controversial) policy prescriptions in relation to “state-building” (Sandoval 2004; Giraldo 2008), whilst Marxist readings tend to accentuate the structural dimensions of the conflict, justifying insurgent actions but downplaying the problematic moral dimensions of their use of violence (see Petras 1997).
In chapter three I explore these philosophical issues raised by a MacIntyrean perspective on morality, which include the question of the relationship of morality to the social sciences, the implications this has for studying the moral dimensions of the conflict, and the role of social science in analysing, perpetuating and transforming conflict. I also argue that MacIntyre’s philosophical project suggests an important research programme for those of us interested both in understanding contemporary intra-societal conflicts and seeking to transform them through some agenda of social change. From a MacIntyrean perspective, these two agendas are conceptually, theoretically and practically linked. I go on to suggest that MacIntyre’s project has affinities with the liberationist pedagogy and ethical approach of Paulo Freire (1970), which insists on the need to link theory and practice and thereby posits a radical challenge to mainstream social science and conflict analysis.

In chapter four I turn to an analysis of the Colombian conflict through a MacIntyrean lens. From the moral corruption and “schizophrenic” nature of the Colombian state (Giraldo 1999), to the process of “state construction” and the ambiguities of human rights discourse, I demonstrate the moral problems with Colombian politics and the state, as well as the challenges for effecting revolutionary social change and the transformation of politics in an ethical and rational way. MacIntyre calls for resistance to capitalism and the modern state but argues that the classic Marxist approach to such resistance and the revolutionary “road to socialism” shares the moral and epistemological failings of liberal modernity (MacIntyre 2008). He links this to his critique of social science, arguing that Marxist revolutionary theorists share the manipulative, managerialist assumptions of the “ideology of bureaucratic authority” with mainstream social scientists (MacIntyre 1973b, 1998a). Therefore, the
problematic moral dimension of armed left resistance lies not merely in the widely denounced terroristic acts of the guerrillas (denunciations which often rest on an uncertain moral basis), but is related to their theories of social transformation and their underlying conceptions of morality and human action.

I claim that MacIntyre’s philosophy points to the need for slow, creative, and often frustrating processes of social, cultural and political encounters in which moral bonds and shared political visions can be constructed, something that practitioners of peacebuilding and grassroots conflict transformation have also underlined (Lederach 2005). I postulate the hypothesis that MacIntyre’s philosophy is already partly implicit in certain practices of social organizations and communities of resistance in Colombia, and propose MacIntyre’s moral-sociological framework as a model for empirically exploring the peacebuilding process of a small Colombian community that has spent ten years attempting to transform local conflict through public participation and deliberation. Arguing that what is required is a form of MacIntyrean ethnographic fieldwork, I conclude the chapter with a justification of my case study and a brief excursus on my methodology.

The importance of an adequate account of morality for politics and the search for consensus and coexistence should now be clear. If morality is only a reflex of pre-given individual and collective interests, then peace and social justice in Colombia can only be imposed through power via the victory of one group of social forces over another. “Dialogue” will continue to take the form of emotivist assertion and counter-assertion and, if it is not rooted in alternative social and political practices, will amount only to rhetoric and fail to address the crucial issues of character, motivation, and the re-orienting of desires and attitudes. Alternatively, if morality is more than this, as MacIntyre argues it is,
then for it to have social power it requires, on MacIntyre’s view, smaller-scale politics and closer, participatory social and political interaction and debate. Thus I was led to explore the potential and the pitfalls of the politics of local community in a Colombian municipality.

Chapters five and six present my empirical case study of a local community process that has sought to build local peace and to transform dominant political practices through such political participation and debate. Picking up MacIntyre’s prescription of “local community” as the locus of moral rationality and a politics of the common good, I study a Municipal Constituent Assembly (AMC) in a rural Colombian municipality (Tarso) as a possible site for social change and the rebuilding of social and political coexistence through the reconstruction (and reconnection) of ethics and politics. Colombia’s Municipal Constituent Assemblies first emerged in the late 1990s as community responses to the pressures of armed groups, corrupt political practices, and local development needs (Marulanda 2004; Sanabria 2006). Politically and philosophically they found their justification in the 1991 Constitution that mandated public participation and asserted the sovereignty of the people. Based on the principle of social inclusion, the Assemblies aimed to facilitate social dialogue and the construction of consensuses on development priorities, and to bypass corrupt political networks based on clientelist practices. Due to the Assemblies’ emergence in the context of an ongoing armed conflict, they also had to somehow take into account the issue of radical disagreement based on deep ideological, political and moral differences.

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6 Luis Orjuela defines clientelism as “a pyramidal system of political relations in which regional and local political bosses act as a substitute for the State by way of satisfying the individual needs of their clientele in exchange for votes.” This has “encouraged the private appropriation of public resources to pay for commitments made on the basis of personal loyalties, thereby preventing the orientation of these resources towards public objectives and collective benefits” (Orjuela 2008, p. 217).
between members of the same community. In this way the Assemblies were and are more than an attempt to render local government more efficient as in the neoliberal “good governance” framework.⁷ They seek to address social and political conflict through dialogue and debate linked to a more active conception of citizenship, a critique of the state, and the construction of an ethical political culture that prioritizes the good of the “community” over private interests (Sanabria 2006).

However, my aim in the empirical work was not to go in search of an ideal MacIntyrean community. Rather, I took MacIntyre’s philosophy and politics as a guide to the kinds of spaces that might partially embody MacIntyrean assumptions and which had the potential for being sites in which rationality could be restored to politics and ethics. MacIntyre’s advocacy of local community politics as the only worthwhile and coherent politics that can aspire to rational justification is not based on a love of the local for its own sake. Rather, as Kelvin Knight observes, because the modern liberal state is “structurally incapable of admitting its subjects to the kind of shared reasoning that would be necessary for the formation of a veritably ‘shared purpose’ and ‘political community’” (Knight 2007, p. 170), local communities offer the only possible arenas for enabling the necessary forms of communal reasoning. For MacIntyre, politics in the Aristotelian sense is a “practice” that aims to integrate the various “social practices” within a given community into an overarching conception of the good and the best as such (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 194). MacIntyre contrasts what he calls the goods “internal” to practices (such as architecture or farming), which are achieved for their own sake and for the

sake of furthering the practice and taking it to higher standards of craftsmanship, with those “external” goods that are contingent on the end result (a school or a crop) such as money, status and power. For MacIntyre, modern liberal politics is based on the “compartmentalization” of life into separate spheres that are ultimately ordered to the achievement of external goods, which turns the modern citizen into a mere instrument of capital formation (MacIntyre 2006c, 2006d). The loss of a teleological perspective is thus key to what MacIntyre deems to be the modern deformation of politics and ethics. As Kelvin Knight explains,

MacIntyre’s sociology entails that goods and standards of excellence internal to practices may be internal, also, to a veritably political community. Such an institutional extension of the practical rationality of moral and intellectual excellence throughout society is possible only if two conditions are met: first, that practices are rationally and cooperatively ordered; secondly, that all individuals actively participate as citizens. Citizenship in this sense is not simply the abstractly and legally equal status that its name is now taken to denote. Rather, it is an activity of learning and of teaching, and of discussing, judging, executing decisions and- if, when and as necessary- of defending one’s community. It is also an activity that is not compartmentalized from participation in other practices. Rather, one participates in political community by participating in reasoning about the good served by one’s particular practice within the structure of goods internal to the entire political community. (Knight 2007, p. 179)

Whilst suggesting resonances between MacIntyre’s proposals and the social-political process of the Municipal Assemblies, I aim to critically explore the
relevance of the politics of local community for the Colombian context. Is it appropriate for a radically divided society in which the conflict has partly centred on deep ideological and conceptual differences between “capitalism” and “communism”, between liberalism and Catholicism? Can it be a vehicle for much needed radical social transformation?

Through in-depth interviews with the key protagonists of Tarso AMC carried out over a six month period in 2008, I sought to elicit the ethical-political assumptions and views of those engaged in a concrete, “bottom-up” political process of peacebuilding and social change. The morally and politically charged atmosphere of the Colombian conflict and the often emotivist, shrill nature of moral-political argument within it, as well as the imputation of beliefs, motives, and normative/ideological stances by external observers to different groups and constituencies, calls out for empirical study of real processes of change involving actual subjectivities conditioned by their own histories and narratives. I wanted to understand how individual and collective moral-political agency could emerge in a context in which it is widely acknowledged that moral authority, in fact morality, has in large part broken down as the social fabric has seriously fractured and deteriorated (Gómez-Müller 2008; López 2005; Pearce 1998). Through participant observation and general observation of the social and political context of Tarso, I aimed to make connections between moral discourse, perceptions, and the social structure, as well as to assess the degree to which the politics of local community as practised in Tarso could contribute to wider social-political change.

In the final chapter, chapter seven, I analyse the fieldwork and attempt to bring the different threads of the argument together. I conclude that whilst
the kind of politics practised in Tarso can be said to be based to some degree on a politics of the common good and certain MacIntyrean assumptions, there are serious failings and question marks over its continued viability in the absence of deeper structural changes to Colombia’s macro political, social and economic system. I suggest that by itself the politics of local community is not adequate to the task of facilitating essential wider social change, and therefore to contributing to national not just local peacebuilding. I finish with a call to combine local community politics with a nationally oriented politics of social movements that can respectively avoid the dangers of emotivism and parochialism. Despite these criticisms, I argue that MacIntyre’s philosophy and politics are on the whole extremely illuminating and relevant to the Colombian context and, by implication, to other contexts of overt social and political conflict.

In this final part of the Introduction I now turn to a brief overview of the Colombian conflict in order to put my overall argument into context.

The Colombian conflict

Characterizing the Colombian conflict is neither an easy nor uncontroversial task. The very framing of the conflict, whether it is to be classified as a civil war (Ramírez 2003), a “war against society” (Pecáut 2001), or a question of a terrorist threat to a “besieged democracy” (Pizarro 2004), implies some set of normative, philosophical and ideological assumptions. I share the analysis of those who classify the conflict as a civil war, whilst recognizing that we cannot simply speak of an unbroken continuity of a singular mode of conflict and war throughout Colombia’s post-Independence history. However, I argue that the
contemporary mode of the Colombian conflict can be understood as to some extent a continuation of Colombia’s 19th century civil wars inasmuch as they were wars for the political, moral and cultural definition of the nation and state-society relations (Uribe and López 2006). Today, Colombia is still attempting to move from social, political and cultural fragmentation to the construction of the state (González et al. 2002). The so-called “weakness” of the Colombian state, by which is generally meant its uneven presence throughout the national territory, is one explanation for the emergence and persistence of both left-wing insurgencies and right-wing paramilitaries (Pizarro 2004). However, this is a contestable explanation that nevertheless contains elements of truth. Since the official inception of the contemporary guerrilla movements in the 1960s the FARC\(^8\) guerrillas have gained increasing territorial control, culminating in their being conceded in 1999 a huge demilitarized zone in their traditional stronghold in the south of the country for the purposes of peace negotiations. For decades the FARC have acted like a de facto state in the more peripheral zones of the country, building infrastructure, administering justice, imposing taxes, and forging close links with local populations (Brittain 2009). This demonstrates the problem of “disputed sovereignties” and the contested legitimacy of the Colombian state (Uribe 1998, pp. 277-278).

The close links that the state has with extreme right-wing paramilitary organizations (Human Rights Watch 1996) problematises the weak state thesis in some respects, although there is evidence to suggest that the paramilitary phenomenon grew above and beyond what the state had imagined, becoming a threat to the very structure that had helped engender

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8 Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. In 1982, following the guerrilla organization’s Seventh Conference of the Guerrilla Movement, the initials EP standing for Ejército del Pueblo were added to their name.
and incubate the paramilitary project (Romero 2003). The paramilitaries managed to gain significant military, political and social control over large areas of the country (Rojas and Cepeda 2008; Romero 2007), pushing back the guerrillas but imposing their own forms of control based on the threat and use of brutal violence.

Despite substantial differences in terms of their visions of society and the responsibility for atrocities\(^9\), the guerrillas and paramilitaries both share forms of authoritarianism (Peñate 1997; Romero 2003; Uribe 2001), they both claim to justify their means through the ends they seek, and they attempt to impose on the wider society, through violence, their particular moral and political notions and ideologies backed by a total belief in their own righteousness. Colombian social movements and civil society are therefore employing alternative forms of resistance to state depredations as well as to the armed “resistances” of the left and right. As I have pointed out, MacIntyre calls for an ethical politics of resistance to coercive, irrational and illegitimate manipulation whether of the state, capitalism or self-proclaimed revolutionaries.

Both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries claim social legitimacy for their actions and ostensibly represent a threat to the state. However, in the case of the paramilitaries they have consistently reiterated their support for the state, claiming that its failure to exert its presence in many regions left populations at the mercy of guerrilla attacks, whilst the guerrillas have consistently sought to overthrow the state (Romero 2003; Brittain 2009), despite a shift in emphasis.

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\(^9\) See the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights and the Noche y Niebla database for statistics on the ratio of atrocities and violations of human rights committed by the paramilitaries and the guerrillas: http://www.nocheyniebla.org/ http://www.comitepermanente.org/. In general terms there is a significant disparity with the guerrillas responsible for roughly 30-35% of abuses and the paramilitaries for roughly 65-70%.
towards taking, maintaining and increasing local state power through clientelist networks (Rangel 1996). Despite these important differences, the fact remains that the Colombian state does not have full control over the national territory, and its legitimacy is put in question by different sectors of the population, including those who tacitly or openly support the guerrillas. The constant threat to social order by drug-traffickers in alliance with paramilitary structures also represents a challenge to state control.

This problem of fractured territorial and administrative control and the presence of armed insurgencies and drug-lord controlled private armies has led some theorists to consider Colombia to be in a Hobbesian “state of nature” (Sandoval 2004; Giraldo 2008). The problem is how the state, with its structural links to paramilitaries and drug-traffickers, can claim the legitimate authority to attempt to gain the monopoly of force and administer “justice”. This is where political and moral philosophy have played and continue to play important roles in analysing the problem and elaborating ways out of the impasse (Giraldo 2008; Mejía 2007, 2004; Orozco 2005). The current vogue is Hobbesian political theory (Giraldo 2008; Orozco 2005; Sandoval 2004), yet the rational justification for this is elusive. Rival accounts of political legitimacy and prescriptions for building political community and peace point to the problem of incommensurability that MacIntyre highlights.

Despite dramatic reductions in levels of violence according to some indicators over the last few years (see Aguirre et al. 2006), there is still plenty of evidence to suggest that Colombia continues to be a society moving “away from building unifying ethical bonds and moral norms of ‘civility’ and the rule of law, to one where groups of individuals merely aggregate their particular interests and pursue them through the murder, torture, ‘disappearance’ of
Others,” as Jenny Pearce remarked of the country in the late 1990s (Pearce 1998, p. xv). Colombia is still immersed in social and political conflict, is still suffering from the impacts of diametrically opposed forms of armed “resistance”, and yet is also the site of remarkable if not entirely coherent collective efforts at resisting violence and constructing coexistence. It remains in urgent need of finding an ethical and political formula by which to conduct “civil war by other means”. The aim of this thesis is to philosophically explore the presuppositions and conditions of this.
CHAPTER 1

MacIntyre and the moral-political disorder of modernity

This chapter explores Alasdair MacIntyre’s philosophical critique of modern moral philosophy and politics, and outlines his alternative moral-political framework and proposals. I aim to demonstrate the richness and complexity of MacIntyre’s thought and the way it can illuminate the Colombian problematic. I argue that MacIntyre’s linking of moral theory and sociology is of particular relevance to the Colombian situation, and claim that MacIntyre’s is a critical philosophy that points to radical political proposals that avoid the pitfalls of emotivism of some radical political theory. I conclude that certain criticisms of MacIntyre’s politics are misguided but recognise that there is a question mark over his political proposals that calls for empirical exploration.

A voice in the moral wilderness

Alasdair MacIntyre’s preoccupation with the moral dimensions of human existence and, more particularly, the moral dimensions of social transformation, is evident in his first book published in 1953, Marxism: An Interpretation. Then as a Marxist and a Christian (a conjunction that MacIntyre would later realise he could not intellectually hold to) MacIntyre began to question what he would later describe as an important lacuna in Marx’s work: the failure to provide a philosophically adequate account of the moral basis of
the critique of capitalism and the path to communism. For MacIntyre, Marxism and Christianity are unities of theory and practice, praxes, which integrate normative accounts of the way the world should be with an analysis of how the world is. However, MacIntyre began to perceive a tension between Marxism as a predictive science and Marxism as a moral theory and conception of the human good. As Peter McMylor notes, “MacIntyre is claiming at this point that Marx is now giving up the moral perspective on capitalism and communism in favour of science” (McMylor 1994, p. 14). In MacIntyre’s words, “Marx does not uphold communism as what ought to be, but simply as what will be” (cited in McMylor op. cit., p. 14). MacIntyre later revises this critique in his attempt to theorise a philosophically adequate Marxist morality (MacIntyre 1958-1959) but will eventually conclude that Marxism too ultimately lacks the necessary resources for developing a rational, philosophically cogent moral alternative to capitalism and liberalism (MacIntyre 1985a). The “scientific” claims of Marxism create a problem for any philosophy that claims to be a philosophy that aims not merely to interpret but to change the world. As McMylor notes, “How can a philosophy designed to motivate behaviour fail to involve moral criteria of choice and judgment[?] A theory deprived of a compelling moral imperative will become one more tentative empirical hypothesis capable of a fickle rejection” (McMylor 1994, p. 14).

In *Notes from the Moral Wilderness* MacIntyre develops the essential outlines of his later arguments about the philosophical incoherence of liberalism as a moral and political theory and practice, claiming that liberal morality is merely a “photographic negative” of Stalinist morality (MacIntyre 1958-1959, p. 91). At this point, however, MacIntyre was himself uncertain of the standpoint from which he was making this critique. Whilst here MacIntyre
seeks to ground a philosophically cogent Marxist morality that suffers from none of the defects attributed to liberalism or Stalinism, he eventually turns the arguments developed in this piece against Marxism tout court, something that has not surprisingly led to criticism from contemporary Marxists (Blackledge 2009; Harman 2009). MacIntyre’s central contention is that ex-Stalinists’ principled, Kantian-like moral condemnation of the distortions and deprivities of the Stalinist system is in philosophical terms weakly based and deceptively fragile as a position that can command authority and rational assent and respect from others. The fragility of the appeal to moral principle “lies in the apparently arbitrary nature of that appeal” (MacIntyre 1958-1959, p. 91).

The liberal moral critic of Stalinism effectively inverts the form of moral judgement and moral agency within Stalinism. As MacIntyre puts it, “The Stalinist identifies what is morally right with what is actually going to be the outcome of historical development” (ibid., p. 91). Moral judgments and therefore moral agency are effectively determined by the horizon of historical necessity, hence their ultimately unfree nature: “The ‘ought’ of principle is swallowed up in the ‘is’ of history” (ibid., p. 91). In contrast, the converted liberal moral critic of Stalinism who has claimed his independence of the Stalinist machine appeals to moral principles that stand wholly outside of history. The principles are invoked as valid independently of the course of historical events, and every issue is to be and can be judged on its “moral” merits: “The ‘ought’ of principle is completely external to the ‘is’ of history” (ibid., p. 91). For MacIntyre, these amount to fundamental philosophical incoherences in the liberal and Stalinist accounts of morality. This matters for MacIntyre because he fears that without the ability to rationally persuade people on matters of values and wider social and political evaluations, modern
societies can only continue down their road of asserting and implementing power through manipulation and distortion. People will be left at the mercy of pseudo argumentation and moral rhetoric because they have, unknowingly, been deprived of the resources for understanding their situation and of authoritatively and rationally critiquing the social order: “Thus the isolation of the moral from the factual, the emphasis on choice, the arbitrariness introduced into moral matters, all these play into the hands of the defenders of the established order” (ibid., p. 94).

Whereas moral agency is clearly compromised if not rendered obsolete by Stalinism, in liberalism what appears as moral agency is in fact moral impotence in the guise of individual moral heroism. In the case of liberalism this arbitrariness of moral judgment stems from the philosophical view expounded in its classic form by Kant that moral judgments can have no non-moral basis. That is, they can only be supported by other moral judgments, principles or propositions. They cannot be grounded on or derived from facts, from some material account of the world or from inclination. No ‘is’ can entail an ‘ought’. But MacIntyre argues that this leaves morality as an unintelligible facet of human behaviour and interaction. It is as if moral judgments were taboos, linguistic residues of some long disappeared culture that modern individuals have the habit of retaining without understanding or enquiring into their original and proper use. “It is to turn ‘ought’ into a kind of nervous cough with which we accompany what we hope will be the more impressive of our injunctions” (MacIntyre 1959, p. 90).

MacIntyre in this early text implicitly diagnoses the problem as partly one of a lack of a teleological perspective in which moral rules and principles and human inclinations and desires are intimately connected (he does not use
the word *telos* or its cognates as he is later to do). For this early MacIntyre, the
discovery of shared desires in the form of class consciousness forged in the
context of class organizations and struggles, which confront the individualistic
and anarchic desires unleashed by capitalism, provides the key to restoring a
rational, non-arbitrary basis to morality. It therefore addresses a key issue for
Marxists who are rightly suspicious of bourgeois moralizing. For MacIntyre,
what this Marxist morality amounts to is, against the Stalinist, an assertion of
absolutes; against the liberal critic, an assertion of desire and of history (ibid.,
p. 96). MacIntyre here wants to reclaim moral agency as part of the reassertion
of human agency in the face of determinist, historicist accounts of Marxism
and the "road to socialism". He sees that any moral theory and normative goal
of radical social transformation has to reckon with and take into account the
agency of those in whose name such theory and transformation is aimed. But
what he also sees is that such agency is equally compromised, if not cancelled
out, by jumping ship to, or simply adding to a Stalinist account of historical
development, a liberal morality because, despite the liberating feeling of
independence and moral heroism this induces, it is ultimately to conform to the
dominant conception of morality in the liberal West, a conception that is utterly
ineffective as a form of rational suasion that can convince others to make the
transformations in society that the ex-Stalinist still, presumably, sees as
necessary. Because under liberalism there are no shared, authoritative criteria
of moral argument and judgment, the only authority moral rules and arguments
can have (beyond the minimal requirements of logic) is that which individuals
deckle they are to have. When confronted with rival moral claims and
arguments this lack of shared criteria entails that individuals can only choose
rather than rationally adjudicate between them. What this implies is the ability
of power and interest to maintain the inertia of the status quo by psychological, intellectual and other forms of manipulation.

For MacIntyre, morality - practical reason - is the essential rational connector between what is the case and what one wants to be the case. He seeks to understand the relation between “what I am, what I can be, what I want to be and what I ought to be” (MacIntyre 1958-1959, p. 100). One of the key concepts in relation to this, which connects moral agency, moral rules and human desires, is that of motivation. As MacIntyre observes in Marxism of the Will, “Marx himself never raises explicitly the question of the motives of those who seek to achieve socialism” (MacIntyre 1971a, p. 74). The motivation that is generated by Kantian introspective discovery of moral imperatives is too arbitrary. The motivation generated by the deterministic account of the end goal of “socialism” (Stalinism) is entirely externally imposed and therefore is not moral agency. This calls into question the moral justification of both liberalism and Stalinist socialism, and also threatens to leave us in the situation of having to arbitrarily impose our preferred values on the rest of society and to generate motivation in others through non-rational, emotive means.

But if the motivation to build socialism cannot be rationally grounded on anything but individual choice, or if it can only be externally imposed, then, for MacIntyre, it lacks justification. Therefore, the question of motivation for those seeking radical social change, as Marxists do, is central to the rational supportability of the objectives sought. MacIntyre provides Che Guevara as an example of someone who, along with his fellow comrades, had to address the problem of motivating people to support and follow the goals and aims of radical social transformation. A new motivation springing from the new nature
of socialist man was to replace the deformed bourgeois, capitalist motivations of material incentives. For Guevara, “moral” incentives had to replace these material incentives. However, according to MacIntyre, the same philosophical problem applied. MacIntyre's point seems to be that the decisions taken by Guevara in relation to the way the material and social basis of the Revolution was to unfold failed in respect of their theoretical moral justification and because they effectively overrode the moral agency of those in whose name the Revolution was carried out. In MacIntyre’s view, Che’s Kantian conception of morality “was the tragic flaw which finally destroyed him in Bolivia” (MacIntyre 1971a, p. 75). For MacIntyre, Che's conception of morality led to a flawed character, despite the undeniable selflessness and dedication with which he strived to serve others. This strikes an Aristotelian posture that MacIntyre will fully develop in his later writings. It is a position that links intellectual virtues with the moral virtues required for good character, something that MacIntyre sees as crucial for those who would direct others towards particular ends. For MacIntyre, the individual moral heroism of Che with his Kantian motivation and exhortations to others “is not enough” as an ethical justification and basis for revolutionary, working-class struggle (ibid., p. 75).

Ultimately, what MacIntyre is arguing is that the arbitrariness of modern morality diagnosed in *Notes from the Moral Wilderness* affects both liberalism and Marxism in equal measure. There is a fundamental incomprehension of morality affecting both liberal critics of Stalinism (or the Cuban Revolution) and Marxist revolutionaries like Guevara. Morality is what provides rational justification or not to either reform or revolution. In the absence of a functioning morality, the distorting masks of liberalism are also worn by those Marxists
who in their negative arguments critique liberalism and capitalism, and in their positive arguments seek to justify alternative policies and goals. As MacIntyre concludes, “We therefore cannot escape asking the question: what is morality? and what is its power in the world?... [I]f we are to criticize effectively the uncontrolled, destructive progress of advanced societies in the name of an alternative vision of human liberation— if, that is, we are to create a genuinely post-Marxist ideology of liberation, then we have to avoid the snares which Marxism did not, for all its great achievement, avoid” (MacIntyre 1971e, p. 93). One significant part of these snares was the failure to address the question “of the nature of morality and the conditions under which morality can have power in the world” (ibid., p. 93).

It is evident that MacIntyre’s earlier attempt to develop a Marxist morality, an answer to the inadequacies of liberal morality, is undermined by his later arguments. The philosophical afflictions of modern, liberal morality are now seen to plague Marxism. The hope that class-based organizations can develop within them the resources for overcoming the moral lacunae and irrationalities of liberalism and Stalinism has been abandoned. MacIntyre no longer believed that “the only way to overcome the corruption of our culture is through the achievement of working class power” (cited in Knight 1998, p. 2). Why? MacIntyre’s answer in his landmark work, After Virtue, is that “secreted within Marxism from the outset is a certain radical individualism” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 261). MacIntyre points out that Marx fails to tell us upon what basis

10 The most recent attempt to address this problem from a Marxist perspective argues for a “dialogue” between Marxism and Rawlsian liberal theory (Callinicos 2006). Alex Callinicos appears to adopt a Kantian moral perspective. He writes, “a theoretically consequent Marxist critique of capitalism requires...ethical principles in terms of which capitalism is condemned as unjust. How else can it succeed as critique?” (Callinicos 2006, p. 220). Callinicos wants to explore how to construct “a new proletarian collectivity, a new revolutionary subject” that can “confront and break the power of existing states and...create forms of popular power that can govern the world and its resources according to radically different priorities” (ibid., p. 256).
individuals are to enter into the free, common association that is the post-capitalist Marxist vision: “At this key point in Marxism there is a lacuna which no later Marxist has adequately supplied. It is unsurprising that abstract moral principle and utility have in fact been the principles of association which Marxists have appealed to, and that in their practice Marxists have exemplified precisely the kind of moral attitude which they condemn in others as ideological” (ibid., p. 261). MacIntyre also argued that Marxists in power tended to become Weberian in their separating of means from ends and facts from values (ibid. p. 109). In a recent reply to a Marxist critique of his project MacIntyre responds that “The most important thought that Marxist theorists have been unable to entertain is that the rational self-determination of workers, peasants, and others might not lead to socialism and that ‘the road to socialism’ (itself an unfortunate metaphor) leads neither to rational self-determination nor indeed to socialism. This inability is not unrelated to a conceptual failure, the failure to understand adequately what rational self-determination involves” (MacIntyre 2008, p. 271).

This critique is related to MacIntyre’s earlier realization that Marxism and liberalism tended towards the ideology of bureaucratic authority that he saw as following from the rejection of teleological modes of thought and practice. Marxist theorists and the “neutral” social scientists the former criticized both ultimately relied upon an elitist philosophical dichotomy that radically separated themselves from the subjects of their enquiries, converting these into the objects of revolutionary activity or policy. They both claimed to be somehow above the infected realm of ideology in which “ordinary agents” were epistemologically limited, but were themselves adhering to the “ideology of expertise”, which “embodies a claim to privilege with respect to power”
This is what leads MacIntyre to reject modern ideologies of the left and the right in favour of a commitment to virtue. For MacIntyre, it is morality properly understood in terms of the tradition of the virtues and reconstituted in contemporary forms that can provide a coherent, rationally supportable basis for radical social transformation.

Despite MacIntyre’s ongoing respect for Marxism, his conclusion is that “Marxism’s moral defects and failures arise from the extent to which it, like liberal individualism, embodies the ethos of the distinctly modern and modernizing world, and that nothing less than a rejection of a large part of that ethos will provide us with a rationally and morally defensible standpoint from which to judge and to act- and in terms of which to evaluate various rival and heterogeneous moral schemes which compete for our allegiance” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. x). In the original essay that provoked the critique to which MacIntyre responds above, MacIntyre writes that Marx “failed to understand that while proletarianization makes it necessary for workers to resist, it also tends to deprive workers of those forms of practice through which they can discover conceptions of a good and of virtues adequate to the moral needs of resistance” (MacIntyre 1998b, p. 232). MacIntyre points out that if the moral impoverishment of capitalism is what so many Marxists say it is, then we are led to the question of where the moral resources for transforming society are to come from.

The working-class is no longer seen as the agency and political subject to push for an emancipated and non-alienating social order because it is inevitably constrained by the dominant capitalist modes of thought and practice, which induce workers to conceptualize workplace struggles and conflicts within the terms of instrumental rationality in which means are
divorced from ends (see MacIntyre 1998a). The moral-political consciousness of the worker therefore remains alienated and divided. MacIntyre argued that faced with the moral impoverishment of capitalism and the problems this brought for envisaging and engendering the kind of revolutionary agency required to transform it, Marxists reverted to constructing their own “Nietzschean fantasies” in “versions of the Übermenschen” that could overcome the problems of moral motivation and justification: “Lukács’s ideal proletarian” and “Leninism’s ideal revolutionary” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 262). As Paul Blackledge points out, whereas Marx located the proletariat as potentially the universal class in the modern world, “MacIntyre’s defence of local communities is rooted...in a more ‘pessimistic’, and he would argue more realistic, assessment of the socialist potential of the working class” (Blackledge 2009, p. 871). MacIntyre thus avoids the idealization of the moral capacities and virtues of the working and peasant classes, which leads him also to avoid the temptation to make “false absolutist claims” (MacIntyre 2002, p. 261) about the subjectivity and agency of the oppressed classes.

This all leads to MacIntyre’s assertion at the end of After Virtue that “Marxism is exhausted as a political tradition, a claim borne out by the almost indefinitely numerous and conflicting range of political allegiances which now carry Marxist banners,” which is something “shared by every other political tradition within our culture” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 262). Thus what lies behind the moral impoverishment of liberalism has also contaminated Marxism amongst every modern form of politics. In After Virtue MacIntyre barely hints at the kind of politics required, but has gone on to call for a “politics of self-defense” for local “participatory practice-based communit[ies]” (2006d, p. 155).
Morality and social science

MacIntyre came to recognize that “the competing moral idioms in which contemporary ideological claims...are made...were the result of a fragmentation of practical and evaluative discourse” (MacIntyre 2006d, p. 156). This helped him to understand “what had to be rejected in the moral, social, and economic theory and practice of liberalism and individualism” (ibid) and would lead him to his radical critique of the dominant modes of social science. He would also come to see that Marxism as a social scientific theoretical framework with “its claims to understand the iron laws of history were but masks for another incommensurable moral framework” (Blackledge 2009, p. 872).

MacIntyre argues that the social sciences conceive the social world in such a way that conflict and contestability are concealed (MacIntyre 1998a, p. 60). Their methodology purports to provide an objective set of analytic tools for social analysis and policy prescription that remove all reference to values and beliefs. Only by doing this, it is held, can social data be made sufficiently uniform for statistical analysis, comparison and the construction of genuine law-like generalizations akin to the mode of enquiry of the natural sciences. Yet, as MacIntyre points out, the very act of analysing the social world into independent “variables” already presupposes one particular conceptualization of the social world. As MacIntyre puts it, “the conceptualization of the subject matter studied is a task for the social scientist in which what governs his conceptualization is not a relationship to the rival conceptualizations of the society which is being studied, but his own convenience” (MacIntyre 1998a, p. 63). Further, social relations and institutions are partially defined and sustained by the intentions, values and beliefs of those whom they serve and with whom
they interact (MacIntyre 1971b). However, social and political enquiry is generally committed to the view that analyses and explanations are value-free. It is this that is held to provide such enquiries with authority because they have extricated themselves from the contaminated world of partial beliefs and ideologies. Yet the insistence on excising all value judgements and evaluative references from social and political inquiry and explanation actually “involves the most extreme of value commitments” (MacIntyre 1971b, p. 278) because it means we cannot use clauses such as “because it was unjust” or “because it was illegitimate” in explaining certain social and political outcomes. Instead, explanation will make reference to hitherto hidden, impersonal social laws, processes and structures that the social scientist has been able to perceive and understand in a way that ordinary agents cannot. The social scientist therefore claims insight into the genuine causes of individual and social action, not accepting agents’ own accounts of the reasons for their actions.

In effect, sociological analysis and explanation ignores the putative moral dimensions of the social world and disregards agents’ claims that behind their actions are moral reasons and motives. As Andrew Sayer points out,

In much of recent social theory, action is assumed to be either merely interest-driven, or habitual, or a product of wider discourses and institutions. Often it adopts a sociologically-reductionist account of actors’ motives and actions, in effect, saying ‘they would say/do that, wouldn’t they, given their social position’, which is in contradiction with the first person accounts which actors (including social scientists) offer for their own behaviour, which involve justification rather than sociological explanation. (Sayer 2003, p. 1)
This is related to what MacIntyre noted in *After Virtue* when he pointed out that with the rejection of Aristotelianism the explanation of action was increasingly held to be a matter of laying bare the physiological and physical mechanisms behind it. With such a philosophical view of action the next step was the excision of all normative accounts of an agent’s action (facts became radically divorced from values) and, subsequently, the emergence of the notion that the social world and with it social agents could be manipulated according to the canons of neutral scientific knowledge by the relevant experts. Yet the social scientist who provides this manipulative knowledge to governments or corporations does not view his or her own behaviour as itself explicable by reference to mere physical, physiological or socio-structural mechanisms: “For the behavior of the manipulated is being contrived in accordance with his intentions, reasons and purposes; intentions, reasons and purposes which he is treating, at least while he is engaged in such manipulation, as exempt from the laws which govern the behavior of the manipulated” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 84).

Of course, this does not mean that social scientists must necessarily take at face value people’s self-reported accounts of their actions and behaviour. What it does mean is that explanation must initially take such accounts seriously and then if a discrepancy between stated beliefs and action arises, an independent explanation will be required. Yet such an “independent” explanation will have to depart from the structure of rationality within the particular social order and phenomenon under scrutiny. The imputation of irrationality to such discrepancies is not made in relation to some external rational standpoint but in terms of the implicit or explicit rationality of that social order (MacIntyre 1971c, p. 256). What this ultimately means is that the concept
of rationality is not something free-floating and neutral in respect of social analyses and inquiries, but is an “inescapable sociological category” (ibid., p. 258). This kind of social science would have to recognize that beliefs can be a genuine cause of certain social and political outcomes. In the case of political science (which in Colombia is of particular prominence in terms of analyses and prescriptions in relation to the conflict) it “would become in a true sense a moral science” (MacIntyre 1971b, p. 277), taking seriously the possibility of ascriptions of illegitimacy or injustice (or their converse) to institutions or policies as possible causes for their failure or success.

The claims of After Virtue

From MacIntyre’s standpoint there is a relation between our loss of comprehension of morality and the dominant, manipulative mode of politics in modern societies. After Virtue narrates the philosophical history of this problem. The central claim of After Virtue is that the contemporary moral-political debates of modern societies are peculiarly unsetttable ultimately because of the rejection of the Aristotelian tradition of ethics and politics at the threshold of the modern world. The rejection of Aristotelianism led to the Enlightenment attempt to elaborate rational moral principles that could be assented to by all individuals qua rational individuals. MacIntyre argues that this project failed and had to fail. In order to restore intelligibility and rationality to morality, to our moral stances and moral arguments, we need to revive the Aristotelian theory and practice of ethics and politics in contemporary forms. If morality is to have power in the world, then we need to understand the necessary conditions for its rational expression and embodiment.
MacIntyre observes that “The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance is that so much of it is used to express disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which those disagreements are expressed is their interminable character...there seems to be no rational way of securing agreement in our culture” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 6). This is because of the historical fragmentation of moral discourses and schemas caused by the disappearance of previously more integrated forms of social and political life, and the deep social dislocations brought about by the rise of capitalist markets, the modern nation state, and the subsequent philosophical theorising of the Enlightenment. Where once moral argument presupposed a large measure of agreement on first premises based on some generally shared substantive and teleological conception of the human good, the form of moral argument in the Enlightenment in its various theoretical guises presupposed the opposite. Substantive conceptions of the good were now ruled out of the framework of moral argument.

However, the older moral frameworks still haunted the Enlightenment mode, which led to a discrepancy between the accepted conventional moral norms of the day and the forms of moral argument used to justify and support them. For there was no longer any connecting route between “is” and “ought” based on a wider substantive conception of the human good and human nature. Despite the air of rational authority bestowed upon moral reasoning and theory by its distinguished philosophical proponents, MacIntyre argues that the Enlightenment project of discovering a set of rational principles capable of authoritatively persuading and guiding all rational individuals could only fail, splintering as it did into a range of different theories based on rights, utility, virtues, and passions, each of which were based on incommensurable
first principles or premises. The Enlightenment philosophers “inherited incoherent fragments of a once coherent scheme of thought and action and, since they did not recognize their own peculiar historical and cultural situation, they could not recognize the impossible and quixotic character of their self-appointed task” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 55). Moral argument thus lost the ability to engender rational agreement across society. What the Enlightenment project also did was “release into the culture at large a set of moral concepts which derive from their philosophical ancestry an appearance of rational determinateness and justification which they do not in fact possess” (MacIntyre 1984, p. 4).

Public debate therefore becomes a struggle for power, not a search for truth. This is what leads MacIntyre to characterise contemporary moral argument as “emotivist”. Whereas philosophers like C. L. Stevenson argued that moral argument is essentially a means for emotionally persuading people to adopt one’s own moral preferences, MacIntyre denies this but accepts it as a more than apposite characterization of what moral argument has become in modern society. He points out that “in saying this I am not merely contending that morality is not what it once was, but also and more importantly that what once was morality has to some large degree disappeared- and this marks a degeneration, a grave cultural loss” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 22).

For MacIntyre, it is the displacement of the classic teleological moral scheme that is at the heart of this problem. The structure of moral reasoning within the classical tradition is centred upon factual premises that lead eventually to evaluative conclusions. According to MacIntyre, the ethical life in the classical period is characterised not by rules but by virtues. Virtues were dispositions that enabled people to participate in practices and move towards
certain goods. These goods were intimately related to a wider conception of the “good life” that informed social life and imbued its various structures and roles with meaning and purpose. Evaluations were of the form “X has not been courageous”, or “that behaviour is not good”, where “good” is understandable only by reference to a presupposed order that includes the explicit or implicit narrative-like understandings of how people should live and behave in relation to this wider purpose or “good for man.” In this moral and social scheme there is a conception of the proper and most fulfilling end for a human life, on the one hand, and a conception of human nature as it actually is, on the other. Ethics was the discipline through which one could learn how to pass from humankind-as-it-is to humankind-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its- telos or proper end (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 53). MacIntyre observes,

The acceptance of this kind of social life as the norm by which actions are judged is not something asserted within the moral system. It is the presupposition of there being moral judgments at all...But that breakup of the traditional forms of social life which was produced by the rise of individualism, begotten partly by Protestantism and capitalism, made the reality of social life so divergent from the norms implied in the traditional vocabulary that all the links between duty and happiness were gradually broken. The consequence was a redefinition of the moral terms. (MacIntyre 2002, p. 161)

The very nature of moral judgment in the modern era is thus transformed with the rejection of teleology (and the concomitant rejection of teleological philosophical accounts of human action and the transition to mechanistic theories of action.) To call something good in the classical era is to
presuppose that it has a particular function and purpose and therefore is to make a factual statement. And this holds of human beings as much as objects. Thus, to call a particular action just or right is to say that it is what a good human being would do in such a situation, and it is equally a factual statement. With the eschewal of any teleological conception of the good for man this kind of moral judgment is no longer possible and the modern situation of interminable moral argument appears. What we currently possess are the “fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have- very largely, if not entirely- lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 2).

As MacIntyre points out, in the present day we retain the habit of speaking of moral judgments as true or false but we have lost the essential notion of what it is in virtue of which something is so judged. This is not only the case at the level of day-to-day morality but also on the level of moral philosophy itself. Indeed, the problem of day-to-day morality and moral discourse is inextricably connected to the problems in the realm of moral theory. It is in the choosing of first principles or premises that there enters an inescapable element of incommensurability between rival theories. Each proponent reasons in a logical and more or less sophisticated way from his or her first premises to their respective conclusions, but “the rival premises are such that we possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one against another. For each premise employs some quite different normative or evaluative concept from the others, so that the claims made upon us are of quite different kinds” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 8). John Rawls (1973) and Robert
Nozick (1974), for example, agree that justice is an important facet of any society but begin their arguments for assent to their particular theories of justice from completely different, incommensurable premises; Nozick from premises assuming the importance of individual rights and entitlements and the limiting of redistributive justice, and Rawls from premises assuming the importance of equality and the limiting of acquisitions:

It is precisely because there is in our society no established way of deciding between these claims that moral argument appears to be necessarily interminable. From our rival conclusions we can argue back to our rival premises; but when we do arrive at our premises argument ceases and the invocation of one premise against another becomes a matter of pure assertion and counter-assertion. (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 8)

Moral arguments in our culture nevertheless have the characteristic of appealing to *impersonal* and *independent* criteria that are more than the expressions of personal, subjective preference. Behind the surface arbitrariness and interminability of modern moral discourse there still beats a pulse of rationality, which suggests that the use of moral argument in our culture “expresses at least an aspiration to be or to become rational in this area of our lives” (ibid., p. 9). However, with what MacIntyre sees as the failure of the Enlightenment project, modern morality finds itself in a quandary in which rational suasion is replaced by manipulation. The modern autonomous moral agent who now finds herself freed from the perceived constraints of teleology, tradition and authority actually has a very unstable and confusing kind of freedom and autonomy:
Contemporary moral experience as a consequence has a paradoxical character. For each of us is taught to see himself or herself as an autonomous moral agent; but each also becomes engaged by modes of practice, aesthetic or bureaucratic, which involve us in manipulative relationships with others. Seeking to protect the autonomy that we have learned to prize, we aspire ourselves not to be manipulated by others; seeking to incarnate our own principles and standpoint in the world of practice, we find no way open to us to do so except by directing towards others those very manipulative modes of relationship which each of us aspires to resist in our own case. The incoherence of our attitudes and our experiences arises from the incoherent conceptual scheme which we have inherited. (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 68)

With the loss of the teleological framework for understanding human action, politics was also transformed. Whereas in the Aristotelian scheme ethics was integral to politics, in the modern scheme the rejection of Aristotelianism tout court due to its clear metaphysical and scientific inadequacies led to the, for MacIntyre, grave error of radically divorcing ethics from politics. MacIntyre traces this partly to the emergence of capitalist social relations and the theology of the Reformation in which the newly constructed individual confronts the “self-justifying rules of the political and economic order” (MacIntyre 2002, p. 120). The state becomes distinct from society with its own set of norms and justifications, and the market becomes an autonomous economic sphere also with its own norms and regulations. The individual moral agent is now theoretically stripped of social particularity. “A man is related to the state not via a web of social relations binding superiors and inferiors in all sorts of ways, but just as subject. A man is related to the economic order not
via a well-defined status in a set of linked associations and guilds, but just as one who has the legal power to make contracts” (ibid., p. 120). As a result of this the individual now finds there are no, or more correctly too many, criteria for deciding what one ought to do, how one ought to act in this new social, political and economic scenario. Everything now depends on individual choice.

The Lutheran theology of the time also sees the individual as fundamentally corrupted, with anarchic wants and needs that cannot provide the basis for moral decision-making. Hobbes will come to provide a secular counterpart to this theology in which the prerogatives of political and economic power cannot be rationally called into question because there are no longer any shared criteria and assumptions as there were under pre-capitalist social and economic relations. The doctrine of the social contract formalises this view of human nature and the nature and purpose of political and economic institutions. It is the precursor to the modern liberal conception of politics as fundamentally divorced from any wider conception of the good. Modern politics has become radically separated from practical reason. Whereas “In Aristotelian ethics, as in the less explicitly formulated moralities of traditional societies, human needs and wants, understood in various ways, provide the criteria for judging human actions” (ibid., p. 122), under Protestant theology and Hobbesian philosophy these cannot provide such criteria because wants and needs are deemed to be fundamentally corrupt. Yet in some sense these individual wants and needs do provide the criteria but it is just that that there is no longer any integrated conception of human needs and wants within some overall account of the human good that sets limits to and orders these needs and wants. These cannot provide rationally justifiable criteria.
The fiction of the self-regulating market in the interests of “society” in which unconstrained private consumption can paradoxically provide public benefits is the political economic counterpart to this philosophy of human nature and the divorce between ethics and politics (cf. Mandeville 1989). The individual now has “interests” that are philosophically separate from the interests of society. The political economists attempt to make these converge but they speak in the name of a stratum of society that attempts to pass off a social order that benefits a minority of elites as one that benefits all. It is first Marx and then Nietzsche who see through this. For Marx, bourgeois moralizing merely masks the ideological interests of the dominant classes; conflict cannot hope to be settled through appeal to morality, to justice, for each class has radically different conceptions of the requirements of morality in respect of justice. Nevertheless, Marx’s political and economic vision implied a strong moral dimension (see Dussel 1981, p. 55), although as we have seen it suffered from the same philosophical problems of all modern moral thinking. For Nietzsche, such moralizing masks the resentment and rancour of the suppressed will to power. Individual will has to assert itself and devise its own entirely “new tables of what is good” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 114). However, MacIntyre argues that the political implications of both Marx’s and Nietzsche’s thought lead to “irrationalisms of the Left as well as of the Right” (ibid., p. 114), which results from the breakdown of the teleological moral-political framework.
Political implications

As the Enlightenment moral theories and concepts were also used to frame and inform political arguments, discourses and ideologies modern politics has also become an arena of essentially interminable conflict:

\[\text{[R]ational consensus upon central moral questions and a fortiori on central political questions has proved impossible within the framework provided by the dominant conception of rationality in modern cultures and...therefore in the arena of rational discussion there is radical dissensus. (MacIntyre 1985b, p. 238)}\]

Political debates framed on the one hand in terms of some form of individualism that appeals to individual rights, and on the other hand in terms of some form of collectivism that appeals to the concept of utility cannot find some rational point of mediation when these at some point inevitably clash. As MacIntyre points out, the common idiom of weighing up such considerations obscures a salient fact: there are no scales (MacIntyre 2006e, p. 212). Further, “if the concept of rights and that of utility are a matching pair of incommensurable fictions, it will be the case that the moral idiom employed can at best provide a semblance of rationality for the modern political process, but not its reality. The mock rationality of the debate conceals the arbitrariness of the will and power at work in its resolution” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 71). Yet the Weberian arena of modern politics conceals this and the depth of our conflicts by furnishing them with a pluralist rhetoric and a discourse of consensus (see MacIntyre 1999). However, for MacIntyre, “Modern politics cannot be a matter
of genuine moral consensus. And it is not. Modern politics is civil war carried on by other means” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 253).

Given that modern politics in most Western societies is carried out without violent conflict, it might be suggested that at least the Enlightenment has bequeathed to us a political system the implementation of which could play a significant role in resolving conflicts and, more importantly, avoid the use of violence in their resolution. Civil war by other means is arguably precisely what is required in certain contexts of overt civil war such as Colombia. As I shall demonstrate, the concern to bring an end to decades of civil war in Colombia has led philosophers and political analysts to turn to variants of liberal moral and political theory as the basis for peaceful political coexistence. However, if the conflict itself is based on deeper underlying conflicts that are also manifest in the “advanced” societies of the West and which are leading to increasing social, political and economic crises in those countries, conflicts which are partly the result of the modern state-building process and its philosophizing, then the answer lies elsewhere.

The agreement to disagree characteristic of modern political orders is in reality the outcome of a process of forced settlements that have been retrospectively rationalised as the outcome of a rational debate. As MacIntyre points out, the history of the modern state and its political modality is a contingent history of arbitrary power, not rational suasion. Therefore, if the roots of conflict and their discursive manifestations lie partly in the inability to rationally move others towards one's own or group's position, then the imposition or even relatively consensual implementation of such a political framework as the modern liberal state and a modern liberal constitution does not entail that a rational as opposed to a coercive consensus has been
established. Further, the requirement that the state forcibly assume the monopoly of violence with which to implement the liberal state goes hand in hand with a particular conception of society and the good that from many standpoints is morally unacceptable. It might be argued that if such an outcome were achieved it would at least be a better state of affairs, but this too relies on a moral argument and form of evaluation that is itself in need of rational justification.

MacIntyre’s concern is not to bring about some homogenous social order in which conflict does not or cannot arise, but to restore rationality to our moral and political enquiries and disagreements such that what conflicts we do have can be approached in a more fruitful way and in which “shifting coalitions of interest and power” (MacIntyre 1998c, p. 245) are not the arbiter of such disagreements. For MacIntyre, conflict lies at the heart of modern social structure and modern political disagreement has no hope of reaching a rational terminus. Contrary to the advocates of liberalism as the political system through which conflict can be rationally resolved, or at least managed in a way that is rationally binding upon and acceptable to all rational individuals, MacIntyre argues that liberalism is itself a contestable social, political and intellectual tradition of moral-political enquiry which presupposes a particular account of human society and the human good such that it cannot lay claim to being a neutral system for the rational resolution of conflict.11 The veneer of consensus in liberal social and political orders is skin deep, but the illusion of deeper consensus enables them to appear to address radical disagreement in

a rational way when in reality genuine conflict is suppressed (MacIntyre 1988, pp. 2-3).

The incoherent and emotivist characteristics of modern morality and politics also impact on the phenomenon of social protest and, therefore, on arguments for social change. The fragmented morality of modern social orders ensures that such protest and the various resistances and movements for change it engenders inevitably lack a rational moral dimension. Protest can be effective, just not rationally so (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 71). This explains why radical movements for social change often become manipulative, self-righteous and increasingly prone to preaching to the converted or imposing their positions on others.

The emotivist character of such protest and its political dimension is evident in some recent radical political theory that advocates a “politics of prescription” (Hallward 2005). This posits a given “axiom” such as equality and attempts to instantiate it in the world irrespective of the mediations of community and power. According to Alan Badiou, “The political subject acts or resists as a matter of course, and not thanks to a reasoned affiliation with a particular group, class, or opinion. He resists, not as a result of communication or consensus, but all at once, to the exclusion of any ‘third way’” (cited in Hallward 2000, p.1). Badiou states that this political act of black and white, either-or choice does not pit two political antagonists against each other in a zero-sum struggle, for there is only one political actor, “the we that comes out or demonstrates in the real of fraternity” (cited in Hallward 2000, p. 2). Yet this fraternity seems to be of such an abstract kind that it is difficult to see how such a “we” can emerge on the basis of political thought and action that is utterly divorced from social, historical context. As Badiou writes,
We have too often wanted justice to establish the consistency of social bonds, whereas it can only name the most extreme moments of inconsistency. For the effect of the egalitarian axiom is to undo the bonds, to desocialise thought, to affirm the rights of the infinite and the immortal against the calculation of interests. Justice is a wager on the immortal over finitude, against ‘being-for-death’. For in the subjective dimension of the equality we declare, nothing now is of any interest other than the universality of this declaration, and the active consequences which follow from it. (Cited in ibid., p. 3)

From a MacIntyrean perspective this is emotivism *par excellence*. Pure abstract thought disengaged from any account of human desire, of need, of community. Moreover, there appears to be no room for working out the particular social, economic and political interpretation of the “egalitarian axiom”; it appears to be simply assumed as already-interpreted and validly implementable.

Peter Hallward calls for a “reformulation of a prescriptive practice of politics. A prescription involves the direct and divisive application of a universal principle (or axiom). For instance: if we uphold the axiom of equality, we can prescribe the rejection of slavery, and with it the organization of a force capable of transforming the relations that sustain the plantation economy. If we uphold the axiom of the worker, we can prescribe the restriction of corporate power, that is, the organization of forces capable of reversing the subordination of politics to profit. If we uphold the axiom of territorial integrity, we can prescribe a relation of resistance to foreign aggression, and with it the mobilization of a force capable of repelling invasion” (Hallward 2005, p. 771).
Hallward does not tell us who the “we” is that is to make the prescriptions and organize the necessary actions, although he tells us that a prescriptive politics sidesteps the “authorized mediation of public inquiries, sociological studies, or NGOs” (ibid., p. 771). For Hallward, a “Prescription is divisive because its application divides adherents from opponents, but universal insofar as its assertion depends on a properly axiomatic principle” (Hallward 2005, p. 771). Hallward states that such principles come from Kant and clearly demonstrates the emotivist nature of the politics he is advocating: “the politics of prescription retains an indifference to difference, interest, consensus, adaptation, or welfare” (ibid., p. 771). Hallward then adds that, against Kant, such prescription is relational and thereby apparently overcomes the limitations of Kant’s call to abstract duty. Thus for all Hallward and Badiou critique Habermas and like approaches their own approach appears extremely similar. The normative, prescriptive principles to guide political action are divorced from any material content or mediation and are understood to be formulated in relation to abstract, presuppositionless others. Hallward also states:

A political subject prescribes its own boundaries. The prescriptive subject exists in its militant and emergent interface with the world rather than in any specified psychological (let alone cultural or biological) location. Prescriptive autonomy, in other words, necessarily presumes some kind of qualitative leap in the constitution of the subject, a leap adequate to enable its relative freedom from causal or presubjective determination. (Hallward 2005, p. 781)

This is starkly emotivist and is highly resonant of the arbitrariness and philosophical incoherence that MacIntyre diagnosed of ex-Stalinist critics of
Stalinism. According to Hallward, a prescriptive political practice “undertakes the concrete transformation of those relations that sustain inequality, exploitation, or oppression” (ibid., p. 772). Yet presumably such transformation can only proceed through imposition, not argument or rational persuasion. Those who adhere to the axiom and prescription are presumably convinced of the validity of their right to engage in the required transformation. Those who do not adhere to it presumably need to be coerced. The point of appealing to abstract “universal” principles is, I take it, that they provide some kind of ultimately moral backing for the prescription inasmuch as they are perceived to have an impersonal authority, despite Hallward’s assertion that “Upheld as a strategic imperative, a prescription says shall rather than ought. Prescription is not a matter of abstract moral reflection, of aspecific obligation, of ‘objective’ rights and wrongs: it is a matter, under the constraints of a given situation, of practical consequence and material invention, of relational struggle, of mobilization and countermobilization” (ibid., p. 783). But such practical consequence, material invention and social mobilization must either implicitly proceed in light of some normative framework that enables consequences to be assessed and judged and material inventions and mobilizations to be evaluated, or it amounts to no more than an assertion of arbitrary choice and power. In the Colombian context in which the conflict has, so I argue, followed a sectarian, emotivist dynamic of self-certainty and moral-political imposition, such a politics of prescription is problematic.

As we have seen, MacIntyre’s powerful diagnosis of the arbitrariness of appeal to abstract moral principle calls into question the rational justification of the kind of appeal to universal principles that Hallward and Badiou make. The authority of an alleged universal principle that is ultimately chosen, prescribed
by individuals through isolated (or in neo-Kantian form, relational) introspection is a simulacrum of genuine authority. In the politics of prescription the moral and motivational basis of social transformation is simply urged upon workers and the oppressed: “As Badiou reminds us...the ‘anticipatory certitude’ that alone can guide any extraordinary ‘process of becoming’ itself depends on the courage and confidence that a decisive intervention, in the element of present uncertainty, demands of its subject” (Hallward 2005, p. 776). This is indeed the kind of “Marxism of the will” that MacIntyre argues is ultimately arbitrary, incoherent and inadequate. As we shall see below, the notion of a prescriptive practice of politics is therefore quite at odds with MacIntyre’s notion of politics as a practice in which shared evaluative criteria are discovered that can provide the moral basis for wider social critique and transformation.

The concept of a practice

The concept of a practice is central to MacIntyre’s moral-political theory. Practices are the key concept and structure through which moral and evaluative criteria regain rational justification and authority while avoiding the problem caused by a determinist understanding of structure and agency as in Stalinist ethics. Further, as MacIntyre points out, “In the ancient and medieval worlds the creation and sustaining of human communities- of households, cities, nations- is generally taken to be a practice” (MacIntyre 1985a, pp. 187-188). This is what (in part) establishes the connection between ethics and politics; for MacIntyre, practices are what necessarily make up morally rational communities and societies, but the ordering of these practices is the specific task of the politics of such communities and societies. Politics is a master
practice that involves systematic deliberation about how best to order the variety of individual and common goods available to people in the interest of an overarching conception of the community’s common good.

By the term “practice” MacIntyre means “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 187). So farming is a practice, as is architecture, the life of a fishing crew, etc. The goods internal to practices are sought independently from contingent, external goods such as money and power that might happen to also be attained through participation in practices. It is through participation in such practices that we come to discover the peculiar, impersonal authority of evaluative standards that are independent of our own desires and interests (ibid., p. 190; MacIntyre 1982, p. 301). However, because this impersonality is located within social practices it is necessarily connected to desires and interests in the sense that it is only within shared practices we care about that such impersonal moral authority becomes rational, which stands in complete contrast to the Kantian notion that individuals must obey the abstract impersonal demands of the categorical imperative irrespective of their social relationships and inclinations.

Through his social theory of practices MacIntyre reconnects facts and values; evaluative criteria are discovered to be independent of our choices and we thereby also make factual statements in judging practitioners in relation to their performance in social practices. MacIntyre has since emended a
biological basis to his scheme where now human nature also provides part of a standard for moral and political evaluation (MacIntyre 2001), although a standard that is historically conditioned within social practices with internal goods and standards of achievement and evaluation. This synthesis enables MacIntyre to avoid the problems associated with “ethical” evaluations and prescriptions centring on “development” and indicators of “human well-being”, which are held to be “apolitical” or implicitly or explicitly assume liberalism and capitalism as their modes of embodiment (e.g. Kliksberg 2005).

Because practices have a history their standards are not immune from criticism, but in order to learn the standards for adequate, rational criticism one must first accept the received, authoritative standards. These standards embodied within practices operate “in such a way as to rule out all subjective and emotivist analyses of judgment” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 190). A key distinction is between internal and external goods:

It is a characteristic of what I have called external goods that when achieved they are always some individual’s property and possession. Moreover characteristically they are such that the more that someone has of them, the less there is for other people...External goods are therefore characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners. Internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice. (Ibid., pp. 190-191)

In light of this understanding of practices and internal and external goods MacIntyre defines a virtue as “an acquired human quality the possession and
exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods” (ibid., p. 191). Practices require a certain kind of relationship between participants, and the virtues define our relationships to people with whom we share the purposes and standards that inform practices. Thus the individual exercises moral agency through a discovery of shared moral criteria and motivations in necessary practical relationships with others.

As MacIntyre points out, practices require institutional embodiment if they are to obtain the resources required to further them (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 194). This relationship therefore generates an inherent tension between practices and institutions, and requires the constant exercise of the virtues if practices are not to be deformed by the bureaucratic normativity of their institutional framework. Because institutions have corrupting power, “the making and sustaining of forms of human community- and therefore of institutions- itself has all the characteristics of a practice, and moreover of a practice which stands in a peculiarly close relationship to the exercise of the virtues” (ibid., p. 194).

The politics of local community and the common good

Political agency is also exercised by individuals as they inevitably have to come together to order the various practices. Because individuals through practices have (re)discovered that their individual goods are necessarily constitutive of and constituted by shared goods held in common with others, the goods of practices, the kind of politics required (and presupposed) is a politics of the common good to which the different practices are ultimately
subordinate. This is a conception of the common good that is much stronger than the individualist and minimalist conception of the common good that is often appealed to by liberal political orders to justify allegiance to them (MacIntyre 1998c, pp. 239-240). MacIntyre argues that the minimalist conception of the common good fails to provide the necessary political justification for liberal polities because it amounts to no more than an aggregation of individual interests. Thus if an individual’s particular good is not furthered by allegiance to this aggregated conception of the common good, then that individual lacks any rational reason for continuing to give resources towards and allegiance to that common good. Therefore, political justifications that rely on such a concept of the common good break down and with it run the risk eventually of socially and ethically unravelling (MacIntyre 1998c, p. 242). Political justification and allegiance, and by implication social and moral cohesion, require a stronger connection between the goods of individuals and the common good. However, for MacIntyre

We must not picture this connection between individual goods and the common good as something that might exist apart from and independently of the rational activity of the members of that society in enquiring and arguing about the nature of their goods. For it is a connection constituted by practically rational activity. Practical rationality is a property of individuals-in-their-social-relationships rather than of individuals-as-such. To be practically rational I must learn what my good is in different types of situation and I can only achieve that through interaction with others in which I learn from those others and they from me. Our primary shared and common good is found in that activity of communal learning through which we together become able to order
goods, both in our individual lives and in the political society. (MacIntyre 1998c, pp. 242-243)

The kind of deliberative politics of the common good that MacIntyre calls for will necessarily have to be undertaken in small-scale local communities where people can call each other to account in respect of their deliberative standards. As Mark Murphy points out, this is not based on some love of the local as such: “It is simply a brute truth that the conditions under which common deliberation can take place require a small community. The very size of the typical modern state precludes state politics from being a matter of common deliberation” (Murphy 2003, p. 165; see also MacIntyre 2001, p. 142). Such a politics will have to depart from some set of shared agreements, practices and cultures and “will have to avoid those destructive conflicts of interest that arise from too great inequalities of wealth and power” (MacIntyre 2006f, p. 39). Furthermore, the rational resolution of agreement requires some measure of prior agreement.

Yet this might sound like MacIntyre is begging the question and, moreover, might appear to make such a politics irrelevant to societies like Colombia where destructive conflicts of interest have long since permeated society and led to the moral crisis of coexistence (Gómez-Müller 2008; Torres 1964). However, as Kelvin Knight points out, “MacIntyre has always held that conflict rather than community must be the starting point for any Aristotelian politics within capitalism” (Knight 1998, p. 21). What MacIntyre is outlining are the basic presuppositions of the kind of politics required to begin to move forward towards a more rational, coherent and socially viable form of ethical-political contestation and coexistence. MacIntyre says we need to look within
our own societies and communities for the kinds of already-existing practices and milieus within which we can build a more complex and integrated politics of the common good. On this basis we can hopefully begin to ameliorate what social fracturing and deformation might have already occurred in the community and wider society. For example, the required kinds of practical rationality “are exemplified to significant extent in the forms of various local enterprises: households, fishing crews, farming cooperatives, schools, clinics, neighborhoods, small towns” (MacIntyre 2006f, p. 39). This resonates with Raúl López’s call for an ethics of encounter in Colombia in which we look not to abstract ideals, models or theories for an ethical response to the crisis but to the often implicit codes of interaction that can be found in local neighbourhoods and forms of community life (López 2005). It also resonates with Sergio De Zubiría’s point that any ethics adequate to the Colombian crisis will need to be closely linked to local cultures (De Zubiría 1998).

MacIntyre also points out that the presupposed shared standards of rational justification in the kinds of political communities he calls for will be independent of the de facto interests and preferences of their members. These standards will define the community’s common good “and the fundamental bond between their members will be allegiance to that common good. This means that the self-understanding of members of such communities has to be incompatible with substituting for that fundamental bond any notion of civic unity as arising either from some shared ethnic or religious or other cultural inheritance- important as these may be- or from the shared interests and preferences of its members” (MacIntyre 2006f, p. 39). In the Colombian context such a political understanding will inevitably challenge political
identities linked to the sectarianism of the traditional political parties and the deep-rooted phenomenon of clientelist political relations.

Authentic moral and political agency are elicited by and exhibited in participation in communal practices- and deliberation about these and their interrelation- not through abstract reasoning, individual choice, ideological or class affiliation, or obedience to law. Moreover, these practices, and the communities in which such practices are embedded, “require a shared recognition of their common good as a political bond, a type of bond very different from that provided in local societies by ethnic or religious or other prejudice” (2006g, p. 63). MacIntyre is advocating a contemporary politics of the polis, not a Volk. As he puts it, “A polis is always, potentially or actually, a society of rational enquiry, of self-scrutiny. The bonds of a Volk by contrast are prerational and nonrational. The philosophers of the Volk are Herder and Heidegger, not Aristotle” (MacIntyre 1998c, p. 241). The kind of politics MacIntyre envisages is a politics of resistance and “self-defense” against the depredations of state and other forms of power, both political and economic (MacIntyre 2006d, p. 155). This will necessarily be a participatory politics of deliberation in which “no one is excluded” (MacIntyre 1998c, p. 248) without debate and challenge. However, particular exclusions might be necessary on the basis that certain participants might have interests that are at odds with the overall good of a community. For MacIntyre, these kinds of local, practice-based, participatory arenas “are now the only places where political community can be constructed, a political community very much at odds with the politics of the nation-state” (ibid., p. 248). In these spaces productive, domestic and other practices would be ordered for the sake of internal rather than external goods, and these would all be oriented towards the rationally agreed upon common
good. As Kelvin Knight argues, “This is not a conservative conception of politics. On the contrary, it is a revolutionary conception” (Knight 1998, p. 21).

It is revolutionary in that such a politics of local community subverts the alienating forms of practical rationality and political reasoning of dominant state-centred politics, whether liberal or radical, by fostering critical human agency that will require the abolition of alienating social, political and economic structures and institutions. I suggest it is also revolutionary inasmuch as it subverts the tendency to invoke abstract principles as the basis for radical social change. Its rootedness also demands an attention to the development of moral character and the virtues. As Knight observes, “The more we are able to integrate and order the different goods that we pursue in our lives, the greater will be our personal integrity” (Knight 2007, p. 182). MacIntyre’s politics thus addresses issues relating to individual morality and character, which under conservative ideologies within dominant political forms are used to divert attention from structural, systemic problems and explanations in favour of moralizing about ‘individual responsibility’; whilst also addressing the question of social structures, which on the political left under dominant political (state-centred) forms have, most obviously and egregiously in the case of Stalinism, led to a lack of concern for the personal (and collective) moral dimensions of politics and social change (Adamovsky 2006). MacIntyre’s politics thereby connects the personal and the structural, the subjective and the objective. By doing so, such a politics avoids treating individuals as abstract categories and, in Freirean spirit, rejects vanguardist movements that override the moral and political agency of those they claim to defend (Freire 1970, 2001). It is a difficult, demanding but concrete politics.
MacIntyre argues that through local projects such as building a school, a hospital or an art gallery, for example, the cultivation and exercise of the virtues is required if a project is to succeed. This can only authentically occur, however, if a project is devised and implemented in pursuit of a genuinely common interest and not in the interests of external capital formation or politicking. Where the latter is the case, those involved will reason instrumentally in terms of “efficiency” or profitability whilst also contributing to ongoing rationalizations of dominant alienating economic and political modalities. In contrast, under the very different conditions of conceiving and implementing projects in terms of practices, technocratic and individualistic reasoning will be subverted by the Aristotelian reasoning necessarily involved. To participate openly in such projects is “a distinctively philosophical enterprise...insofar as the conception of human flourishing that it expresses is articulated, so that it can become a subject for enquiry and debate by those whose practice has committed them to it” (MacIntyre cited in Knight 2007, p. 182). It is clear how such projects have revolutionary potential inasmuch as they open up new moral and political horizons for those involved: managerialist and neoliberal assumptions will be undermined as individuals come to evaluate projects- both their means and ends- in terms of wider communal and more tangibly political goals. Such a politics necessitates resistance to the modern state and its inherent capitalist normativity. As Knight points out, “For such a project as a neighbourhood school to be pursued, resources may have to be obtained from the state....What is crucial is that such means not corrupt the end, and [MacIntyre] warns against any compromise of the rationally cooperative self-activity of practitioners with state or corporate power” (Knight 2007, p. 183). MacIntyre thus outlines a radical politics that
aims to subvert the socially damaging and distorting effects of dominant institutional power. For this to occur mere “resistance” might not be enough. It might be necessary to actively seek to abolish institutions that systematically generate injustice (MacIntyre 2006d, p. 146). However, MacIntyre’s politics would reject any form of revolutionary activity that simply replaced one form of domination with another. Like Paulo Freire, MacIntyre impresses upon us the importance and value of individual agency and self-determination.

One condition for the exercise of the powers of moral agency is that they can only be exercised by those who are able to justify rational confidence in their judgments about the goodness and badness of human beings. As MacIntyre points out, this ability necessarily requires participation in social relationships and in types of activity in which people’s reflective judgments emerge from systematic dialogue with others and are therefore subject to critical scrutiny. He argues that “Without milieus within which such relationships and activities are effectively sustained the possibility of the exercise of the powers of moral agency will be undermined” (MacIntyre 2006c, p.196). MacIntyre also explicitly states that moral agency requires that individuals can step back from their social roles in order to be able to critique them: “the powers of moral agency can only be exercised by those who understand themselves as moral agents, and, that is to say, by those who understand their moral identity as to some degree distinct from and independent of their social roles” (MacIntyre 2006c, p. 195). In this respect moral agents enter into conflict with the established social order.

MacIntyre argues that modern social orders impose normative frameworks on individuals in different spheres of life and provide an illusion of moral agency and rational determinateness in moral argument. As a result the
modern self is divided and confused. Modern social structure adds to the confusion and indeterminateness through what MacIntyre calls compartmentalization in which different social roles and occupations provide us with a variety of normative frameworks and constraints to which we must conform: those of the various workplaces and professions, as well as of the household, the market, the agencies of the state and a variety of other organizations and associations. For the inhabitants of modern social orders “there is no milieu available to them in which they are able, together with others, to step back from those roles and those requirements and to scrutinize themselves and the structure of their society from some external standpoint with any practical effect” (ibid., p. 197). MacIntyre claims that such milieus would provide agents with an understanding of themselves as having responsibilities and a substantive identity independent of their roles. Such an understanding would overcome divisions within the self imposed by compartmentalization and set the scene for conflicts that such compartmentalization suppresses. Lacking such milieus and the necessary virtues of integrity and constancy these foster, “there is nothing about the self thus divided that is liable to generate conflict with what are taken to be the requirements of morality within the established order” (ibid., p. 200).

It is therefore clear that MacIntyre’s philosophy is a socially critical philosophy that, like liberalism, is concerned to distinguish arbitrary power and authority from that which is morally legitimate. The difference is that, for MacIntyre, liberalism is an entirely negative philosophy that offers no positive guidance as to how to live (MacIntyre 1971d, p. 282). Moreover, liberalism has itself become an ideological mask for arbitrary power and authority in the guise of a neutral theoretical framework and political practice. Further, for MacIntyre,
Liberalism in the name of freedom imposes a certain kind of unacknowledged domination, and one which in the long run tends to dissolve traditional human ties and to impoverish social and cultural relationships. Liberalism, while imposing through state power regimes that declare everyone free to pursue whatever they take to be their own good, deprives most people of the possibility of understanding their lives as a quest for the discovery and achievement of the good, especially by the way in which it attempts to discredit those traditional forms of human community within which this project has to be embodied. (MacIntyre 1998d, p. 258)

Coexistence, rules and the good

One of MacIntyre's central arguments is that in ruling out conceptions of the good from the realm of public debate regarding legislation on social norms and policies liberalism enforces an inability to deal determinately and therefore adequately with important and complex moral problems (MacIntyre 1990a). In effect liberalism abdicates from addressing the question of the morality of certain practices in the name of individual freedom of choice. Coexistence is therefore concerned with the issue of regulating agreement to disagree and of establishing temporary and partial settlements with particular groups who hold to particular conceptions of the good or rival accounts of what justice requires on a specific issue (MacIntyre 1998c, p. 245). Ultimately, under liberalism conceptions of the good are

...to be assigned to and restricted to the sphere of the private life of individuals, while concerns about obedience to what are taken to be the moral rules
required of every rational person can be legitimately pursued in the public realm. So appeals to particular moral rules always provide relevant, although not necessarily sufficient grounds for advocating legislation of various kinds, while appeal to particular conceptions of the human good never do. Insofar as it is this liberal view which has been embodied in social practice in contemporary advanced societies, the good has been privatized. (MacIntyre 1990a, pp. 346-347)

The liberal response to this is that because people inevitably disagree on conceptions of the good, what is required for coexistence is agreement on certain basic moral rules to which appeal can be made in the course of addressing conflicts when they arise. However, MacIntyre argues that this merely shifts the problem of seeking rational consensus. He points out that disagreement on the kinds of argument appropriate for justifying particular moral rules as well as disagreement on the actual substantive content of such rules is endemic in liberal theory. Different kinds of Kantianism, utilitarianism, intuitionism and contractarianism claim to provide the ultimate principles by which to resolve disputes in this area, thus “Radical and de facto ineliminable disagreement confronts us” (ibid., p. 348). A liberal reply to this might be that if this is the case in terms of finding agreement on the justification and content of moral rules, it is equally if not more the case in terms of conceptions of the good. Therefore, what is required for coexistence is some weaker set of assumptions and more abstract principles such that a certain level of rational agreement is at least more likely.

Jürgen Habermas has attempted to supply a philosophical theory of discourse ethics that ostensibly aims to address this kind of problem whilst
avoiding the deficiencies of monological theories such as Kant’s. For Habermas, “Moral argumentation...serves to settle conflicts of action by consensual means. Conflicts in the domain of norm-guided interactions can be traced directly to some disruption of a normative consensus” (Habermas 1990, p. 67). For MacIntyre, however, there is no such consensus to begin with.12 Habermas allows that traditions and particular forms of life in community can and do inform evaluative judgments, but his separating of ethical thought into two components, the strictly normative and the evaluative, prioritises the right over the good and therefore disallows conceptions of the good from informing debates on justice, the “strictly normative”. What Habermas calls the lifeworld of individuals may generate a variety of duties, obligations, virtues and conceptions of justice but these can and ought to be challenged by the purely normative concerns of justice. “For the hypothesis-testing participant in a discourse, the relevance of the experiential context of his lifeworld tends to pale. To him, the normativity of existing institutions seems just as open to question as the objectivity of things and events...Facts and norms that had previously gone unquestioned can now be true or false, valid or invalid” (ibid., p. 107). However, in a MacIntyrean view this is a sociologically and psychologically implausible picture of moral experience and moral agency. It is a picture, perhaps, of the kind of moral experience and agency of a certain kind of individual in a certain kind of social order in liberal societies. For MacIntyre, the “moral point of view” that can be distilled from such a hypothetical discursive community is a fiction that assumes a tradition- and context-independent moral standpoint. The difficulty with seeking this

12 For MacIntyre there is no rational consensus in the modern world- or in fact in the ancient world. In the latter, however, there were significantly shared presuppositions about social, political and moral life.
standpoint is that “those conceptions of universality and impersonality which survive this kind of abstraction from the concreteness of traditional or even non-traditional conventional modes of moral thought and action are far too thin and meagre to supply what is needed” (MacIntyre 1988, p. 334). The picture of moral agency implied by Habermas’s theory is therefore empty and ghost-like (see MacIntyre 1982).

Habermas not only assumes a sociologically implausible scenario for the discussion of moral and social norms and the resolution of conflicts, but the abstraction involved is such that complex moral issues simply cannot be adequately addressed. The relational aspect of Habermas’s discourse ethics remains as empty as its Kantian ancestor. Instead of the monological introspection of an isolated individual, we now have the dialogical, shared introspection of isolated discussants. MacIntyre concedes that there are cross-tradition virtues and norms of human behaviour qua human behaviour but observes that these might be quite wrongly held to provide a kind of transcendental deduction of norms for all times and all places irrespective of the nature of the society in which people find themselves:

Just because human society as such either has to have or will usually have certain norms as part of the ineliminable logical framework of its actions and its discourse, so all choices of different evaluative possibilities arise within this framework and within the context of the norms in question. It follows that these norms cannot provide us with reasons for choosing one out of the set of possibilities rather than another. (MacIntyre 2002, p. 92)
MacIntyre points out that there has been no systematic engagement between rival moral traditions with substantive conceptions of the good. Liberalism merely assumes and dictates that in this area radical disagreement is inevitable and ineliminable. If systematic debate and discourse were to occur in the way MacIntyre envisages we would at least have the possibility to see what might happen and, moreover, begin to adequately engage with complex moral questions in ways that could lead to genuine progress in enquiry (MacIntyre 1991).

However, MacIntyre also insists that such debate and engagement at the level of theory alone cannot expect to make any progress in terms of rational enquiry. MacIntyre insists that any moral theory is only a genuine theory if it is or can be embodied in social practices. MacIntyre came to see that the competing moral idioms in which contemporary ideological claims were framed, whether liberal or conservative, “were to be understood as the outcome of a history in which different aspects of the life of practice had first been abstracted from the practical and theoretical contexts in which they were at home and then transformed into a set of rival theories, available for ideological deployment” (MacIntyre 2006d, p. 156).

As just one more theory, Thomistic Aristotelianism would be as incapable as its theoretical rivals of proving its rational superiority. The difference between liberal theory and Aristotelian theory is essentially the difference between a theory that is free-floating, disconnected from any particular concrete and coherent social practice, and a theory that is the expression of such concrete social practice. However, whilst MacIntyre sees liberal theory as a theory for everywhere and nowhere, it is nonetheless the ideological mask of what for him is a deformed and irrational mode of social
and political life and practice—that of advanced modernity. For MacIntyre, engagement between rival theories, traditions and conceptions of the good must ultimately occur at the level of lived practice. Genuine debate between rival conceptions of the human good “only occurs when the actualities of one mode of social life, embodying one such conception, are matched against the actualities of its rivals. It is as it is concretely lived out that one fundamental standpoint is or is not vindicated against its rivals” (MacIntyre 1990a, p. 355).

Thus MacIntyre implies that liberalism fails as a mode of social life and practice. However, this itself points to a shift in the position MacIntyre takes in respect of liberalism between After Virtue and Whose Justice? Which Rationality? For now it seems that MacIntyre is arguing that liberalism is a tradition and a coherent mode of social practice. As Stephen Mulhall points out, MacIntyre appears to have abandoned his earlier claim “that liberalism lacks the conceptual resources to make sense of human agency and the rationality of political argument, and is accordingly incapable of generating a coherent moral and political system; instead, he is acknowledging that liberalism is a fully fledged tradition, and so possessed of just the resources he originally suspected it of lacking” (Mulhall 1994, p. 221). MacIntyre’s response is essentially the following: Liberalism as a social tradition is distinct from although partially constituted by a range of intellectual enquires and moral theories that were initially formulated as a rejection of the Aristotelian/Thomistic worldview. The various intellectual and moral enquiries that depart from one or other of these theoretical frameworks, be they Kantian or utilitarian, intuitionist or contractualist can be internally coherent as traditions of enquiry but taken in isolation are wholly inadequate to the problems caused, so MacIntyre argues, by the rejection of the classical moral-
political scheme and have conjointly contributed to the incoherence of liberalism as a social and cultural tradition (see MacIntyre 1994, pp. 290-293). The *morality* of liberalism is incoherent because it is an amalgam of, and oscillates between, the different moral traditions of enquiry that partially constitute it. Therefore, on MacIntyre’s view, an incoherent morality leads to an incoherent social and political order. As MacIntyre points out in response to Mulhall, “It is not that the pervasive and dominant morality cannot function as a morality, but that it cannot function as a coherent morality. And that incoherence is perhaps exhibited most clearly in the moral dimension of the politics of the nation-states of the West” (MacIntyre 1994, p. 293).

So for MacIntyre, debates in moral theory and at the level of day-to-day morality can only hope to be fruitfully engaged in and resolved through a conjunction of theory and practice in which moral criteria regain determinacy and rational purchase. In MacIntyre’s perspective, the compartmentalization of modern political and social orders ensures that social, economic and political activities are not carried out as practices with internal goods and criteria of evaluation but in terms of the achievement of external goods, such as those of power and wealth. The fragmented and confused theorizing of liberal social orders is the philosophical expression of a fragmented and irrational social order. MacIntyre’s political proposals aim to overcome this moral philosophical and social fragmentation and irrationality.

**Critiquing MacIntyre’s Politics**

MacIntyre’s work has been critiqued from many different perspectives (see Horton and Mendus 1994; MacIntyre 1985b; Knight and Blackledge 2008). I
concentrate here only on a small selection of criticisms in relation to the political dimensions of MacIntyre’s philosophy.

Argentine liberation philosopher and theologian Enrique Dussel has written, “Nor does Alisdair Mcintyre’s [sic] *After Virtue* overcome the impossibility of propounding a social ethics, this work remaining stuck on an abstract level” (Dussel 1988, p. 237). For Dussel, “McIntyre’s [sic] keen critique of earlier moralists is tarnished by his return to Aristotle, and his taking a position between Aristotle and Nietzsche. Neither of the two, obviously, can be ethicians of liberation” (Dussel 1988, p. 248). This is all Dussel has to say on MacIntyre’s centrally important contribution to moral philosophy. Firstly, the notion that *After Virtue* is stuck on an abstract level is a strange criticism. It is a deeply historical philosophical argument that attempts to demonstrate and overcome precisely the abstract conception of moral philosophy as addressing the same timeless and ahistorical moral concepts. Secondly, MacIntyre’s “keen critique of earlier moralists” is undertaken from the standpoint of a neo-Aristotelian position, hence his return to Aristotle. Thirdly, Dussel says that Aristotle and Nietzsche cannot be “ethicians of liberation” and implicitly dismisses MacIntyre’s moral philosophy for the same reasons. Yet as Dussel also points out, MacIntyre takes a position *between* Aristotle and Nietzsche. MacIntyre is fully aware of the defects of both positions but argues for a contemporary restatement of Aristotle’s ethics and politics in order to develop a “post-Marxist ideology of liberation” (MacIntyre 1971a, p. 93). Contra Dussel, I suggest that MacIntyre’s project provides the philosophical basis for an ethics of liberation. Moreover, Dussel’s own philosophical project of elaborating an ethics of liberation can be critiqued from MacIntyre’s perspective. Dussel’s own formulation of an ethics of liberation is heavily indebted to Marx, whose
thought MacIntyre has critiqued in terms of its moral philosophical incoherence, as we have seen. Whilst Dussel’s own ethics of community praxis is in some respects resonant with MacIntyre’s approach (see Dussel 1988, p. 186), I contend that he remains prey to the deformities in Marx’s and subsequent Marxism’s approach to moral issues. For example, Dussel validates the ethical approach of certain vanguardist movements and leaders in a definite Kantian register: “The hero organizes the oppressed to the end that they may throw themselves into a process that includes struggle” (Dussel 1988, p. 90). Further, Dussel appears to separate ethics from politics and to adhere to the kind of reasoning MacIntyre saw as characteristic of Stalinism. Discussing Colombian priest, political organizer and guerrilla fighter Camilo Torres, he writes: “The political legitimacy of the actions of citizen Camilo will be judged by the future liberated state, not by theology or the church” (Dussel 1988, p. 178).

However, contra MacIntyre, Dussel suggests that Marx does provide a cogent moral basis for working-class militancy and activity:

In the *Grundrisse* (1857-8), Marx puts forward certain propositions with a decidedly non-Stalinist ring:

Free individuality founded on the universal development of individuals in the subordination of their communal productivity ...as social patrimony, constitutes the third stage. ...Communal production ...is subordinate to individuals, and controlled in community fashion by them as a patrimony [of their own]. ...[It is a] free exchange among individuals, associating on the basis of community appropriation and
control of the means of production. This last association has nothing of
the arbitrary about it. It presupposes the development of material and
spiritual conditions [Grundrisse, 1974, pp.75-7].

Marx speaks not of a ‘collectivity’ (Kollektivität) but of a ‘community’
(Gemeinschaft). (Dussel 1988, pp. 185-186)

Thus Dussel appears to provide evidence that the basis for association in Marx
is community-controlled production. However, in “The Theses on Feuerbach: A
Road Not Taken” MacIntyre (1998b) contends that Marx could not discern the
praxis, the conjunction of theory and practice based on the precedence of a
particular kind of practice over theory, that such community production
presupposed, a practice outside the, for Marx, problematic practical-theoretical
standpoint of civil society. According to MacIntyre, “in the theses on
Feuerbach Marx came very close to formulating just the distinctions which
might have enabled him to understand this. But to have expressed those
distinctions clearly and to have developed their implications would perhaps
have left Marx unable to define his relationship to the large-scale revolutionary
changes which he had identified as imminent, tied instead to what he took to
be already defeated forms of past life” (MacIntyre 1998b, p. 232). The kind of
practice MacIntyre highlights as presupposing the necessary relationship of
theory to practice is one that is militantly against the modern ethos, an ethos
which later Marxist movements have succumbed to and helped propagate.
This itself points to Marx’s failure to pursue the philosophical problem of the
theory-practice relationship, which has led to Marxism becoming just one more
arbitrary theory.
Paul Blackledge (2009) has critiqued MacIntyre’s concept of a practice, arguing that one of the examples he cites as instances of local communities which have virtuously resisted in the face of capital and the state include Welsh mining communities that were underpinned by forms of trade unionism not classifiable as MacIntyrean practices, “which by his account of proletarianization...should have been forever trapped in an alienated means-ends morality characteristic of capitalism” (Blackledge 2009, p. 880). It might be argued in response that such trade union activity was ultimately undertaken in light of the virtues governing other properly MacIntyrean practices in the communities, which provided a necessary check on the instrumental nature of such militancy; that is, they kept the workers conscious that the struggle for better pay and conditions only made sense in the context of an integrated community life of shared practices. However, Blackledge points out that it was in fact the activity of trade union militancy that effectively made communities out of initial aggregations of domestic and foreign workers. In line with this I don’t see why MacIntyre’s politics of local community cannot successfully mediate and counterbalance the kinds of problems MacIntyre highlights with ideologically based associations like trade unions, and vice versa.

Chris Harman writes that MacIntyre’s political proposal reads to me like a call for hippie communes without hippies. If MacIntyre means by ‘morality’ what he used to mean by it, such communities cannot be a moral response to what the system is doing to humanity in the 21st century, however personally satisfying they might be. We are faced with the depredations of a system of alienated labour that has escaped from all control. The global economic crisis, the “war on terror”, the periodic pillaging of the
poorest countries, the “world of slums” and climate change are all expressions of this. There is a race between barbarism and socialism in which, at the moment, the odds are on barbarism. Cultivating your own garden with a few other people may be more pleasant than slaving for capital, but to identify it as a moral choice is to fall back precisely into the arbitrariness that the early MacIntyre once castigated. (Harman 2009- unpaginated)

This ignores the complexity and rigour of the argument that leads to MacIntyre’s political conclusions and caricatures the kind of politics and milieus that MacIntyre calls for. In MacIntyre’s view, the “socialism” that Harman pits against barbarism is imbued with the same modern ethos underpinning capitalism, which in contemporary manifestations is rife with contradictions. Further, MacIntyre does not advocate a local politics of resistance as a “moral choice” but as the basic presupposition of a coherent, rational morality and basis for social critique and transformation. It is Harman’s position that appears arbitrary (why a race only between “socialism” and barbarism?) Nevertheless, the immense, global scale of the crises facing humanity that Harman rightly draws attention to raises the question of the necessary moral-political response. To large scale problems, large scale solutions; an ethics and politics of the local can sound like withdrawal from the world. In the Colombian context the sheer scale of forced displacement, political and social violence, inequality and poverty also urges decisive, principled political action, perhaps along the lines of Peter Hallward’s “politics of prescription”.

However, the assumption here is that MacIntyre is urging us to turn away from seriously addressing these urgent human, social problems. This is
not the case. Despite his infamous call for a “new St. Benedict” at the end of *After Virtue* and his view that the point is not to overthrow capitalism but to “withdraw from it and not get involved in its disasters” (cited in Blackledge 2009, p. 869), MacIntyre explicitly states that any politics of local community will inevitably have to align itself at times with the large-scale politics of nation-states in order to defeat particular, large-scale threats (MacIntyre 1998c, p. 252). The difference for such a local politics, however, is that it is concerned with generating and maintaining a coherent, rational, ethical politics in which the dominant politics of individual and collective interests is subverted and, crucially, moral character and morally structured forms of political subjectivity are developed. The dominant, irrational political orders of modernity prey and thrive upon divided selves and subjects. Just as “capitalism...provides systematic incentives to develop a type of character that has a propensity to injustice” (MacIntyre 2006d, p. 149), so modern, especially liberal, political orders induce confusion and inconsistency amongst citizens, which is both a result of and a prerequisite for the sustaining of the contradictory demands and values of liberal market democracies (see MacIntyre 1990b, p. 5). However, there is in my view a question mark over the kind of politics MacIntyre envisages, which needs to be empirically explored for its adequacy as a vehicle for the restoration of a rational morality and radical social transformation.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have set out MacIntyre's philosophical project, which provides the theoretical and conceptual framework for my overall argument. It is my
contention that MacIntyre’s diagnosis of the philosophical deficiencies of modern morality and politics can illuminate the convoluted nature of the moral dimensions of the Colombian conflict, whilst also providing better resources for conceiving the task of constructing coexistence and an ethical politics and political community than those emanating from liberalism. MacIntyre’s complex account of moral conflict, which encompasses theories of rationality and social action, and which demonstrates the connection between rationality and desire and the always theory-laden nature of our social analyses and explanations, is of particular relevance to situations of entrenched conflict such as in Colombia. In the following chapter I attempt to substantiate these claims through a critical exploration of the Colombian philosophical literature that addresses the conflict and the question of reconstructing coexistence and political community.
CHAPTER 2

Philosophy and the Colombian crisis

This chapter reviews a sample of the Colombian literature that addresses the “moral crisis” and which theorizes the problem of coexistence and the search for an “ethical response” (López 2005) to the Colombian conflict. My criteria for selecting this literature are the significance of the authors and the arguments they advance. For example, I range from the important Colombian sociologist María Teresa Uribe, who has written extensively on the topics of politics, ethics, and conflict in Colombia, to the peace activist and theorist Luis Sandoval who merits attention because of his prominence and stature within the peace movement. Between these are a selection of writers who have made what I deem to be important or highly relevant interventions on the topic(s) of ethics, politics, coexistence and the conflict. Literature on the specifically ethical dimensions of the Colombian conflict, Colombian politics and the question of coexistence is not abundant. In contrast to the abundance of literature dedicated to analysing the nature and extension of violence in Colombia (see González et al. 2002 for an extensive review of the literature) and the growing literature on peace initiatives of civil society, research addressing the specifically ethical dimensions of conflict and peace is scarce. I argue that the liberal paradigm within which this literature is situated is problematic in light of MacIntyre’s thesis and that MacIntyre provides more

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13 I borrow this chapter title from the title of an important book published in Colombia edited by R. Sierra Mejía and A. Gómez-Müller called “La filosofía y la crisis Colombiana”, which addresses the conflict from various philosophical perspectives (Taurus: Bogotá 2002).
adequate philosophical resources for conceiving the task of overcoming conflict and constructing social-political coexistence and an ethical politics.

Civic Ethics/the ethics of minimums

As María Teresa Uribe and Liliana López (2006) demonstrate, Colombia’s 19th century civil wars centred upon ethical-political conflicts in relation to the nature of the state, conceptions of citizenship, justice and political community. Despite what I argue were to become fully emotivist moral-political discourses, James Sanders (2004) has shown how in the 19th century there was originally much less social and political distance between elites and subalterns as a result of the fragmentation and weakness of the central state, which enabled a basic moral-political consensus to emerge in the form of “republican bargaining” based on a more or less shared moral-political language. The eventual fracturing of this moral-political framework was ultimately related to deeper radical disagreements about political economy and the increasingly abstract moral idioms appealed to by elites (Palacios and Safford 2002; Sanders 2004; Uribe and López 2006). Following the 1886 conservative “Regeneration” - a reaction to the hegemony of radical liberal republicanism - no longer republican bargaining but power would ultimately become the arbiter of political disagreements and determine the nature of the political constitutions that would hold sway and serve as imposed national normative referents (Henao and Rodríguez 2006; Sanders 2004).

The 1991 Constitution arguably marked a shift in this pattern as a range of insurgent groups demobilized and a National Constituent Assembly debated the clauses of the new charter that would enshrine important new rights and
inspire hope that Colombia was on the path to resolving its decades long conflict and finding some new ethical basis for shared political life. As Rubén Fernández (1996) put it in an important book titled “Ethics for Better Times”, originally published shortly after this significant political event, “Today the debate about the ethical referents of our society is open once again” (Fernández 1996, p. 7). Fernández, director of one of Medellín’s most important NGOs/think tanks, expressed his hope that all Colombia’s social actors would embrace this debate and help in the reconstruction of ethical referents that would “become a new consensus that in the form of a pact of coexistence will enable us with greater collective and mutual security to address the tasks- arduous ones, but much more interesting than eliminating opponents- of eradicating poverty, constructing democracy and social justice” (ibid., p. 8). The different essays that make up this text concur in the view that the way out of the conflict is through a new kind of politics, an ethical politics that avoids the demagoguery and dogmatism of institutionalized politics and the politics of those armed groups in resistance against the exclusionary political system and the social injustices it breeds. What is called for in this text is a “civic ethics” or “citizen ethics” that transcends the dogmatism and intolerance of the dominant form of politics through the elaboration of an “ethics of minimums.”

For Carlos Calderón, such an ethics of minimums refers to “the acceptance of a core of values around which all citizens can agree, whatever our political or religious creeds. Primary and fundamental elements of this minimum ethos would evidently be the valuing of and respect for life and the

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dignity of the human person, both presuppositions of an authentic coexistence of citizens” (Calderón 1996, p. 22). Based on the foundation of a “shared rationality”, Calderón sees this consensus as “gradually constructed through interdisciplinary, inter-institutional and inter-religious dialogue” (ibid., p. 22). What is needed is an “urgent formulation of a juridical-moral language that demands of, and engenders within individuals, groups and institutions a sense of social responsibility, respect for the ‘polis’, a sense of the ‘public’ and the common good” (ibid., p. 24).

The connection between the moral crisis and moral language is therefore seen to be central. As Calderón puts it, “it would seem that we have learned to resolve our conflicts only through irony, mutual verbal delegitimizing or by resorting to violence” (ibid., p. 24). Calderón is hopeful that a shared moral language can emerge through dialogue on the basis of a shared rationality, following Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action and “discourse ethics”. Calderón’s conception of ethics is therefore cast in the classic Enlightenment mould as essentially ahistorical, as a question of discovering binding ethical precepts and principles on the basis of reason and discourse alone in abstraction from social contexts and practices. Calderón does not address the problem of embedded, contradictory and fragmented normative standpoints in society or the issue of motivation- why it is that individuals will have the desire to follow the norms elaborated through dialogue-, which leads to a utopian and sociologically implausible scenario: “free of mutual prejudices and above all free of ambitions of power, all institutions would have to hear and accept the call to agree to seek what we might call the elaboration of a civil pedagogy of morality and ethics. This would
be what others denominate as the formulation of a citizenship ethics” (ibid., p. 21).

Calderón’s proposal also points to a general theoretical incoherence that is prevalent to greater or lesser extents throughout the Colombian discussion. For example, the concepts of social responsibility, the Greek polis, the modern public realm, and the common good that Calderón mentions imply very different accounts of moral language, of the meaning of moral terms and judgements, and the relationship of these to politics. For example, the common good in the Romantic tradition implies a conception of society that is more “organic” and communitarian than the Aristotelian conception centred on the polis as interpreted by MacIntyre. The modern public sphere, comprised of civil society conceived in terms of an aggregation of individual interests, implies an account of practical rationality according to which to be practically rational is to act on the basis of the costs and benefits to oneself of different courses of action. In contrast, within the practical and theoretical context of the Greek polis, to be practically rational is to act in such a way as to achieve the ultimate and true good of human beings. The mistake Calderón makes is to assume that morality and practical rationality refer to a single phenomenon common to all social and cultural contexts whereby the Greeks, Hume, and Kant, amongst others, are all seen as attempting to analyse morality and practical rationality as such. As I showed in chapter one, MacIntyre argues that the confusion and incoherence of modern morality and moral philosophy, and the subsequent inability to reach rational consensus and to render moral reasoning coherent, is partly a result of the failure to understand this. Therefore, the idea that on the minimal basis of the norms of rational argumentation alone we can
formulate a moral language that has rational purchase on individuals and social institutions is deeply implausible.

Yet this notion of developing a public morality (Rojas 2007, p. 14) in which all substantive moral positions are to be respected and held together by the discursive constraints of some procedural ethical model is prevalent throughout the Colombian discussion, but no less problematic for that. For example, Vicente Durán writes, “Rationally speaking, it is clear that a citizen ethics cannot a priori exclude anyone. Both the military officer who professionally defends the institutions of the state, and the landless peasant who fights to transform those institutions, must be capable of being integrated within the community of citizens. Both must be able to aspire to have their ethical principles and actions approved of by the community” (Durán 1992, p. 80). However, this fails to take into account the incommensurability involved in radical moral disagreement and the diverse institutions and forms of social life in relation to which each individual’s ethical principles are partly formed. It does not see the moral crisis in terms of rival and incompatible forms of social practice, but primarily in terms of conflicting moral discourses (see Rojas 2007, p. 16). Moreover, it posits an ethical realm above the fray of social or institutional mediation. It also ignores the problematic nature of the state and its central role in the Colombian moral crisis.

As Carlos Rojas points out, moral philosophy is used both to analyse and comprehend the social-political crisis in Colombia as well as seeking to transform it (Rojas 2007, p. 13). However, the general philosophical approach is liberal (of Kantian and Habermasian variants), which I contend is problematic. I claim that MacIntyre’s philosophy provides both a more
plausible account of the moral crisis as well as more adequate resources for conceiving an ethical response.

Citizenship and the public sphere

A more philosophically and sociologically sophisticated account of the need for a new political ethics and its content is provided by María Teresa Uribe, one of Colombia’s leading scholars who has written sophisticated analyses of the historical, political and ethical dimensions of Colombian society and its ongoing conflicts. In “Notas Coloquiales Sobre la Ética y la Política” (1996) (“Colloquial Notes on Ethics and Politics”) Uribe, like Calderón, argues for the necessity of an ethics of minimums that can guide social coexistence in Colombia. In her view, a central part of the Colombian crisis lies in the fact that a shared notion of the public sphere has never been constructed (Uribe 1996, p. 36). Instead, Colombia and Latin America more generally have economically modernized and urbanized, while at the level of the state and social identities and referents have struggled to overcome what she calls, following Hannah Arendt, “pre-political” forms of association and normativity. As Uribe puts it,

In reality the drama of Latin America is that we have not constructed a public sphere, and because of this we do not have common ethical or cultural referents or a common social identity. We are an aggregate, a collection in which a multiplicity of values, ways of life, powers and mentalities circulate, reproduce and confront one another. (Uribe 1996, p. 36)
This is what leads Uribe to the conclusion that the problem of state legitimacy is acute; the multiple and rival normative frameworks in Colombian society mean that there are competing accounts of what is legitimate. From the standpoint of these various normative schemes the Colombian state lacks moral-political legitimacy. As Uribe puts it, in an argument strongly resonant with a point MacIntyre makes in *After Virtue*, “If national identity is weak, if it is fractured or constituted by great socio-cultural heterogeneity then it will be all the more difficult for the State to gain legitimacy” (Uribe 1993, p. 44). Uribe points out that the socio-cultural ethos of Colombian society in the 19th century was one that clashed with the abstract “meta-discourses” of universal rights and citizenship emanating from modern Europe, discourses that were promoted by a small sector of the Colombian elite. This, Uribe contends, is true of contemporary Colombian society, which has

an excellent Constitution, a ream of legislation, a complete normative framework, yet unfortunately people in their collective and social day to day life, in their personal or political relations, do not take this normative meta-discourse as a collective reference point. Instead they guide their social life by other pre-political, familial or traditional schemes. (Uribe 1996, p. 38)

For Uribe, part of the solution to the moral-political crisis in Colombia lies in the internalisation across Colombian society of the abstract notion of the individual citizen in direct relationship to the state. This is the clear normative element in Uribe’s proposal. However, from a MacIntyrean standpoint the notion of a direct relation between the individual and the state is an undesirable fiction. In reality this relationship is mediated by the bureaucratic normativity of the state
that is the domain of experts in whose hands individual citizens have to put themselves in a way that compromises their moral agency (see Uribe 1999, p. 187; MacIntyre 2006b, p. 115). As Kelvin Knight remarks, “MacIntyre, like Marx, regards the idea of citizenship as an ideological mask, worn by an institution that is structurally incapable of admitting its subjects to the kind of shared reasoning that would be necessary for the formation of a veritable ‘shared purpose’ and ‘political community’” (Knight 2007, p. 170). Moreover, historically, despite the formal declarations of rights and inclusion by the Liberal and Conservative elites, as Alfredo Gómez-Müller (2008) points out, such declarations were ultimately intended to support the actual economic interests and practices of the elites. Abstract equality was fine, material equality and the idea that the state should intervene in the market to guarantee this were anathema.

However, this idea of the abstract citizen whose identity centres not on local forms of particularity but on the “universal” form of the citizen-state relationship is seen to supply part of the answer to the problem of intolerance that is perceived to lie at the root of violence. Uribe sees the strong sense of identity and attachment engendered in Colombia’s multiple localisms and cultures with their substantive conceptions of the good as part of the reason for political violence and the inability to resolve conflicts rationally. As Uribe points out, as Colombia moved from colonialism to Independence what appeared on the scene were collectivities, towns, cities, provinces and ethnicities:

The inhabitant/member-citizen was, then, a concrete subject, territorialized, rooted. One was a member of this or that locality, but not of the nation as a whole. This presented a profoundly differentiated image of the new political
subject inasmuch as a general statute of membership did not exist, and this condition depended on the jurisdiction and privileges of the community to which one belonged. (Uribe 1999, p. 201)

According to Uribe, the characteristics of such membership “were opposed, in fact, to those attributes that defined the modern citizen: universality, individuality, equality and abstraction” (ibid., p. 201). As Uribe points out,

Identities and feelings of belonging generated very particular cultural forms that survive to this day in Colombia; peasant and village cultures, traditional values associated with localism as an original form of social identity that are constantly reproduced in different contexts. (Uribe 1990, p. 30)

Hence Uribe’s search for an ethics of minimums based not on the substantive commitments and conceptions of the good emanating from these communal forms of membership with their “mestizo” notions of citizenship, but on the presuppositions of intersubjective discourse, following Habermas. In Uribe’s view, this ethics of minimums based solely on the abstract and formal precepts of the presuppositions of communicative reason is necessary to generate consensus. As Uribe puts it, “To arrive at a rational consensus is to let ourselves be convinced by the argument of another, the only active force would be that of argumentation, the force by which another convinces me, in which I cede some of my interests and appetites as I recognize the interests and appetites of another” (Uribe 1996, p. 43). For MacIntyre, in contrast, such abstract argumentation is inadequate to the heavy work it is asked to do for political society.
Nevertheless, Uribe's is a powerful argument and analytical framework in a society in which local and regional power has often turned inwards, concerned to defend its own domains and seeking rationales for the use of power and violence in “traditional” conceptions of society and morality. Uribe’s outline of a civic ethics is aimed at weakening the hold of the traditional ethos (whilst still respecting some of its key moral and cultural expressions and referents, such as Catholicism), and encouraging a more critical reflection on the presuppositions of political community in a society prone to the violent resolution of conflicts, which because of the dominant socio-cultural ethos have been over-politicized and reduced to zero-sum struggles. Given this, it is not difficult to see why the search for an ethical politics in Colombia has turned to neo-Kantian theories such as those of Habermas and Adela Cortina, an important Spanish philosopher whose work has also been used to analyse and theorize the Colombian moral-political problematic (see Peña 1996 for a defence of Cortina’s theoretical grounding of an ethical politics). Moreover, it is possible to misread MacIntyre as valorizing the kind of “traditional” society and social relations that Uribe rightly critiques in Colombia, especially given his own allegiance to the Catholic tradition. However, it is my contention that MacIntyre’s theory not only seriously problematises the discourse ethics and ethics of minimums approaches of Habermas and Cortina, but that it also provides more adequate resources for understanding how an ethical politics might be developed.

Despite Uribe’s profound insights and analyses there are significant problems with some of her arguments and assumptions. Firstly, she appears to have a somewhat prejudiced and stereotypical view of “traditional” societies as totalizing spaces in which myth and irrationality structure the normative
dimension of identities and social relations. This too readily assumes that members of traditional societies do not have the moral or cognitive resources for critiquing their own society/community. On Uribe’s view, individuals in such communities are prisoners of their culture. They guide themselves according to the give and received wisdom and doctrines of their culture/community/tradition, not by the “post-conventional” and abstract norms of reason. As Uribe puts it, only the elites guided themselves by what she refers to as “lo pensado” (“abstract thought”- see Uribe 1993, pp. 56-57).

Moreover, her critique of historical “traditional” forms of local political society and community seems to me to assume that the hierarchical structure of these with their “notables” (political overlords who dispensed rights and favours in exchange for loyalty) is a mark of community per se. Further, Uribe’s contention that in such traditional communities notions of equality were absent in contrast to the abstract discourses of the liberal elites simply does not square with her own account of the artisans in the 1854 war, for example (see Uribe and López 2006). The artisans represented a form of “traditional” community/way of life based on small-scale artisanal production from which notions of equality certainly emerged. However, these were more substantive and “particular” notions of equality that differed from the abstract proclamations of equality made by the Liberal and Conservative elites.

In places Uribe reads the problem of ethics in Colombia in a very similar way to how MacIntyre reads the broad, problematic history of ethics generally, but her solution moves in the opposite direction (see Uribe 1992, p. 161). Her proposed remedy is based on the acceptance of the inevitability of the social and moral dislocations produced by modernity and the modernization of
society. In Uribe’s view, Colombia needs to keep moving forward and attempt to instill the “spirit of modernity” into the complex patchwork of Colombian society. By contrast, in MacIntyre’s view the moral reality of modernity is a confused, incoherent mess that threatens to pull us into a new dark ages where rational collective restraint on the depredations of state power, corporate globalization and political violence is no longer possible because we lack the moral resources for reaching urgent moral consensus on central moral and political questions. Uribe, however, is more positive about the “spirit of modernity”. Where MacIntyre, some suggest somewhat apocalyptically (Hinchman 1989), urges local, semi-traditional communities (and also modern individuals) to turn away from seeking new socio-moral referents within the melange of modernity, Uribe bids them to find in it alternative modes of self-understanding and moral-political identity (see MacIntyre 1985a, p. 252; Uribe 1992, p. 164). As we have seen, MacIntyre thinks we can only move forward by reconstituting in contemporary forms something akin to the Aristotelian theory and practice of morality and politics. Modern liberal conceptions of politics can only perpetuate emotivist self-understanding and therefore conflict.

Uribe herself links Aristotle with Habermas as a philosopher of the public sphere, but I argue that she is mistaken in her contention that what the Greeks saw as necessary for political life- praxis and lexis - “is none other than the communicative action of which Habermas speaks” (Uribe 1996, p. 33). Discourse and dialogue were of course central to Greek politics but, certainly at least in MacIntyre’s account of Aristotle’s ethics and politics, this was

15 As Sergio de Zubiría notes, “The genesis of the profound lack of correspondence between ethics, law and culture or the absence/deficit of a secular or “civic” ethics and the tendency to authoritarianism is in the majority of analyses connected to the incapacity, incomprehension or postponement of modernity in Colombian society” (De Zubiría 1998).
combined with the view that discursive political criteria emerged from a substantive, teleological conception of the human good, which included politics as the “master practice” that ordered the other subordinate practices that comprised a well-ordered human life and that were ultimately directed to a conception of the good. Political life was integrally structured around the ethical life, and vice versa. For Aristotle, ethics was the science of how to move man’s untutored human nature towards what it could be in its alignment with the substantive conception of the human good. For Habermas, in contrast, ethics is understood as establishing the minimal presuppositions of coexistence in the face of heterogeneous conceptions of the good. Because for Habermas there is no such thing as the good, ethics is a question of prioritizing justice- what is right- over the good, which as MacIntyre demonstrates is problematic on various levels.

I suggest that Uribe misreads Aristotle through her reading of Hannah Arendt; in particular in claiming that the political life is openly counterposed to the domestic and private realm, that political life is in “direct opposition” to domestic, family life.\(^{16}\) I suggest it is this misreading that partly accounts for Uribe’s own view that the political sphere has to be sharply differentiated from the private realm and based on purely “rational” activity (Uribe 1996, p. 33), which implies that economics (oikonomiā) cannot be subject to normative, which is to say political, evaluation (see A. Kogl 2007). Indeed, the discourse ethics of Habermas and Karl Otto Apel has been criticized precisely for insisting that material, economic questions cannot factor in to moral reasoning, holding that morally valid norms of coexistence have to be worked out at the

\(^{16}\) See A. Kogl (2007) who argues that Arendt misreads Aristotle on the connection between the economic-domestic realm and the public political sphere.
purely formal level of abstract argument without considering how such formal validity requires some substantive and material basis in order to get going (Dussel 1999).

Uribe’s liberal moral-political standpoint also means that she conceives politics as not based on any notion of shared interests and a common good, but as departing from radically divergent, individual interests (Uribe 1996, p. 40). Uribe’s conception of the ethical-political self/subject is of one who has their own interests prior to engagement with others, even though these interests might be first discovered within a corporate structure such as a business federation or trade union. As Uribe puts it, “it is very important that these movements exist because it is the principal way...of constructing identity, of knowing where I am in the world and my position in the face of others, of what my interests are and what the interests of others are” (Uribe 1996, pp. 40-41). What is clear is that Uribe assumes what MacIntyre calls the “compartmentalization” of modern, social and economic life (MacIntyre 2006c). In the political sphere these rival interests come together to bargain, not to construct a shared project. These interests are therefore given; there is no conceptual room for modifying interests and transforming desires through a common political project. Rather, individual interests have to be ceded. Moral-political argument therefore does not begin from some notion of a consensus of interest but from the fact of pre-given individual interests.17 Uribe recognizes that shared ethical referents and “generalizable interests” cannot emerge from a mere aggregation of these different interests, pointing out that a distinct

17 Although Habermas says that conflict is the result of a disruption of a prior consensus, it is clear that he, or at least those who follow his approach, conceive the social-political world in terms of the priority of individual interests. Moreover, for MacIntyre this claim about consensus masks the reality of deeper conflict within society- see MacIntyre 1998a.
“alchemy” will need to emerge out of them (Uribe 1996, p. 41). However, I argue that such a distillation will only permit a fragile, temporary and ultimately irrational consensus. Because of its failure to recognize the fragmentation of moral concepts and discourse it does not (as with all liberal ethics) address the question of how a genuinely rational consensus can emerge. What minimalist set of agreements might emerge out of the discursive procedure will also surely be too thin to do the work of facilitating and enabling shared political life and coexistence. It also fails to address the problem of radical disagreement. As Mark Kingwell remarks, Habermasian discourse between ideally rational participants “cannot address the deep political differences that motivate such conversation in the first place” (Kingwell 1993, p. 116). It is also an ethical-political framework that neglects motivation and character and which therefore, I argue, renders it too abstract and idealistic. The theory says nothing about why people should be motivated to follow the norms that have emerged from dialogue.

Ultimately Uribe’s theoretical approach to the formulation of a civic ethics of minimums is philosophically incoherent. On the one hand she outlines a nuanced (Habermasian) liberal individualist model of an ethics for coexistence that fundamentally calls into question “traditional” and local forms of community with non-liberal presuppositions and social bonds, yet on the other hand elsewhere she argues that “The alternative to the ethical vacuum in Colombia will have to be sought in the collective public realm rather than in the

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18 From a MacIntyrean standpoint Uribe is philosophically incoherent in her view that the normative legitimations corresponding to European models of the nation state and social contract were “valid in themselves” whilst “totally illegitimate” because of the context in which they were applied (Uribe 1993, p. 57). This represents the view of philosophical and moral-political arguments as free-floating and capable of validity outside of concrete social contexts and practices.
private, individual sphere; in social practices rather than in private morality and the law; in the vast and problematic realm of socio-cultural ethoses and political culture rather than in formal principles and rhetoric” (Uribe 1992, pp. 176-177). This is more MacIntyrean and goes against the formal, rationalistic approach of Habermas that Uribe also endorses. Other Colombian philosophers who appeal to this Habermasian ethical theoretical approach include Guillermo Hoyos (2008), John Manuel Peña (1996) and Angela Uribe (2002), but they do not link this in the same way to Colombia's political and cultural history.

A Habermasian model of dialogue

Ángela Uribe, however, makes an interesting attempt to apply Habermas's theory to a contemporary social and political conflict in Colombia that can perhaps help us to see more clearly some of the problems discussed above. Uribe outlines a Habermasian model of conflict resolution in the case of the conflict between the U'wa indigenous people, the Occidental Oil Company, and the Colombian state (Uribe 2002). The Habermasian approach abstracts away from social particularity and radically different conceptual frameworks in the hope of engendering agreement on norms and resolving conflict on the basis of shared, universal communicative presuppositions. However, it is problematic for two main reasons: first, it sees conflict as emanating from a disruption of a prior normative consensus (Habermas 1990, p. 67), which is part of the liberal philosophical and ideological operation that MacIntyre argues suppresses radical conflict and, when it is recognized, tends to frame it in terms of an underlying order of regularity and consensus (MacIntyre 1998a).
Second, it does not take into account radical disagreement or the possibility of calling into question its own ultimately liberal social, political and ethical conceptual framework and associated way of life (see MacIntyre 1998c).

In Uribe’s model the incommensurable conceptual scheme and idiom of the Other is ultimately neutralised by the discursive procedure whereby the Other is effectively coerced into conceiving conflict generally, and the specific conflict in question, in a particular way. Firstly, Uribe reduces the demands of the U’wa regarding the disruption of their way of life and cultural system by oil exploration in their territories to the liberal discourse of “interests”. Secondly, she caricatures the way in which the U’wa spokespeople would actually engage in discourse with the state and oil company representatives as amounting to no more than descriptions of their customs and way of life. Thirdly, from the outset the imagined interlocutor that represents Habermas begins by asserting that what is at stake in the conflict over the borders of the U’wa territory is “a matter of justice”. Thus, as with most liberal moral theories, the right is prior to the good. The norms of justice have to be formulated in abstraction from conceptions of the good. In this way what is intended as a philosophical model for rationally and non-coercively addressing conflict in a way that genuinely takes account of individuals and collective cultures in their Otherness ultimately “includes” the Other through a coercive assault on their very identity as Other.

Habermas is then imagined as pointing out to the U’wa that the idea of the discussion is to reach an agreement between the State, the oil company and the U’wa that is the “best for all” and that does not “protect particular or privileged interests” (Uribe 2002, p. 258). When the U’wa spokesperson responds to this by elaborating the outlines of a historical narrative of injustice
against their people the imagined Habermas retorts: “What you have just said does not seem to me to be a good way to begin….If we want to be successful in our attempt to establish the ground rules that will facilitate a just agreement, it is not pertinent that you expound the memory of grievances regarding the history of power relations between the indigenous communities and the governments of Latin America” (Uribe 2002, p. 258). This starkly demonstrates the fact that the neutrality, objectivity and validity of moral reasoning that are alleged to arise from the presuppositions of linguistic communication alone clearly presuppose, at least in this case, the validity of liberal ideology. The historical contingency and contestability of the liberal state is also obscured by this philosophical sleight of hand. It rules out the possibility of calling liberal ideology and conceptions of the good into question by disregarding as illegitimate historical narratives of European imperialism that for the U’wa very possibly factor in to their sense of justice. This is done in the guise of purely formal morality.

This liberal start point thus autocratically rules out historical, not just “mythical” narrative from the dialogue and the process of argumentation. 19 MacIntyre argues that this is the dominant characteristic of liberalism in contrast to “tradition”. What MacIntyre refers to as “traditions” are complex, interweaving bodies of moral enquiry, theory and social practice in which forms and standards of practical rationality emerge (MacIntyre 1988, 1991). These are exemplified in the “big” intellectual and theological traditions of

19 Uribe says in a somewhat condescending tone after once again relating the U’wa story of how the world “rests on a rock that first is red, then blue and then a greeny blue”, “How can one demand that the borders of a territory be decided on the basis of such confused expressions?” (Uribe 2002, p. 263) Yet from the outset of this imagined dialogue the U’wa do not refer to this myth but to a narrative of historical grievance that is unilaterally disregarded!
Aristotelianism, Thomism, Judaism, Buddhism, etc. but also in counter-cultural movements such as the Amish and indigenous cultures. MacIntyre writes:

Where the standpoint of a tradition requires a recognition of the different types of language-in-use through which different types of argument will have to be carried on, the standpoint of the forums of modern liberal culture presupposes the possibility of a common language for all speakers or at the very least of the translatability of any one language into any other. Where the standpoint of a tradition involves an acknowledgment that fundamental debate is between competing and conflicting understandings of rationality, the standpoint of the forums of modern liberal culture presupposes the fiction of shared, even if unformulable, universal standards of rationality. Where the standpoint of a tradition cannot be presented except in a way which takes account of the history and the historical situatedness, both of the traditions themselves and of those individuals who engage in dialogue with them, the standpoint of the forums of modern liberal culture presupposes the irrelevance of one’s history to one’s status as a participant in debate. (MacIntyre 1988, p. 400)

This is also consistent with the liberal philosophical anthropology underlying Rawls’s theory of justice that I perceive also underlies Habermas’s theory. What this philosophical anthropology implies is a conception of the moral self as fundamentally detached from its ends and deprived of understanding its identity as constituted by its historical cultural, communal and personal relationships (see Michael Sandel’s critique of Rawls in Mulhall and Swift 1996). Furthermore, through insisting that the U’wa see themselves as a “constitutive part of public institutions” (Uribe 2002, p. 258) within the “democratic project” (ibid., p. 259) the Habermasian interlocutor also thereby
imposes the ground rules in the same way that Rawls’s theory does, as well as a particular way of conceiving their identity. Thus instead of really addressing the problem of an incommensurable conceptual scheme and idiom, the Habermasian model as reconstructed by Uribe utterly fails in what Habermas calls “hermeneutic sensibility” and makes no serious attempt to get inside the Other’s idiom, to attempt to learn what MacIntyre calls “a second language-in-use as a second first language” (MacIntyre 1988, p. 387) so that we might be able to judge whether such an idiom and conceptual scheme can indeed be translated into our own. As MacIntyre points out, “The thought which modernity, whether conservative or radical, rejects is that there may be traditional modes of social, cultural, and intellectual life which are as such inaccessible to it and to its translators” (MacIntyre 1988, p. 387). Moreover, in attempting to seriously engage with such an Other through an effort to learn its idiom as a second first language we might discover that our own tradition lacks resources for addressing certain problems internal to it, resources that might only be provided by the as yet alien tradition encountered. As MacIntyre argues, “Only those whose tradition allows for the possibility of its hegemony being put in question can have rational warrant for asserting such a hegemony. And only those traditions whose adherents recognize the possibility of untranslatability into their own language-in-use are able to reckon adequately with that possibility” (ibid., p. 388). In setting the terms of debate in the way she does, Uribe rules out the possibility of fundamentally calling into question the dominant, modern social, cultural and economic model. As MacIntyre argues, liberal theories as embodied in the political systems of modern societies provide few possibilities for putting liberalism itself to the
question (ibid., p. 392). Uribe’s application of Habermasian theory is thus highly problematic as a framework for conflict resolution and coexistence.

**Law, morality and culture**

An alternative to the Habermasian model of rationally grounding political coexistence is provided by neo-Hobbesian accounts of morality and law. Former mayor of Bogotá and university professor Antanas Mockus has addressed the problem of coexistence with fellow academic Jimmy Corzo. In their paper “Dos Caras de la Convivencia. Cumplir Acuerdos y Normas y no Usar ni Sufrir la Violencia” (2003) (“Two Faces of Coexistence. Respecting Agreements and Norms and Not Using or Suffering Violence”) Mockus and Corzo draw conclusions from an extensive study conducted in Bogotá amongst a representative sample of Bogotá’s youth population. They argue that the problem of coexistence in Colombia lies in the divorce between law, morality and culture. The ideal for coexistence is that there be a harmony between these three:

The harmony between law, morality and culture can be defined with precision as the conjunction of (1) the moral and cultural disapproval of illegal conduct, (2) moral and cultural approval of legal obligations, and (3) cultural and moral pluralism. (Mockus and Corzo 2003, p. 4)

The authors add that the harmony between points (1) and (2) does not mean there is an identification between law, morality and culture, which would be “fundamentalism” and therefore incompatible with moral and cultural
“pluralism”. In their view, “general subjection to the law is precisely the basis of pluralist guarantees” (ibid., p. 4). After analysing their empirical data Mockus and Corzo defined five “indicators” of coexistence: agreements, anomie, aversion to norms, pluralism, and omission (acuerdos, anomia, aversión a normas, pluralismo y descuido). They then classified individuals into groups in relation to their attitudes to law, morality and culture and their associated competences in the following way: committed, semi-committed, and anomic (cumplidos, cuasi-cumplidos, anomicos). Their principal conclusion is that,

In sum, coexistence would be characterized by the capacity to make and to keep agreements; the absence of anomie, that is, respect for the law...; unconditional obedience to the law, a desire to adhere to norms, and optimism about the law in Colombia, perceiving it as a guarantor of rights; tolerance of people with different moral views or cultures; a like of norms including legal ones, accompanied by a respect for agreements. (Mockus and Corzo 2003, p. 9- italics in original; my underlining.)

However, there are various problems with this conclusion that derive from their general philosophical assumptions about morality. First, their approach assumes what appears to be a relativist view of morality that Cristina Villegas (2003) argues is prescriptive and not merely descriptive. They define morality as “those informal rules by which individuals govern themselves” (Mockus and Corzo 2003, p. 4). However, this view might actually derive from their empirical studies- as the authors point out, they derived their indicators from an analysis of the data. I suggest that it is more likely that Mockus and Corzo do not so much prescribe relativism in morality as simply describe the dominant liberal
individualist assumptions about morality that are embedded in the dominant forms of social life in modern societies. As they observe, “It could be said that the members of each of the three groups see themselves as radically governed by their conscience. ‘The law is for others but I am guided above all by my conscience’ turns out to be a good summary of the ecology of interactions, alliances and justifications espoused. The committed, semi-committed and the anomic share the characteristic of being guided by their conscience” (Mockus and Corzo 2003, p. 15). This does not necessarily imply a relativist conception of morality (although it could lead that way with added qualifications or conditions) but it does indicate the problem for coexistence. If individuals govern themselves by their own chosen moral criteria then how can a shared set of criteria for coexistence be agreed upon? The implication is that this cannot be done on the basis of morality, so a different basis for coexistence is required. The answer for Mockus and Corzo lies in submission to law. However, this has clear authoritarian implications and does not address the philosophical question of how the law itself can claim legitimacy if not on the basis of moral principles. It also assumes the current, contestable moral-political framework of society. Citizens are effectively told they have to conform to the implicit conception of the good embodied within the law and the taken for granted political-economic institutions that are implicit in this account of coexistence. Mockus and Corzo also leave no room for any notion of legitimate dissent despite their caveats about moral pluralism.

Further, Cristina Villegas suggests that Mockus and Corzo suppose that individuals are moved to obey the law by the threat of external sanctions rather than through internal regulation, which Villegas argues ignores the sense of autonomy as an achievement of human beings. However, the sense of
autonomy as an achievement of human beings is arguably very different to the modern notion of autonomy as the ability to arbitrarily choose by what moral principles one will be bound (MacIntyre 1958-59). It is this concept of autonomy that arguably appears in Mockus and Corzo’s data. I suggest that Mockus and Corzo acknowledge this autonomy of individuals in respect of morality but that they simply see no other way of resolving the problem of finding a rational, authoritative basis for consensus other than their Hobbesian-like appeal to law. If Mockus and Corzo are also working with the assumptions of modern, liberal morality it is understandable they should reach such a conclusion. Thus Mockus and Corzo’s approach and solution simply does not work and points to the deeper problem of finding a rational moral basis for consensus and coexistence given the moral fragmentation and atomism (what they perhaps mean by the term “pluralism”) and individualism they diagnose/assume.

In contrast, Cristina Villegas sees the solution in uncovering an impersonal, universal moral basis for adherence to law that in her view is necessary for social cohesion. She concludes her criticism of Mockus and Corzo’s approach with the claim that “what should be promoted is moral development in order to achieve obedience to the law” (Villegas 2003, p. 86.) Yet this still begs the question in relation to the justification of the law and appears to assume that the aim of moral development is to get people to conform to the law rather than to develop the capacity to rationally critique and evaluate it.

Villegas points out that on a Kohlbergian interpretation of Mockus and Corzo’s own data it is the most educated (i.e. the most socially privileged in
Colombia) who are the most morally competent. However, this is a highly questionable and abstract conception of morality and moral development that is also problematic as a basis for coexistence and an ethical politics. Firstly, the fact that Colombian elites, i.e. some of the most educated sectors of Colombian society, are responsible for heinous human rights abuses (see Guzmán et al. 2005; Restrepo 2001; López 2005) seriously calls into question the notion that education and abstract reasoning abilities lead to morally more advanced people. Secondly, the abstract conception of moral development implies a ghost-like account of moral agency that also rests on a problematic notion of choice that appears deeply arbitrary. Moral agency is understood as a set of abstract, formal reasoning competences divorced from social and historical presuppositions and commitments (see MacIntyre 1982). Thirdly, it does not address the political problem of the legitimacy of the state (or the law) and the question of rationally deciding which of the rival moral standpoints in Colombia to adopt or, instead, of how to find an “alchemy” or minimum consensus from a distillation of these multiple normative frameworks. The Kohlbergian idea of morality and moral development defended by Villegas also assumes that the problem of deducing valid norms for coexistence can be stated independently of any social structure (see MacIntyre 2002, p. 93). But the kind of moral education aimed specifically at the problem of political ethics and coexistence envisaged by Villegas and others necessarily implies some evaluative stance towards the social and political structure in which such education occurs. Further, as Michael Gross points out, so-called principled, post-conventional reasoners can be found in radically opposed political and

20 Lawrence Kohlberg developed a six stage theory of moral development in individuals in which the different stages give way to and are a pre-requisite of reaching the next stage. See Kohlberg 1983. Kohlberg’s model has been criticised most famously by Carol Gilligan (1982).
religious groups, which reveals the problem of finding an authoritative, impersonal and rationally supportable, shared moral basis for regulating coexistence (Gross 1997, p. 79).

A new social contract

Some analysts and philosophers have turned to the idea of the social contract as a theoretical framework for addressing the problem of conflict, resistance and coexistence in Colombia. Peace activist and theorist Luis Sandoval observes:

The logical consequence of recognizing that Colombia still lives in or has regressed to a state of nature...is a further recognition: the inescapable necessity of a new social and political pact that will only be possible on the basis of the recreation or radical change of politics. Colombia needs a renewed application of modern contractualism that is the political form that processes of reconciliation take in fragmented societies. (Sandoval 2004, p. 42)

Sandoval implicitly points to Thomas Hobbes’ theory of the social contract, which is built on Hobbes’ questionable concept of human nature. Yet Sandoval’s own writings on the need for a new “ethical-political subject” to transform Colombian politics and society would appear to assume Rousseau’s much less negative and more subtle account of human nature (Sandoval 1998, p. 71ff.). Sandoval’s vision of how a new ethical-political subject can effect social transformation in Colombia is, in my view, correct in emphasizing its processual, incremental nature, but problematic in terms of its implicit account
of motivation and the issue of generating rational consensus on the basis of this social project. Sandoval’s theory of social change is important for emphasizing the centrality of the ethical dimension and especially its focus on the ethical subject, the unity of means and ends, and the fact that social and political institutions are comprised of individual human agents. As Sandoval puts it, “In terms of the development of the ethical-political subject, whose identity is constructed as it grows, the idea is that what is today a small nucleus of people will conquer spaces in the associations of civil society, then in the political arena and, eventually, will gain positions inside state institutions and could then come to direct them” (Sandoval 1998, p. 76). Sandoval warns that “in the state lies its maximum possibility but also its maximum risk” (ibid., p. 76) although he doesn’t specify what this risk is. As we have seen, for MacIntyre the danger of the state is that it has its own, compartmentalized and manipulative normative framework that is resistant to and subversive of alternative, more coherent normative frameworks. Sandoval rightly observes that discourse alone is not enough to turn competitors and individuals with rival interests into friends and colleagues with common goals- “the invitation to dream together is not enough to change things”- but then goes on to argue that what is required is a minimalist approach “capable of generating the widest possible movement for transformation and change in the history of Colombia” (Sandoval 1998, p. 77).

The weakness of Sandoval’s approach ultimately lies in its liberal philosophical assumptions. Despite the insight that social actors have to be “coherent and consequent with what they propose” (ibid., p. 75) and need to align their practice with their ethical enunciations, the philosophical problem remains of how to rationally justify and agree on such proposals and ethical
pronouncements, and on what basis people are to enter into the agreement to work towards the very broadly defined goal of social change. The problem is that Sandoval ultimately adheres to a typically modern conception of morality and moral agency as insulated from any connection to shared social practices that alone can provide rational coherence to moral rules (on a MacIntyrean view). The broad vision of social change cannot itself generate an ethics to guide the transition—any vision articulated from the perspective of abstract liberal ethics must necessarily suffer from the normative fragmentation of modern morality; and the ethics proposed to orientate the transition must equally lack rational justification and coherence. In Sandoval's view, “To sustain an ethical project is to create for oneself the demand to act ethically, which constitutes the best argument to convince others and attract new elements to the ranks of those who promote it” (ibid., p. 75). This implies the classic modern account of moral agency stemming from Kant and passing through Kierkegaard and Sartre (see MacIntyre 1982). The problem is the arbitrariness of the choice involved in giving to oneself the moral rules by which oneself is to be bound (MacIntyre 1958-59, p. 92). As MacIntyre points out, a fundamental characteristic of moral rules is that they are impersonal, gaining their authority over us through their objectivity and distance from our own choices. This understanding is shared by liberal moral philosophers like Kant and Mill. However, as MacIntyre demonstrates, in modern liberal moral philosophy, moral rules and moral agency then became divorced from any substantive, teleological conception of the good, of any account of essential human need, which was a significant step towards the notion of arbitrary, free-floating moral rules. This, so MacIntyre argues, has led to the decay of moral
reasoning (MacIntyre 1983, p. 590) and eroded our comprehension of moral argument and morality.

The problem for seeking ethical social change is, then, that the abstract general vision of “social justice”, “peace”, “human rights”, etc. that is part of Colombian civil society’s and the peace movement’s vision cannot engender socially shared ethical standards for evaluation of ends and means. We have the vision(s) but we lack the comprehension of morality to enable us to reach agreements on strategy, settle internal differences, and rationally convince others, which is not peripheral to the goal of social change but central to its being ethical, rational and sustainable. The progressive goals and visions of civil society are accompanied by a variety of contradictory moral standpoints in relation to personal choices and strategies for social change- for example, in relation to the use of violence as a means to social change there is widespread disagreement, as well as in relation to working with the state in its programmes of “reparation and reconciliation”, amongst other issues. Sandoval’s own invocation of a non-violent ethic is, moreover, in terms of the modern moral disorder, an arbitrary preference that despite possibly being justified on many grounds is nonetheless no more ethically justified than alternative strategies precisely because of the failure of rational moral argument and consensus.

Further, and as a result of this, the broad vision of social change is inevitably comprised of an aggregate of individual visions and conceptions of its constituent terms- i.e. what justice means in the term “social justice”, what human rights mean and imply, what peace entails, etc. Sandoval’s list of desired attributes, virtues and concerns/goals that are required by the initial nucleus of people suffers from this fragmentation and arbitrariness (see Sandoval 1998, pp. 77-78), which is related to the problem of the lack of
shared criteria for interpreting these attributes, virtues and concerns/goals. Despite the essential insight that the ethical question and the problem of ultimately generating some shared ethical basis for social change has to be central, his theory of social change suffers from the incoherence of its moral philosophical assumptions. The minimalist civic ethics approach that Sandoval ultimately calls for is inadequate to the problem because of its assumptions about moral agency as essentially a question of finding acceptable limits to one’s pre-given interests. As Barragán et al. point out in an empirical study on coexistence, in the logic of what they call the “postmodern” society “the common good is interpreted as the limit that individuals and groups must confront in the pursuit of their legitimate interests” (Barragán et al. 2007, p. 39). This expresses well the modern liberal conception- the common good is merely a limit to individual interests; it is something individuals “confront”, not something that might be constitutive of their own good.

Sandoval also implicitly signals the problem for the state and the state-building approach built on Hobbesian justification when he points out that “none of the armed actors of political violence has sufficient legitimacy...Legitimacy emerges from an unequivocal manifestation of the popular will” (Sandoval 1998, p. 29). Therefore, I argue, this also has to hold for the state, which is a principal actor in the political violence that afflicts Colombian society. However, the mere fact that a majority might happen to support the state does not, at least on a MacIntyrean view, entail its moral or political legitimacy. As rational moral argument has broken down, the justification of the current state-building project based on very high approval ratings is ultimately emotivistic, a manifestation of irrational manipulation and successful power, not rational, reasoned argument. Other Hobbesian
approaches attempt to address this problem but ultimately fail to provide a compelling, rational justification for viewing the state-building project in these terms.

Political philosopher Fabio Giraldo (2008) suggests that Hobbesian theory is relevant to the contemporary Colombian crisis in which rival powers, sovereignties and authorities abound that attempt to impose their interests through force. For Giraldo, the merit of Hobbesian theory is its notion of an overarching power that all others agree to submit to and which can therefore render social and political life susceptible to predictability and order that can facilitate coexistence. However, the problem with the Hobbesian argument from a MacIntyrean standpoint is its incoherence. The Hobbesian contract is the foundation of social life in the sense that prior to the contract there are no shared rules or standards; the story of the contract offers an account of how individuals come to share social norms. The problem is that in order for the notion of a contract to be cogent it requires, and presupposes, a pre-existing set of standards and criteria by which the contract can be understood to be binding. Without such standards and criteria there can be nothing that can be correctly called a contract. As MacIntyre points out, “There could perhaps be expressions of intention; but in a Hobbesian state of nature there would be every reason to suspect that these were designed to mislead. The only available standards for interpreting the utterances of others would prevent any conception of agreement” (MacIntyre 2002, p. 132). The expressions of intention of advocates of the state and its agencies in the Colombian context are certainly understood by many as designed to mislead, to dupe people into thinking that it will honour its duties to citizens by defending and enforcing rights. Further, as Giraldo points out, the alleged voluntary assent to the “social
contract” ostensibly offered by the current Uribe administration is, within the reigning ideology, based on elections and public opinion. The manipulation of public opinion by the mass media, compartmentalization, social atomization, and the increasing bureaucratization of the state militate against the possibility of rationally formed views, opinions and moral standpoints (Habermas 1974; MacIntyre 2006c; Marcuse 1964). The significant surges of social protest in 2008 by victims of state terror, indigenous movements, trade unions, teachers, landless peasants, and even the entire judiciary against the current government also clearly call into question its legitimacy and therefore the notion that Colombian society has entered into a valid social contract with the state that can command assent to its state-building project.

Colombian law professor Iván Orozco (2005) has also turned to Hobbes as a framework for addressing the problem of the state and coexistence. However, Orozco’s argument highlights the problem of rationally justifying and adjudicating between different moral frameworks and conceptions of the basis for coexistence. He writes,

To say, for example, that Colombia finds itself...in certain respects in the early stages of modernity in regards to the process of state construction, and that therefore the democratic security policy of the Uribe administration must be understood as a policy of affirming interior sovereignty, is only [seen as] acceptable if tolerance towards impunity is not a normative implication derived from it. Those from the periphery and the semi-periphery, but above all those within internecine internal wars who remind the morally more advanced inhabitants of the humanitarian postmodernity that in Europe and in the centre more generally, throughout various centuries, the Leviathan was built with fire
and brimstone without much of a glance towards the common people, and points out the difficulties that this entails for the construction (upon the footprints of colonialism) of a nation state in other latitudes, tends to be stigmatized as an accomplice of tyrants and war criminals that certainly abound in the banana, coffee and coca republics. (Orozco 2005, p. 289)

Clearly, Orozco adopts a particular and highly questionable moral standpoint in relation to politics and the conditions for coexistence. A contrasting moral standpoint in respect of these issues is represented by the Colombian human rights movement “Nunca Más”. Orozco criticizes this organization for making too many demands in relation to standards of transitional justice, which he argues need to be more “flexible” and lenient, less about retributive justice and oriented more towards “reconciliation”. These demands are seen to be related to the “moral epistemology” of Nunca Más which, according to Orozco, “is burdened with the platonic idea that moral principles are atemporal “essences” that we “discover”...and not contingent historical constructions” (Orozco 2005, p. 285). This is deemed to be “an error that can have grave implications for a country like Colombia, which may make impossible in the short term, or at least too costly, the transition to peace and towards the re-liberalization of democracy” (ibid., p. 285). But we may legitimately ask then: What is the status of Orozco’s own moral appeal? Moreover, if morality is no more than a series of contingent historical constructions then we can of course simply construct a set of moral principles to justify any political project. The notion of morality as setting limits to political or any other human activity then becomes unintelligible. In which case, why continue to use the impersonal idiom of morality? Perhaps Orozco means that moral principles are agreed upon and
gain authority over us only insofar as they are “constructed” through intersubjective debate. However, this Rortyean conception of morality (Rorty 1994) would appear to mean that as long as a set of moral principles for political policies are formulated on the basis of intersubjective agreement, then any political outcome is moral, which is counterintuitive to say the least and, of course, deeply troubling. Further, Orozco problematises the universality of human rights (and their validity for the Colombian situation) whilst accepting the normative validity of the European process of state-building, which was hugely violent, as Orozco himself acknowledges (although this need not mean having to commit the “errors” of this process). But on what moral basis does Orozco question the demands of human rights in relation to transitional justice and accept the idea of an absolutist state that disregards these? Orozco’s position simply reveals the arbitrariness of modern morality and moral philosophy and highlights the problem of finding a rationally supportable ethical basis for coexistence in Colombia.

Philosopher Oscar Mejía (2008) also suggests the need for a new social contract but in a different, non-Hobbesian register. As Mejía observes, Colombia has

a complex totality of collective subjects from that mortally wounded traditional society, with divergent cultural, social and political symbols, values and traditions, and a panorama of incompatible practical rationalities that do not find in formal law nor in our particular form of liberal democracy the instrument for conciliation and post-conventional integration that is necessary to re-establish the disintegrated social links and to lay the foundations for a symmetrical participatory democracy in which every one has the same
opportunities, possibilities to intervene and, on the basis of such conditions, can propose a new, wider and more plural social contract. (Mejía 2008, pp. 85-86)

The “dilemma”, as Mejía puts it, is the issue of constructing consensus. In their study “Élites, Eticidades y Constitución en Colombia” (“Elites, Ethicities and Constitution in Colombia) Mejia et al. (2004) attempt to address this problem, arguing that the 1991 Constitution was ultimately a hegemonic project of Colombian elites with some opening for alternative, non-traditional sectors such as the M-19 guerrilla group. As they put it, “in 1991 Colombia’s elites once again (but this time through the imposition of the neoliberal development model) were able to institutionalize deception and disguise their historic hegemonic domination in the seductive trappings of a Social State of Law and a participatory democracy” (Mejia et al. 2004, p. 7). Thirteen years later, in 2004, it was obvious, Mejía et al. observe, that the Constitution had failed to consolidate the conditions for the possibility of national reconciliation and for the respect of fundamental rights. They argue that a new constituent process is required to bridge the chasm between institutions and what they refer to as “eticidades”, which appears to denote the ethical principles and positions of different sectors of Colombian society such as indigenous groups, women’s organizations, students, etc. This process would have to be based on “a logic of consensus rather than a logic of negotiation” (ibid., p. 7). The principal problem of Colombian political culture is described in the following way:
the difficulty of finding points of encounter between the diverse, substantive ethicities on the foundations of democracy and deliberation. Amongst these difficulties are the problems of reaching consensus in a fragmented society like Colombia, the crisis of legitimacy derived from the failure to enact the promises made in the 1991 Constitution, and the lack of a civic culture which, grounded on the respect for the other as an equal interlocutor, promotes the bases for social solidarity and democratic participation. (Ibid., p. 8)

Mejía et al. highlight the legitimacy crisis of Colombian institutions as fundamental and signal the importance of recovering the concept of “ethnicity” and its role in the construction of politics and its institutions. The solution they propose is for these institutions to find resonance and support “in the values of the community that give it shape” (ibid., p. 84). Yet an element of incoherence appears due to their particular construal of the term “ethnicity” and its difference from the term community. For example, in their “map” of Colombia’s multiple “ethnicities” Mejía et al. run through a list that includes ethnic peoples, trade unions, students, women’s movements, guerrillas, and paramilitaries. However, it is questionable to say that these different groups and movements constitute substantive “ethnicities” or moral communities. Whereas some, such as indigenous communities, can correctly be deemed to be substantive moral communities or ethicities, others like students or the paramilitaries can hardly be said to constitute a moral community or even organizations with a substantive moral interest. They might of course make moral claims or dress their interests up in moral language, but this is very different to being a moral community or “ethnicity” proper, which on a MacIntyrean view must be based on social practices, a shared conception of the good, and a rejection of the
“modern ethos” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. x). This has implications for Mejía et al.’s notion that political legitimacy can be restored by state institutions finding normative resonance and justification within the terms of particular communities, and vice versa. For these different interest groups are not such communities and, moreover, what resonance has been found between these interest groups and Colombia’s political institutions has been firmly based on the logic of aggregated individual interests under capitalist normativity (cf. Pearce 1998).  

On MacIntyre’s view this is inevitable. Hence the conundrum of consensus that Mejía et al. pose cannot be solved with the philosophical resources they propose. Their proposal is very much along the lines of the Habermasian notion of open, participatory dialogue and deliberation in which some minimum consensus can be reached that is more than the mere aggregation of what these different sectors want. Yet, as I suggested above in the case of María Teresa Uribe’s proposal, the philosophical assumptions of such an approach cannot address the issue of radical disagreement or the fact of incommensurable standpoints. As Mejía et al. point out, Colombia’s ethical and political terrain is populated not merely by rival interests but rival forms of practical rationality. In this case, so I argue, the kind of philosophy needed to understand the problem and begin to envisage a way forward is not Habermasian but MacIntyrean. The fact of rival practical rationalities implies rival and perhaps incommensurable ways of life and social practice (see MacIntyre 1998c, p. 238), which makes the possibility of constructing a wider political consensus problematic.

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21 Some of these groups have found a greater degree of resonance with the state than others, for example the paramilitaries- see Hylton 2006, p. 135.
As Mejía et al. put it, “The important challenge imposed by a system that recognizes diverse ethicities is how the different particularities converge into a universal political consensus, or how to ensure that such a universal political consensus does not destroy these social particularities” (Mejía et al. 2004, p. 74). The confusion is evident in the elision of “ethicities” with social particularities. If the paramilitaries are an ethnicity then it is surely the case that a universal political consensus has to exclude them inasmuch as their project and the values that underpin it are destructive of the common good. It is perhaps the underlying liberal, Habermasian assumptions that lead to this apparent confusion. The construction of what Mejía et al. call a “democratic ethnicity” is seen to require the contribution and inclusion of everyone. However, not only is this to bestow questionable legitimacy on particular social actors responsible for gross human rights and other moral abuses, but it is far from clear how a rational consensus can emerge through the unconstrained participation of everybody (cf. MacIntyre 2006e, p. 215) amidst the ethical-political cacophony and confusion of Colombian society that the authors diagnose.

This implicit urging of tolerance is perhaps understandable in the Colombian context, but if it is not understood within the terms of an appropriate philosophical theory and practice it can only, I argue, lead to the continued manipulation and imposition of those with more power. For example, Francisco de Roux’s notion of constructing a region that is “open to all projects”22 (de Roux 2007) implicitly cedes too much to the liberal restriction on evaluating substantive conceptions of the good but at the same time inadvertently allows

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22 Father Francisco de Roux is the director of the Peace Laboratory project in the Magdalena Medio region, which is historically one of the most violent and conflictual areas of the country.
the covert imposition of particular such conceptions over others in the guise of formal, “equal” participation and “dialogue” in the name of tolerance and democratic participation.

Mejía et al. point to the need to establish “social integration” and “networks of communication” in which “affective links” can be built between people, which stems from their recognition of the communitarian critique of liberalism. But their advocacy of Albrecht Wellmer’s attempt to link communitarian and liberal theory takes the strong points of both and cancels them out by the incoherence their attempted amalgamation leads to. They want to “narrow the breach between ethos and institutions through the cultivation of a democratic ethic” (Mejía et al. 2004, p. 84), which in their view constitutes the conjoining of communitarian and liberal theory. However, from a MacIntyrean standpoint this cannot be rationally achieved on any liberal assumptions (or on communitarian assumptions- MacIntyre has explicitly criticized and distanced himself from communitarianism on a number of grounds) because of the normative nature of modern state institutions and the clash between these and the conditions for rational moral-political enquiry that MacIntyre sees available only in local communities. The communitarian requirement that the norms of justice and the grounds of democratic society and political institutions have to be devised with reference to substantive conceptions of the good clashes with the liberal requirement that these conceptions of the good have to be ruled out of such foundational discussion and the realm of public political dialogue. Therefore, I argue that the construction of an ethical democratic culture (which is arguably different to a “democratic ethic”) cannot proceed on the theoretical basis of a union between communitarian and liberal theory. What is required, as MacIntyre
argues, is the emergence of theory from practice, but a practice that sets itself against the incoherence and confusion of dominant political practice that is the counterpart to the incoherence of liberal moral theory (MacIntyre 1990a, 1998b). The attempt to reconcile the communitarian motivation with liberalism is what implicitly underlies most of the above approaches, which arguably springs from an implicit recognition of the inadequacies of both taken in isolation. However, their conjunction simply compounds their separate weaknesses. Thus the fundamental problem of consensus that Mejia et al. highlight cannot be resolved with these philosophical-theoretical resources.

The conjunction of communitarianism and liberalism is also evident in Adela Cortina’s work (Cortina 2001, 2002). Cortina is one of the principal exponents of the “ethics of minimums” approach that attempts to address the need for a wider, “universal” political consensus in democratic societies in which rival substantive conceptions of the good abound; what Cortina refers to as “ethics of maximums” (Cortina 2002). In Colombia her work is referred to by Guillermo Hoyos (2008), John Manuel Peña (1996- who argues that Cortina’s ethics of minimums framework can serve as the foundation for morals and politics in Colombian society) and Ángela Uribe (2002), amongst others. Despite Cortina’s nuanced approach, which shows an appreciation of the communitarian critique of liberalism, it is susceptible to most if not all of the criticisms of the liberal philosophical assumptions of the above schemes. For Cortina, autonomy is seen to be the defining element of morality, which is understood as the ability to choose one’s own moral criteria and/or to be free of the particular desires of corporeality and social life (see Cortina 2001, p. 34; Peña 1996, p. 69). This autonomy is seen as being constructed socially but it still leaves a strangely ephemeral character to moral agency and the moral life.
Because on Cortina’s view the core of shared morality cannot be anything deriving from substantive human goals and desires, the discussion on social norms, the politics of such an ethics, is effectively empty. We can dialogue with others intersubjectively but only on the most minimal presuppositions. The conception of the public political realm is as ghost-like as the account of moral agency underlying it (see MacIntyre 1982). The real substance of political discussion and dialogue is missing.

However, Cortina’s starting point is of course a liberal starting point. In other words, it is not and cannot be neutral. Cortina’s explicit defence of a moderated form of capitalism testifies to this. Capitalism assumes a particular view of human nature, the self and its relationship to moral norms that factors in to liberal justifications for it and for liberalism as the most appropriate form of politics and morality. In other words, the liberal theory that Cortina defends turns out to be another form of moral tradition with its own particular accounts of practical rationality and the good. As we have seen, this is one of MacIntyre’s many arguments against liberalism.

A different argument against liberal theory is that its conception of a shared rationality and minimal moral consensus both masks the fact of deeper conflict- i.e. it has an ideological function- and lacks the resources and necessary purchase to adequately address the serious moral-political issues of complex modern societies (MacIntyre 1990a). Even if the alleged shared minimal intersubjective consensus in modern societies existed, as Cortina claims it does (Cortina 2001, p. 264), it would, according to MacIntyre, be incapable of giving proper consideration to weighty moral issues and of formulating determinate moral norms. This is brought out clearly in the moral debate on euthanasia. Cortina asserts that only on the basis of a shared ethics
of minimums that prioritizes justice/right over the good can the challenge of euthanasia and other such moral issues be rationally addressed (Cortina 2002, p. 48). Yet on a topic as profound as euthanasia it seems difficult to imagine reaching a consensus based on the kind of minimal ethical presuppositions that Cortina says are needed to regulate substantive moralities. Further, to ask those within such moral traditions to put aside their substantive conceptions of the good is to ask them to stop being moral agents: for such traditions euthanasia cannot simply be treated as a matter of justice (i.e. of the right as divorced from the good) because it is ultimately about the meaning of life and the good (MacIntyre 1990a). Those within such moral traditions understand rules about the prohibition of euthanasia as part of a more complex structure that gives point and purpose to those rules. This is what undermines Cortina’s attempt to have it both ways in terms of seeing substantive moralities as necessarily open to public debate and scrutiny whilst at the same time limiting these in the name of an unspecified set of precepts that make up the shared minimal public morality Cortina claims exists in modern Western liberal societies (Cortina 2002, pp. 50-51, 55). In reality the liberal priority of the right over the good that constitutes the ethics of minimums sets the terms of debate in favour of one particular way of conceiving moral argument and moral concern, i.e. in terms of divorcing them from deeper, more complex accounts of the good and therefore also in terms of equal “interests” that have to bargain with other interests.

The further problem remains of discovering what the basic norms of the ethics of minimums are. On Cortina’s view these norms cannot be derived from conceptions of the good, although she asserts that in fact these norms will be supportable from within such conceptions. Yet as MacIntyre points out,
there is widespread dissensus amongst liberal theorists on the basic precepts of a liberal moral framework (MacIntyre 1990a). In part this dissensus is related to the appeal to different moral concepts such as utility, rights, and duty that have been torn from their original teleological social-moral contexts and put to use to solve the problems of morality that since the Enlightenment has been conceived as an ahistorical, purely formal domain. Moral theory as much as contemporary everyday moral argument oscillates between these concepts. Cortina's own defence of an ethics of minimums eclectically appeals to a melange of moral concepts such as autonomy, community, communitarianism, post-conventional, common good, human rights, and applied ethics, and therefore oscillates between the different concepts and conceptions of morality and practical rationality that are characteristic of what MacIntyre diagnoses as the incoherent, fragmented and contradictory conception and practice of modern morality (see Cortina 2001).

Further, both Cortina's and Guillermo Hoyos' ethics end up as a defence of business ethics and "corporate social responsibility", which Hoyos elides with the discourse of human rights. In Hoyos' view, "Today the discourse on human rights from the perspective of civil society tends to be articulated in terms of corporate social responsibility" (Hoyos 2008, p. 165). It would be more accurate to say that this is just one particular way of using and interpreting the discourse of human rights by some particular sectors of civil society. Hence what this also points to is the fragmented and confused moral discourse of civil society in which discourses on human rights, democracy, and social justice are highly contestable and framed in often radically different ways. Cortina's advocacy of applied ethics as constituting the basis of a general citizen ethics does not address this problem, indeed is part of this
problem, and leaves the fundamental assumptions of the capitalist world order in place under a charter of different ethical conventions that apply to different spheres of life—ecological, biological, legal, and political (see Cortina 2002, pp. 115-116).

Social contact, not social contract? An “ethics of encounter.”

Philosophers Raúl López (2005), Alfredo Gómez-Müller (2008) and Sergio de Zubiría (1998) take a different approach to the ethical problem of coexistence, critiquing the formal, rationalistic ethical theories associated with Habermas and the ethics of minimums and arguing for an ethics that is more rooted in Colombia’s local and regional cultures.

In his book, La Respuesta Ética: Una Necesidad Impostergable (The Ethical Response: An Urgent Necessity), Raúl López takes a critical view of the modernization process in Colombia, and in contrast to María Teresa Uribe he challenges the idea of deepening this process as part of the solution. For López,

modernity did not embed itself amongst us in a peaceful way but rather forcefully integrated the multiple cultural expressions and diversity of beliefs into instrumental utilitarian rationality, causing the dissolution of various forms of production, ways of life and sensibilities; imposing at one and the same time a market economy and certain cultural values whose supreme expression is money, progress and capital accumulation. Inoculated in this way, the destructive virus will thus make it impossible to prepare the ground for an ethical approach. (López 2005, p. 44)
López argues that whilst modernity brought certain gains and liberations it also provided aspirations and hopes that were either impossible to realize or were themselves dangerous- e.g. the emphasis on monetary wealth and “progress”. This, argues López, is what detonated particular forms of “cultural violence”.

In places López’s approach is distinctly Aristotelian and it is partly from this perspective that he explicitly criticizes the Hobbesian theory of human nature and society that in his view underlies the capitalist worldview and its ethical justification. Discussing the emergence of credit in the 18th century, López observes how “the defenders of commercial society, in admitting the identification between financial credit and public confidence, will come to accept as a primary source of conduct the Hobbesian presuppositions of natural man” (ibid., p. 70). López narrates how in this scheme ethics and politics come to be sharply differentiated in the sense that politics does not concern itself with normatively evaluating the economic sphere; this takes on an ideological dimension when the dominant economic behaviour of profit-seeking is assumed to be the first principle of political life. The philosophical divorce between ethics and politics marks the unconscious rationalization of a particular mode of socio-economic life. In contrast, the Aristotelian conception of politics assumes its integration with ethics, which is to say the economic sphere comes under the normative scrutiny of collective decision-making that shares a conception of the good life in terms of a life lived well, rather than one simply lived in pursuit of material gain. As López points out, the virtues of character associated with this kind of integrated ethical-political life no longer have application once that relation and framework are broken. Thus, “This displacement of virtue to the interiority of the individual marks an interesting rupture between the public and the private. Ethics is converted into a private
affair, interiorized, reduced to a form of honour in exchanges or in interpersonal relations, leaving the public realm unprotected" (ibid., p. 70).

López’s proposal is what he calls an ethics of connection and encounter, “a craftsman’s labour that goes in search of new bonds, of all that builds bridges...we therefore need new...networks of connection, of common learning about new forms of life and civilization: here is the ethical and political task!” (ibid., p. 208). Like Sandoval, López stresses the importance of developing a new ethical-political subject (ibid., p. 212 ff.) but his diagnosis of the problem and his Aristotelian conception of the integral link between ethics and practice, and between ethics and politics, bring him closer to a MacIntyrean approach. López critically charts a path between the abstract, arbitrary autonomy of liberalism and the equally abstract collective identities of cultural nationalisms, religious fundamentalisms, political ideologies, hegemonic parties, and totalitarianisms. For López, the defining characteristics of an ethics of encounter are autonomy and responsibility; the individual is not subsumed into his or her culture and community, but their autonomy is only realized through such communal, concrete social forms. The ethical-political self discovers its ethical horizons and precepts through engagement with others in particular forms of life. As López puts it, “On assuming this condition of an ethico-political subject the individual opens herself onto the historical moment’s horizon that demands that she constitute herself as a concrete subject” (ibid., p. 213). In López's view, this concrete ethical-political subject stands in stark contrast to the denuded, merely economic subject of neoliberalism and is less vulnerable to control and domestication by the dominant forms of power in society (ibid., p. 216), which has strong resonances with MacIntyre's perspective.
López argues that what is needed is the “political will” to achieve the “fundamental structural transformations” required in Colombia. Then “we would achieve the considerable advance towards the actualization of an ethics that respects human rights” (ibid., p. 235). But if ethical consciousness in Colombia has been structured by the anti-ethics of capitalism and its Hobbesian presuppositions (especially, as López points out, amongst the political elites) whence is the political will for such radical change to emerge? López then lapses into the dominant idiom of the individualism he has so cogently criticized, contradicting his earlier subtle charting of the required ethical path between autonomy and concrete social practice: “From what I have said above we can deduce an immediate task: to recover the ethical dignity of every human being that consists in each one of us, from our inner depths, governing our own existence and deciding what our individual good is that we are prepared to follow” (ibid., p. 235). As an aside I suggest this apparent inconsistency and contradiction is related to MacIntyre’s overall diagnosis: the fragmentation of morality and moral philosophy and the liberal view that morality names a unified, if complex, domain means that modern moral philosophers see no theoretical problem in appealing to a range of moral concepts and arguments drawn from an array of thinkers and frameworks in order to conduct analyses and construct theories. López’s argument appeals to a wide range of moral philosophers and others who write on ethics (but who are not moral philosophers as such) as well as to a subsequent range of ethical concepts and arguments that are ultimately incompatible; concepts and arguments that are embedded within rival traditions of enquiry with their own accounts of practical rationality, truth, and the good. As MacIntyre has argued, modern moral philosophy conceives morality as a single subject matter in
which all moral philosophers from the classical tradition to modern analytic philosophy are engaged in contributing to understanding (MacIntyre 1991, p. 28). Morality on this conception is essentially a timeless, ahistorical domain of human reasoning and enquiry. Hence López can appeal to Foucault’s conception of ethics as “care of the self”, to Adela Cortina, Hannah Arendt, Richard Rorty and Aristotle in order to develop an argument about the need for an “ethical response” to the Colombian situation. It is not of course only López who makes eclectic use of the resources of rival moral philosophies. Indeed, such eclecticism is to be generally expected if the state of modern moral philosophy is what MacIntyre says it is. Hence, there is an important question mark over the coherence and rational supportability of the constructive theories and arguments philosophers make given the condition of modern moral philosophy and normative enquiry.

Like López, in his book *La Reconstrucción de Colombia* (The Reconstruction of Colombia) Alfredo Gómez-Müller (2008) argues that the imposition of modernity in Colombia accounts for the ethical confusion and fragmentation that underlies the contemporary conflict and social crisis. In MacIntyrean vein, Gómez-Müller shows that the political and moral culture of liberal individualism informed the discourses of both liberals and conservatives as well as the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. In this, Colombia is at one with other modern nations who suffer the “same crisis of being able to affirm in common” (Gómez-Müller 2008, p. 66). However, in Colombia the fact that, as María Teresa Uribe has also pointed out, citizenship as a genuinely universal political link has never really existed meant that alternative forms of social bonds, which either did not exist in Europe or disappeared, have been conserved based on “a diversity of cultural, ethical and religious traditions”
Unlike María Teresa Uribe, however, Gómez-Müller does not view such traditional forms of social and cultural life negatively but as constituting the basis for a recreation of social-political coexistence. “This form of coexistence, which could be designated ethical-concrete coexistence to distinguish it from liberal coexistence, signals something essential that could form the nucleus of a public ethical response to the problem of universal citizenship” (ibid., pp. 66-67). Gómez-Müller is scathing in his criticism of the atomistic liberal individualist model of coexistence that he argues has dominated Colombian political thought and culture for over two hundred years: “The rule of this culture that restricts the affirmation of values to the private sphere has left a worrying vacuum in the public realm, which is regularly exploited by religious and political fundamentalisms of an ultra nationalist and racist kind” (ibid., pp. 65-66). In complete contrast to María Teresa Uribe’s analysis, Gómez-Müller sees precisely the modern, liberal model of coexistence as a fundamental part of the Colombian ethical-political crisis. For Uribe, the inability to “affirm in common” is related to the lack of the generalized and internalized notion of the individual citizen; for Gómez-Müller, this inability resides in the fact that the liberal individualist anthropology and conception of morality has always underlain and informed Colombian politics. In this Gómez-Müller is close to MacIntyre’s arguments about the nature of modern politics and ethics.

Finally, Sergio de Zubiría (1998) argues,

We Colombians will not be able to confront the great challenges of the new century if we do not construct a creative link between law, culture and ethicity. Many of the causes of our collective tragedy can be found in these areas and
in their interrelations. Purely legal frameworks are inadequate. Only a strong although differentiated connection between these dimensions will create the necessary conditions for that longed for peace. (De Zubiría 1998)

Like López and Gómez-Müller, De Zubiría suggests that a renewed ethics has to depart from concrete cultures and communities in which “moral sentiments” are produced. This goes beyond the tendency to rely on purely legal mechanisms as the basis for a rational, ethically grounded coexistence and hints at the importance of moral motivation and character lacking in other approaches. The link between law, culture and morality is understood differently to how Mockus and Corzo understand it and suggests some affinity to a MacIntyrean approach.

Conclusion

This chapter has critiqued literature that addresses the ethical problem in Colombia and which proposes theoretical approaches for resolving the problem of coexistence and the search for an ethical politics. I have shown that the assumptions of most of these approaches are broadly within the paradigm of liberal theory, critiquing them in light of MacIntyre’s standpoint. This critique has centred on five main issues:

- the failure to address radical disagreement
- the lack of attention to motivation and the social mediation of morality
- the problem of arbitrariness
- inadequate accounts of moral agency
- general philosophical incoherence
Nevertheless, some philosophers are critical of liberal theory and suggest affinities with some of MacIntyre’s criticisms and constructive ideas. However, an underlying assumption that I have not brought out sufficiently is the fact that all of the above approaches at least implicitly assume the horizon of modern systematic, state-centred politics, which MacIntyre fundamentally calls into question.

What I have argued is that the problems in moral philosophy and actual morality that MacIntyre diagnoses affect both those who on ethical-theoretical grounds defend or generally assume the given system as well as those who criticize it and attempt to change it. I have also claimed that MacIntyre provides more adequate philosophical resources for conceiving the task of coexistence and constructing an ethical politics. These resources are also important for the social scientific task of analysing the conflict and producing knowledge that can provide the basis for effecting positive transformation of the conflict. As we saw in chapter one, MacIntyre’s diagnosis also profoundly calls into question dominant conceptions of the social sciences, which raises important questions for those of us who seek to analyse conflict whilst also aiming to transform it. In the case of the Colombian conflict, the social sciences are deeply enmeshed in its contestatory dynamics. The next chapter explores this issue and the potentially radical implications for social scientific study of the conflict.
CHAPTER 3

*Social science and the Colombian conflict: a MacIntyrean perspective*

This chapter explores what it means to investigate the moral dimensions of the Colombian crisis and the implications of and for the social scientific study of the conflict in light of MacIntyre’s radical critique. It is necessary to explore the philosophical issues raised by a MacIntyrean perspective on morality, which include the question of the relationship of morality to the social sciences, the implications this has for studying the moral dimensions of the conflict, and the role of social science in analysing, perpetuating, and transforming conflict.

I also argue that MacIntyre’s philosophical project suggests an important research programme for those of us interested both in understanding contemporary intra-societal conflicts *and* seeking to transform them through some agenda of social change. In a MacIntyrean perspective these two agendas are conceptually, theoretically and practically linked. In the case of the Colombian civil war, analyses of the conflict and prescriptions for its amelioration and ultimate resolution are inevitably linked to the first-order social and moral-political conflicts within Colombian society that comprise the overarching conflict and “Colombian crisis”. I suggest MacIntyre’s account of the inherent connections between social science and moral theory illuminates this problem. (MacIntyre 1985a, pp. 77, 82, 84, 116; 1998a; Knight 2007, p. 4ff.)
If social scientific and political study of the conflict is inevitably bound up with normative conceptual schemes, with implicit theories of practical rationality and conceptions of the good, then such study therefore necessarily takes part in the overall conflict and is not neutral. As we saw in chapter one, on MacIntyre’s view moral conflict is interminable under the conditions of modern social structure and modern moral philosophy, and this necessarily affects politics and the social sciences. Because the social sciences have an inescapable normative dimension, which is often implicit and contrary to their aspiration to value neutrality and the separation of facts from values, they must necessarily be affected by MacIntyre’s diagnosis of the state of modern morality and moral theory. The question is how the social sciences can avoid becoming “yet another site of conflict” (González et al. 2002, p. 19) and contribute at the same time to social transformation in Colombia. These problems arise most particularly for those researchers and theorists who seek to understand and make proposals towards the social, moral, political and economic dimensions of conflict transformation and peace. It is the connection between producing social scientific knowledge and making prescriptions or recommendations for public policy that brings to the fore the problematic normative dimension.

Social science, conflict analysis and morality

The inherent normative/moral dimension to social scientific study of the conflict is noted by Mauricio García Durán, head of Colombia’s most prestigious conflict research institute (CINEP). For García, the collaborative efforts of
social scientists, analysts and many other academics from different intellectual schools are not only aimed “at comprehending the diverse and conflictual reality of our country, but above all at finding an adequate response and the strategies of transformation necessary to achieving a just, sustainable and peaceful coexistence amongst us” (García Durán 2008, p. 359). This therefore implies that the social sciences need to connect up with moral philosophy. Yet, as I discuss further on, the social sciences are already inevitably theoretically bound up with moral philosophy, with moral/normative conceptual frameworks that imply theories of practical rationality, explanations of human action, and conceptions of the good.

García notes that more dialogue is required between those who provide analyses of violence and those working to build peace, which points to the problem of linking implicitly normative analysis/theory with the explicitly normative goal of constructing peace. García also highlights the problem of the normative dimensions of social scientific study and analysis of the conflict: “A third challenge for the social sciences in Colombia is to provide a critical account of the principles and normative foundations that underlie the categories and concepts used in analyzing conflict situations and efforts at building peace. The crisis of paradigms overshadowed the relation between our analytic categories and the conditions of social change” (ibid., p. 361). It is necessary to return to that debate, García adds, because “in studies of the conflict the normative horizon that informs some of our analyses is not always clear” (ibid., p. 361). This speaks directly to the philosophical questions that MacIntyre poses in relation to morality and social science.
Social science methodology, so MacIntyre contends, presupposes a particular conceptualization of the social world and its conflicts that is ideological in its effect:

When we have reached the level at which we are engaged in handling social life as a collection of discrete empirical variables, then all the work of interpretation and conceptualization is already behind us. We are already dealing with a fully interpreted world. One conceptualization rather than another is already presupposed. In the world thus understood, the beliefs held by individuals or by groups...may well function as just one more variable factor. But the beliefs, the interpretations, which constitute the ordering of the world to be investigated, which make the available range of variables what it is, these underlying constitutive beliefs, concepts and interpretations will have disappeared from view. With them all too often there will also have disappeared from view argument, conflict, contestability and unpredictability as fundamental phenomena. (MacIntyre 1998a, p. 60)

What conventional social science methodology does, therefore, is covertly take sides in the conflict of rival conceptualizations within what I call the first-order conflicts in a society. That is, it often implicitly takes a normative stance in relation to the dominant social-political structures of society, structures which are in the case of the Colombian conflict strongly contested and resisted. I suggest a similar phenomenon occurs in the analyses of the Colombian conflict by economists like Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, Michael Spagat and Jorge Restrepo (see Collier and Hoeffler 2001; Restrepo and Spagat 2004). They all analyse conflict within the terms of general social science methodology, seeking causal generalizations through statistical
analysis of independent variables that lead to particular policy prescriptions and guides to both public and private decision-making. This is not a merely abstract issue. For example, one team of UK-based conflict analysts recommended continued support for president Uribe’s “democratic security” project based on data about civilian casualties and general conflict dynamics drawn in significant part from CINEP’s database (Restrepo and Spagat 2004; Restrepo, Spagat and Vargas 2004); yet based on this same data one prominent CINEP researcher drew a diametrically opposed conclusion and subsequent prescription for how to achieve peace (Giraldo 2003).

As Jenny Pearce points out in a critique, according to the neoclassical economic framework used by the aforementioned analysts, “Civil wars can be best explained in terms of the economic motivations of individual actors...rather than the discourses of grievance which armed actors often use to justify their behaviour. This construction of armed rebellion suits containment or military solutions” (Pearce 2005, p. 153). Of course, this framework supposes that we can recognize the “economic” motivations of particular agents. However, this economic construction is rooted in a particular intellectual and social tradition that implies a particular, contestable way of viewing the social world, one based on covert normative assumptions (cf. MacIntyre 1973a, pp. 7-9).

As I have previously pointed out, Fernán González et al. (2002) have noted how the analysis of the Colombian conflict risks becoming “yet another site of conflict.” This has clearly been the case with arguments about the causes of conflict in Colombia and with the rival claims and policy recommendations in respect of human rights made by certain human rights organizations and the state. I argue that this ‘conflict about the conflict’ goes beyond arguments about the mere instrumental and ideological use of human
rights and the effect of ideological frameworks on interpretation of data (although this is no doubt relevant- see Restrepo 2001) and is, more complexly, related to the use of different conceptual frameworks for the analysis of conflict that are inextricably bound up with normative frameworks. Debate about the causes of the conflict and the structural factors behind the violence is inevitably bound up with normative issues and stances, which leads to a further, second site of conflict about the first-order conflicts within Colombia. As Fernán González et al. observe:

This often occurs with the discussion about objective and subjective factors of violence and the relation between violence, poverty and inequality. Analyses that emphasize structural problems like social and economic inequality, the weakness and lack of presence of state institutions, and social and political exclusion as origins of violence tend to be discredited by some analysts as an attempt to justify the option for violence in terms of a “just war”, in which the birth and consolidation of the insurgent movement is seen as a response to the “structural violence” of a profoundly unjust and exclusionary society. On the other side, analyses centred on subjective aspects relating to rational choice and the voluntary actions of organized agents, who systematically develop a long term strategy inspired and supported by foreign or national agents- “professional revolutionaries”- have been seen by some as an attempt to criminalize the insurgents by portraying them as totally lacking political objectives and ideological motivations. This focus on rational choice tends to place emphasis on their undeniable criminal practices, such as kidnapping, extortion and drug trafficking, and connects violence with the inefficiency and leniency of justice, insisting that the growth and expansion of the guerrillas is
stimulated by generalized impunity, which leads such people to advocate a hard-line position and repressive measures. (González et al. 2002, p. 19)

This ultimately relates to the sociological explanation of particular social actions, which cannot be separated from theoretical or moral concerns. MacIntyre argues that “a moral philosophy...characteristically presupposes a sociology” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 23). Thus, conversely, the way we understand and explain social action is inevitably bound up with moral philosophy, with implicit accounts of practical rationality, what it is that drives people to act in particular ways. As Kelvin Knight points out, if a moral philosophy presupposes a sociology “then such a sociology must include a philosophical psychology capable of explaining action. Practical reasoning, in its syllogistic form, concerns concrete wants and consequent actions, and concrete wants contrast with abstract ‘oughts’” (Knight 2007, p. 131). This also links up with how those who wish to effect social transformation conceive the actions, and therefore the agency, of others.

The above is also symptomatic of how the intellectual and ideological debate in Colombia about the conflict long ago descended to the shrill level of assertion and counter-assertion that MacIntyre has diagnosed as a core characteristic of modern moral and political debate. The tragedy of this in the Colombian case is that the debate over the causes of the conflict has serious social implications. As Alexandra Guáqueta points out, “There is much at stake in the debate since it raises political questions such as whether policies of fundamental redistribution - for example, of land - should be implemented to address the source of conflict, and how to treat guerrillas if it is true that they
had ‘legitimate’ reasons for fighting” (Guáqueta 2006, p. 295). But who decides the legitimacy of the guerrillas’ actions, and how is this decided?

Iván Orozco (2005) pinpoints the philosophical problem highlighted by MacIntyre in terms of reaching rational consensus that can guide decision-making in respect of policies in relation to coexistence, justice and peace, in this case within the arena of civil society:

The fact that the new peace and human rights networks are complex networks that not only include members of NGOs but also public functionaries at the state and supra-state levels, etc. and who are therefore restricted to their respective ‘roles’ determines that they debate amongst multiple moral and amoral logics regarding the definitions of the situations and dilemmas they must address. (Orozco 2005, p. 336)

These rival and often contradictory moral logics partly inform the conceptual frameworks that are used to analyse social and political conflicts. This is evident in the way Orozco himself and others have turned to Hobbesian political theory both to analyse the Colombian conflict and as a normative framework for aiding decision-making in respect of the many complex decisions that both the government and private entities have to make in Colombia in relation to justice, coexistence and the future of political community in the country (see Orozco 2005; Giraldo 2008). Of course, this neo-Hobbesian normative theory conceives political community in terms of a particular notion of social contract (different in important respects from Rousseau’s notion) and also thereby presupposes one particular way of analysing social and political conflicts centring on an atomistic social ontology.
and an inherently conflictual social order of rival interests (see Young 1990, p. 28). In terms of decision-making, such an analytic and normative framework can lead to the conclusion that “there are legitimate political acts that, however, can seem abominable from the perspective of social morality” (López 2007, p. 114). This is therefore clearly a conclusion with strong moral implications, which in the modern condition of moral disorder as diagnosed by MacIntyre amounts merely to an arbitrary choice. The theoretical and philosophical assumptions of such an approach include the separation of ethics and politics, which on a MacIntyrean view makes the use of the word “legitimate” in the above statement difficult to render intelligible (cf. MacIntyre 1983, pp. 124-125).

In the case of Colombia, multiple think tanks and NGOs compete with social movements and other civil society groups to get their interpretation of the conflict accepted and to influence public policies in relation to its resolution. Social movements seek consultants who support their goals and try to convince the government and the public of the justification of their analyses and demands. Many social movements and grassroots organizations contest the legitimacy of public decision-making processes both in terms of their exclusionary nature and their normative and ideological presuppositions. This contestation more often than not takes the form of social protest, which from a MacIntyrean standpoint cannot be rationally effective as it often involves the clash of incommensurable positions (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 71).

As Winifred Tate (2007) points out, the so-called “international helping operations” which include humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, nation building, conflict resolution and political advocacy “involve the production of knowledge and the categorization of violence, making suffering socially legible in
particular ways in order to generate specific kinds of social obligations” (Tate 2007, p. 65). One of the principal issues from a MacIntyrean standpoint in relation to the Colombian crisis is therefore the connection between the first-order social and political conflicts within the overarching armed conflict and the second-order conflict about how to characterize and resolve both particular first-order conflicts and the wider conflict.

Through a MacIntyrean lens the moral dimension of this wider conflict, the “moral crisis”, relates to the philosophical problem of how to reach rational consensus on fundamental moral and political issues, and how to reconstruct a fragmented, divided society in a non-arbitrary, rationally justifiable way. At one level this is a problem of language, of discovering a shared set of terms and criteria for characterizing the problem and engendering rational discussion and enquiry; at another interconnected level it is a problem of rival modes of social practice. The discursive, linguistic-communicative dimension of the conflict is central to the moral crisis in Colombia and, as we shall see, is intimately connected to the problem of practice. As one Colombian civil society activist has commented, “War and authoritarianism have completely divided us; they have plunged us into deafness. That is one of the most serious political problems that we have. In my opinion, it has been about 20 years during which we have not listened to each other’s political views, in which it has been very difficult to listen to other points of view” (cited in García Durán 2006, p. 265).

As MacIntyre notes, “it has been precisely at the level of language that the moral inadequacies and corruptions of our age have been evident, and certainly no less so by those with ideological stances than by others” (MacIntyre 1971d, p. 94).
I argue that the Colombian context demonstrates MacIntyre’s thesis about the connection between the degeneration of moral argument/language and the degradation of politics. However, as I argued in chapter two, the calls for a new moral-juridical language and the emphasis on the need to engender some common idiom with which to channel social and political conflicts in Colombia are themselves rooted in assumptions that can only ensure continued failure to reach rational agreements, bridge differences, and rationally justify policy proposals. The search for some form of common language for interpreting, analysing and prescribing in relation to the conflict is a central task, but one that necessarily has radical implications. As Peter McMylor notes, MacIntyre holds that individuals need “to share a language which is acquired before our capacity to criticize. To share a language is to share criteria for making distinctions and making judgements” (McMylor 1994, p. 170). In Colombia, as elsewhere, the modern analyses and prescriptions of policymakers and their consultants in the social sciences have broken free of any shared normative and discursive framework and are justified through the various modern modes of moral discourse and argument.

Normative implications for study of the conflict

Given the rival, often incommensurable justifications, characterizations and discourses in the conflict, and the lack of a shared language and domain of meaning that includes social actors and theorists, the question is how those of us concerned to achieve peace and, therefore, a significant degree of social transformation, can justify theoretical stances and interpretations in relation to these and the subsequent policy recommendations that often follow from them.
As Vivenne Jabri puts it, from a Foucauldian, genealogical perspective: “When we recognise that [conflict] analysis is itself implicated in the construction of the world, we begin to recognise that analysis is part and parcel of the signifying practices that come to constitute the discursive frames that confer content to a seemingly contentless classifying process” (Jabri 2006, p. 6). For Jabri, the analysis of social and political conflicts, and interventions in them that seek to guide decision-making processes, necessarily have to be understood “in political and ethical terms and not simply in terms that seek to divorce the procedural from the substantive” (Jabri 2006, p. 10). However, Jabri appears to contradict this when she argues for a Habermasian, discourse ethics approach for analysing conflict discourses that are often locked in radical disagreement. The appeal to discourse ethics aims to enable conflict analysts and conflict actors to abstract from the substantive issues involved in order to find a critical point of encounter where the hold of substantive discourses can be weakened, enabling them to be put into question. For Jabri, Habermas’s discourse ethical theory provides a mechanism and standpoint from which to analyse and critique dominant conflict discourses based on radical disagreements. Yet, as Oliver Ramsbotham (2010) points out, Jabri is not really interested in addressing the phenomenon of radical disagreement—whether a particular war is just or not, for example. Jabri sees different discourses in relation to such disagreements about just or unjust wars as tied to particular interests, as conditioned by unarticulated structures that determine participants’ discourses. On Jabri’s view, taking these discourses at face value is to concede the ground to dogmatic postures that need to be subverted rather than engaged with as such. However, this itself smuggles in a particular normative/epistemological position— one that devalues agents’ truth
claims. In this, as I shall elaborate further on, Jabri is at one with those social
scientists who relegate the importance of agents’ moral claims and discourses,
dismissing them as mere rationalizations of interests and strategic positions
(Sayer 2003). As Oliver Ramsbotham observes, “The appeal is entirely away
from first-order analysis seen to be confined to agents’ articulations of their
own conduct, and in the direction of second-order analyses conducted by third-
party social scientists” (Ramsbotham 2010, p. 89). As Jabri explains, the aim is
to “study aspects of the constitution of social life which cannot be grasped
through concepts and tacit forms of knowledge to which agents have access in
their day-to-day lives...Second-order analyses, therefore, involve a language or
a discourse that is situated within the domain of the social sciences” (cited in
ibid., p. 89). However, as social theorist David Harvey observes, “Social
science formulates concepts, categories, relationships and methods which are
not independent of the existing social relationships” (Harvey 1973, p. 125; cf.
Meszáros 1972), which highlights the problem of extricating conflict analysis
from participation in the conflicts it seeks to analyse.

Jabri explicitly recognizes that her Habermasian approach is normative,
that is, ethical and political, yet appears to lack rational grounds for
establishing this approach as more valid than others. Further, as we have
seen, the Habermasian approach is not and cannot be neutral and also
surreptitiously stipulates the ground rules and the political framework within
which social conflict and rival discourses are to be analysed and ultimately
evaluated. Notwithstanding Jabri’s claim that “Discourse ethics as process is a
locale of emancipation from the constraints of tradition, prejudice and myth”

23 This assumes that social scientists can gain access to aspects of social life that ordinary
(Jabri 1996. p. 166), the discourse ethics procedure itself imposes an unacknowledged set of constraints and ultimately side steps the hard philosophical task of engaging rival, incommensurable discourses and traditions. The discourse ethics approach as much as any other implies a set of philosophical assumptions in relation to truth, reality, and justice. Therefore, Jabri’s insight that any mode of conflict analysis implies some ethical and political framework still leaves us with the problem of justifying particular modes of analysis and theoretical stances.

The categories we use in analyses of the conflict, those like “state”, “citizenship”, “clientelism”, etc. all imply some normative dimension. They are examples of what MacIntyre calls “essentially contestable concepts” (MacIntyre 1973a). For some the category of “state” means the modern European state and embodies the notion of a radical separation between the public and the private, between law and morality, between reason and “interests”, “passions” and virtues (Escalante 2008, p. 298). “Citizenship” can refer to the “ideal citizen” who enacts an “immediate and unconditional obedience to the law” (Escalante 2008, p. 290; cf. Mockus and Corzo 2003); it can also refer to autonomy and the claiming of individual rights (Pécaut 2008) as well as the conceptualization of a political subject that is “capable of incarnating a universally valid rationality from which the public interest emerges” (González 2008, p. 50). Thus when we analyse the conflict through or in terms of such categories we cannot but presuppose some normative understanding of what should be the case; that is, we cannot avoid participating in moral conflict. Some analyses imply such moral interventions more strongly than others. As political scientist Gustavo Duncan points out, there is a general consensus amongst Colombia analysts that in Colombia the
“creation of the modern liberal state is today the only viable option” (Duncan 2008, p. 346).

Further, as noted above, such categories also imply a theoretical account of how we are to explain social action. For example, the concept of citizenship appealed to implies an account of individual agency/human action in terms of a particular conception of practical rationality. As MacIntyre points out, a Humean conception holds that reason can be nothing but the slave of the passions, whereas for Aristotle and Aquinas reason can direct the passions. The question is how to decide which account is correct. As MacIntyre observes, we could consider a range of examples of human action in which reasoning and passion are present and in the light of these attempt to reach a judgement. However, “The problem is: how to describe the relevant examples. When individuals articulate to and for themselves the processes through which they proceed to action or when observers describe those processes in others, they cannot do so except by employing some particular theory-informed or theory-presupposing scheme of concepts, by conceptualizing that which they do or undergo or observe in a way which accords with one theory rather than another” (MacIntyre 1988, pp. 332-333).

Sociologist Daniel Pécaut discusses various modes of analysing the conflict, including those that begin from an analysis of the strategies of the armed actors and those that study the relations between them and the civilian population. He makes some important observations about the inherent theoretical pitfalls of such analyses, yet the title of his article, “Citizenship and institutions in conflict situations”, itself implies a strong normative-theoretical dimension of the kind discussed above. Moreover, Pécaut’s caveats about analysing the relation between the civilian population and the armed actors
rely on particular assumptions about the alleged “lack of ideology” of the guerrillas, leading him to conclude that populations’ adhesion to the guerrillas (despite having just before acknowledged, for example, that many populations have welcomed guerrilla presence) cannot be based on “solid convictions” nor that such convictions “can have a deep impact on the evolution of the conflict” (Pécaut 2008, p. 318; cf. Cramer 2002, p. 1850).

Here we enter the complex terrain of the relationship between sociological explanation of social action and moral theory. The theory of ideology is implicitly and explicitly referred to by sociologists who attempt to explain the causes and real reasons of agents’ actions in the conflict. In the Colombian case the view that the guerrillas have “lost their ideology” implies that what they believe to be guiding their action is in fact something else, hence their actual lack of ideology is unbeknown to them and their claim to be driven by ideological motivation is itself an effect of ideological distortion. Social scientists and sociologists who claim to discern the real reasons for their actions in terms of individual economic motives and strategic or other interests are also implicitly claiming that they themselves are free of ideological distortion. Nevertheless, the caveat that we need to get beyond mere appearances and actors’ own characterizations of their actions and the reasons for their actions is important if we are to attempt to achieve genuine understanding. However, as MacIntyre points out, the generality of the theory of ideology “derived precisely from its attempted embodiment...in a set of law-like generalizations which link the material conditions and class structures of societies as kinds of cause to ideologically informed beliefs as kinds of effect” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 110). In attempting to explain social actors’ actions solely in terms of deeper underlying structures that effectively act as causes, we are
relegating the role of agency, of social actors’ beliefs, reasons and intentions as causes of action.

Pécaut argues that “the politics of the [armed] groups have to be analysed...not through their declarations, but by what they do” (Pécaut 2008, p. 318). Yet in order to understand what it is they do, we need to know something of their intentions, reasons, motives and beliefs (MacIntyre 1973b, p. 323). In the case of certain armed actors, for example, their “kidnapping” of people is referred to by themselves as the “retention” of people for strategic reasons of war. Their assault on a local government institution is “an attack on democratic institutions” or, in the terms of the guerrillas, an “attack on paramilitary-dominated structures.” The blowing up of an oil pipeline is “wanton environmental vandalism” or “a means of preventing the continued exploitation of Colombia’s resources”, etc. As MacIntyre points out, a bodily movement can fall under a range of descriptions that render it a particular kind of action, therefore “For the agent and others to see his actions in the same light, a certain community of shared beliefs is a prerequisite” (ibid., p. 324). I return to this issue below.

There is also the problem that in implicitly or explicitly adhering to some particular conception of citizenship we are inevitably also implying a moral judgement about the relative virtues of the ideal, rational citizen in contrast to the vices of the irrational client. As political scientist Ingrid J. Bolivar points out, How many of us, when we are involved in processes of political formation, only see people who are uneducated, ignorant and manipulated by political parties or local political bosses? This should make us revise the forms of knowledge we produce that inform the reports we provide to different agencies, the forms
of knowledge that inform our own relations as members of NGOs or universities. (Bolívar 2008, p. 345)

Bolívar here highlights a problem recognized by Marx and emphasized by MacIntyre in relation to the way theorists, social scientists and revolutionaries conceive themselves in contradistinction to ordinary agents who are the subjects of enquires and the objects of particular strategies and policies (see MacIntyre 1973b, 1998b).

**Theory and practice: civil society, social science and revolution**

From a MacIntyrean perspective there is a relation between the fragmentation of social and philosophical ethics, the autonomy and therefore increasing arbitrariness of social and political theory, and the institutionalized social relations and practices of modern societies. In MacIntyre’s view, modern civil society embodies this disjunction of theory and practice and the subsequent problem of linking the individual to the social. In the framework of civil society, individuals are regarded as distinct and apart from their social relationships, which is “a mistake of theory, but not only a theoretical mistake. It is a mistake embodied in institutionalized social life. And it is therefore a mistake which cannot be corrected merely by better theoretical analysis…What is clear is that human beings who genuinely understand what they essentially are will have to understand themselves in terms of their actual and potential social relationships and embody that understanding in their actions as well as in their theories” (MacIntyre 1998b, pp. 228-229). Theorists, social scientists and revolutionaries also need to conceive themselves in this respect, which will
necessarily affect the way they conceptualize the relationship of their theory to social practice.

In the case of the social sciences, they cannot be conceived as elaborating “pure” knowledge that is then to be “applied” to the problems of society. They will need to emerge in an ongoing dialectical relationship to concrete social practices, practices that are, however, not based on the ethos of modernity. What this means, therefore, is abandoning “the standpoint of civil society”, which is characterized by its abstract individualism and “by a particular way of envisaging the relationship between all theory, including social theory, and practice” (MacIntyre 1998b, p. 229). The alternative form of social practice that does not embody the theoretical and normative assumptions of the standpoint of civil society is one in which “conceptions of the human good, of virtues, of duties to each other and of the subordinate place of technical skills in human life” are integrally connected (MacIntyre 1998b, pp. 231-232). MacIntyre highlights E. P. Thompson’s account of the hand-loom weavers in 18th and 19th century England as providing an example of a kind of revolutionary practice from which alone adequate theory about the relationship of theory to practice can emerge. What made the hand-loom weavers’ practice revolutionary “was the degree to which, in order to sustain their mode of life, they had to reject what those who spoke and acted from the standpoint of civil society regarded as the economic and technological triumphs of the age” (MacIntyre 1998b, p. 232).

MacIntyre observes that from the point of view of what Marx calls Feuerbach’s ‘contemplative materialism’ analysis of the social world reveals the existence of ‘single individuals’ and their agglomeration in civil society (the ninth thesis). Theoretical investigation leads to the conclusion that individuals
are what they are because of their circumstances and upbringing. As MacIntyre notes, “Human beings are then taken to be a product of causal agencies over which they have had no control” (ibid., p. 229). He points out how in elaborating this kind of theory of the social world and human beings’ agency in respect of it theorists have

characteristically without recognizing it, made the sharpest of distinctions between how they understand themselves and how they understand those who are the subjects of their enquiries. They understand those whose actions and experiences are to be explained by their theory as the wholly determined products of circumstance and upbringing. Their biological and social inheritance makes them what they are, independently of and antecedently to their own reasoning and willing, which are no more than products of inheritance. By contrast such theorists understand themselves as rational agents, able to and aspiring to embody their intentions in the natural and social world. (Ibid., pp. 229-230)

For MacIntyre, what we need to learn from this is that there is no merely theoretical solution. It is only from the standpoint of social practice of a very different kind to modern forms of social practice, which envision the autonomy of theory from practice, that a solution will be possible. MacIntyre notes that this cannot be the kind of practice envisaged by those concerned to reform the institutions of civil society without abandoning its basic beliefs. He observes that “those who without abandoning the standpoint of civil society take themselves to know in advance what needs to be done to effect needed change are those who take themselves to be therefore entitled to manage that change. Others are to be the passive recipients of what they as managers
effect” (MacIntyre 1998b, p. 231). This results in educators and managers supposing that they are entitled to impose their conception of the good on others. This general attitude is characteristic of modernity, embodied as it is in modern state bureaucracies and such typically modern civil society organizations as think tanks, institutes, and NGOs. However, MacIntyre also points out that this attitude is embodied within many so-called revolutionaries. Marxist revolutionaries have frequently claimed to know better than ‘the masses’ what is required to achieve radical social transformation. “Intellectually, at the most fundamental level, the orthodox social scientist and revolutionary theorist thus turn out to be one and the same person” (MacIntyre 1973b, p. 342). Their “parallel elitism” issues from the same intellectual assumptions (ibid., p. 342).

MacIntyre argues that social science methodology serves as the “ideology of bureaucratic authority”, which has become the idiom for justifying decision-making in the modern state and which is used by managers and other “experts”. The ideology of expertise “embodies a claim to privilege with respect to power” (MacIntyre 1973b, p. 342). The rise of the claim to managerial expertise also embodies the aspirations to value neutrality and manipulative power. The first aspiration derives from the philosophical error of separating facts from values, which is the result of a complex philosophical history; the second from the false belief that the social sciences can provide genuine law-like generalizations akin to the natural sciences that can justify their claims to deserve a privileged position in respect of influencing and being consulted by governments. Further, “The expert’s claim always takes this form: his taxonomic ordering represents a set of structures that determine the form of social and political life in ways that ordinary agents do not perceive; and his
predictions represent the determinateness of a future not available to ordinary agents. He thus legitimates the treatment of the surface phenomena of social life in one way rather than another by invoking the notion of deeper structures” (MacIntyre 1973b, p. 339).²⁴

However, for MacIntyre the claims to authority embodied in the knowledge produced by social scientists, which is then offered to states or corporations to bring about certain outcomes, lack rational grounding. Social scientists and managers purport to possess superior reasoning to ordinary agents, but this is undermined by the fact that in order to assert this social scientists and managers would need to be able to demonstrate that they can formulate genuine law-like generalizations that can bestow on their findings the rational authority of the natural sciences. In After Virtue MacIntyre shows how this is not possible. He points out how in the social sciences the alleged general laws governing certain social phenomena sit alongside recognized counter-examples, which in the case of the natural sciences would affect the standing of the generalizations. Thus, “The expert’s claim to status and reward is fatally undermined when we recognize that he possesses no sound stock of law-like generalizations and when we realize how weak the predictive power available to him is” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 106). Therefore, the recommendations of social and political scientists lack rational justification in their own terms of social scientific expertise and superior knowledge, but they also lack rational justification inasmuch as they implicitly embody rationally unsettlable moral arguments in the guise of value neutrality. MacIntyre acknowledges the “modest claims” of social scientists to be called experts in

²⁴ This is a lucid description of what appears to occur in the discourse ethics approach to conflict analysis. See above, pp. 147-149.
their respective areas inasmuch as they are indeed aware of the limitations of social scientific generalizations. However, he states that his aim is not to dispute these limited claims but to undermine the claims of bureaucratic institutions to legitimacy in the wielding of the power they exercise in society, and to highlight the corrosive effect he deems them to have on our ability to think and act morally.

Human agency, social structure and the explanation of action

A MacIntyrean approach insists we take seriously the role of human agency in conflict and social and political shifts and transformations. In studying the specifically moral dimensions of the Colombian conflict this concern for agency implies a shift in the way we as researchers conceptualize this dimension of the social world. Kelvin Knight notes that MacIntyre “opposes sociological functionalism’s positivist way of explaining action ‘in terms of social structure’ rather than ‘of the agent’s reasons’” (Knight 2007, p. 139). In the study of the Colombian conflict this relates to analyses that have sought to explain violence and conflict wholly in terms of “objective” social structures, and those which attempt to explain them mainly in terms of “subjective” factors and agents’ individual or collective reasons, motivations and choices, which in many cases have tended to assume these are not what agents say they are. Rather, the focus has often been on discovering agents’ “real” reasons albeit sometimes in terms of some particular and contestable theoretical standpoint such as rational choice theory.

In this way the non-Marxist approach that has been criticized for “criminalizing” the guerrillas adopts the Marxist theory of ideology in seeking to
distinguish what really drives action from that which agents think or claim it is that drives their actions. As Ricardo García Duarte (2006) points out, faced with these dichotomous forms of analysis, both of which have yielded important insights into the nature of violence and conflict, alternative proposals have been made for integrating these two approaches. García also observes how the dichotomy of the objective/subjective analytical frameworks is connected to the normative dimension of social scientific study of the conflict, which is brought to the fore when we connect conflict and notions of citizenship. He points out, “Structural theoretical frameworks, by neglecting the rational will of social actors, tend to suppose that both conflict and citizenship depend solely on structural forces. The possibilities for citizenship and social contradictions depend on such structures” (García Duarte 2006, p. 249). Conversely, individualist/subjective theoretical frameworks, which neglect social structures, tend to suppose that the conflict is better explained in terms of “existential horizons” (ibid., p. 249). García notes that these two perspectives led equally to negative and optimistic affirmations about the possibilities of citizenship. The scepticism was based on the assignment of priority to structural explanations of conflict that effectively negated the initiative of social actors. The optimism was based on the conviction that the “organizational possibilities of conflict and citizenship proceeded from the very strategies of social actors” (ibid., p. 249), which is to say that it was based on the assumption of the priority of individual agency in respect of generating and shaping social structures. What is required, therefore, is the integration of these two approaches that can enable us to highlight both individual agency and social structure, and to understand how agency is inevitably bound up with social structures and vice versa (ibid., pp. 249-250).
MacIntyre’s comments on the problems of agency and structure as noted and debated by Lukács, Engels and Plekhanov can be related to this. He writes,

The partisans of the younger Lukács understood very well that if human beings were the products of circumstance and upbringing, in the terms propounded by Engels and Plekhanov, then the kind of revolutionary agency through which the limitations of circumstance and upbringing could be transcended became unintelligible. The partisans of Engels and Plekhanov understood equally well that if the possibilities of revolutionary agency were what the Lukács of History and Class Consciousness and of Lenin took them to be, then the nature of the historical determination of social and economic orders became quite unclear. (MacIntyre 1998b, p. 233)

For MacIntyre, this becomes an issue about specifically moral agency, of how moral critique can translate into non-arbitrary, practically effective action. The means-ends morality of Stalinism partly derived from a theoretical view of the social world as governed entirely by immutable structures and laws. The autonomous, arbitrary morality of liberalism partly derived from a reaction to this deterministic “Marxist” view of the social world and, earlier, from a reaction to the static, hierarchical world view that had been mystified by reactionary ideologues in terms of a “natural” and “traditional” order. In MacIntyre’s view, both these moralities and their underlying theoretical positions misunderstand the nature of rational self-determination. Therefore, from a MacIntyrean perspective, we need to understand how agency can become rationally effective in the world.
This connects up with the problem of social scientific study and explanation of social action, in particular the explanation of the moral dimensions of social life. In characterizing certain social actions as “pre-modern” (Mejia et al. 2004, p. 84), “pre-political” (Uribe 1996, p. 38), “clientelistic”, “ideological”, etc. we are making a value judgement in relation to the actions and agency of those we study. Moreover, Andrew Sayer observes that there is

a common but often unnoticed inconsistency between third person accounts of behaviour which explain it wholly in sociological terms (‘they would say/do that, given their social position’), and first person accounts of behaviour which use justification (‘I do that not because of my social position but because I believe - and am willing to argue - that it is the best thing to do, given the nature of the situation.’) Ironically, there is a complicity here between sociologically-reductionist accounts of the effectivity of discourse and the belief of populist politicians and media that political argument reduces to a matter of confidence, style and conviction. (Sayer 2003, p. 10)

In other words, this points to the “close relationship between moral philosophy and sociology” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 116) and to the problem discussed above of the gap between theory and practice, between theorists and social actors. The question is, therefore, how we can study the moral dimensions of the social world, which on a MacIntyrean view are central to understanding conflict, and at the same time not avoid the inevitable involvement in the moral-political conflicts of the society we study, but rather participate in them in an open, rational and systematic way. Further, if we want to understand the
moral dimensions of conflict and contribute to social transformation in terms of achieving a “just, sustainable and peaceful coexistence” in Colombia (García Durán 2008, p. 359), then we need an adequate account of morality. Andrew Sayer points out,

> From a positive or explanatory point of view, the obvious realist question about the moral dimension of social life would be: what is it about humans and human society that makes us have moral concerns? Any good answer to such a question would have to go beyond invoking our capacity for language and meaning making and deal with what it is that makes us care about anything. Thus, an adequate account of the moral dimension of social life needs an understanding of the nature of the subjective experience of it. (Sayer 2003, p. 3)

Thus sociology also presupposes a moral philosophy.25 However, as Sayer also points out, analytic moral philosophy tends to neglect social contexts: “The standard questions in practical ethics tend to concern what individuals should do, not what kinds of social organisation should exist” (ibid., p. 11). This is a result of the philosophical history of morality that MacIntyre narrates, in which morality came to be conceived as a purely individual matter. As MacIntyre notes, modern moral philosophers, be they Kantians or utilitarians, “share a disregard for the place in morality of particular social structures and relationships and notably of the structures, relationships, and forms of activity which constitute what I have called practices here and elsewhere. They share

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25 MacIntyre notes that the sociologist Erving Goffman’s works “presuppose a moral philosophy” because they offer an “account of forms of behaviour within a particular society which itself incorporates a moral theory in its characteristic modes of action and practice,” (MacIntyre 1985a, pp. 116-117).
a moral universe without social or institutional mediation” (MacIntyre 1983, pp. 119-120). So-called applied ethics embodies this as it tends to focus on the dilemmas confronting individuals in certain institutionalized settings and situations rather than on the structures that determine the character of those situations (MacIntyre 2006b, p. 118).

Sayer’s interest is in working out how we can rescue the moral dimensions of social life from their neglect by the social sciences. He points out that the (ostensible) excision of normative thought from the modern social sciences means that the normative force of moral concerns is simply not analysed, which reduces them to seemingly arbitrary conventions or mere rhetorical forms. In this way modern social science effectively adheres to the emotivist view of ethics as a manipulative discourse whose purpose is to non-rationally persuade people to adopt certain views or perform certain actions. There can be no question of taking seriously the rival claims to truth embodied in moral arguments because it is assumed that values are irredeemably subjective. Such an emotivist view therefore presupposes a moral epistemology, a particular account of practical rationality, and a psychology of individual action. Individuals guided by emotivism are ultimately assumed to be driven by pre-given wants, preferences and interests that they attempt to satisfy, which in encounter with others will necessarily take the form of manipulation, not rational suasion. Morality on the emotivist view does not entail an impersonal realm of objective moral criteria to which our arguments make appeal in order to rationally convince others of the appropriateness or not of some action, but is merely a technique of persuasion dressed up in the terms of an appeal to impersonal standards. As MacIntyre puts it, the key to the social content of emotivism “is the fact that emotivism entails the
obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 23). Assuming the emotivist account of morality means, for example, that insurgent claims that injustice drives their armed struggle can simply be ignored in elaborating properly “scientific” policy prescriptions in relation to the conflict. However, social scientists and theorists who disregard the moral claims of social actors as nothing but expressions of underlying interests and manipulative power nonetheless surreptitiously employ a different account of morality inasmuch as their policy recommendations have normative implications, which presumably are not seen as manipulative but rather as objectively valid.

The view of the social world implied by the social sciences’ conception of morality is one in which individuals have pre-given interests and wants. Subjective values are first and foremost my values; they are not derived from the social world and social relationships, even though they might find coincidental resonance within the social world. There can be no rational agreement, no discovery of shared values, only forced or fortuitous coincidence of interests and wills. MacIntyre argues that emotivism effectively characterizes the moral dimension of modern social orders; therefore we should not be surprised that the social science that has arisen within the modern moral disorder reflects this emotivism in its theoretical stances and methodological assumptions. It is also not surprising that the relegation of the moral dimensions of social life to the margins of social scientific explanation of the social world has occurred, or that its explanations both implicitly embody a significant degree of arbitrariness, “epistemological self-righteousness” (MacIntyre 1973b) and the kind of dichotomous analytic and explanatory
frameworks of objective structures versus subjective factors and ideological distortion that have partly characterized study of the Colombian conflict.

If we are to take seriously the notion of a “moral crisis” (Arango 2002) and “ethical vacuum” (Rojas 2007; Remolina 1992) as partly behind the ongoing degradation of the conflict, then we will need to overturn this dominant social scientific view of morality. The Colombian moral crisis can be understood in various interconnecting ways (see p.1, footnote 1). We can focus on the linguistic dimension of it in terms of the inability to reach moral-political consensus that can be seen as an important driver of conflict, and we can also focus on particular substantive manifestations of what are generally taken to be barbarous, immoral acts such as the incredible levels of savagery and revenge descended to in the period known as La Violencia or, indeed, in more recent times with the brutal massacres by the paramilitaries and the kidnappings or “retentions” of the guerrillas. We can also look at the moral dimensions of politics in terms of clientelism, corruption, intolerance and so forth. In attempting to theorize and bring about peace and social transformation we inevitably take some position in respect of these moral issues as well as some account of the explanation of human action. MacIntyre writes that “every moral philosophy offers explicitly or implicitly at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions, and in so doing generally presupposes some claim that these concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real social world” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 23). Thus when we analyse the Colombian conflict in terms of the above moral dimensions we presuppose such a conceptual analysis of agents’ reasons and intentions, which is necessary for adequately understanding the moral dimensions of the conflict and avoiding the pitfalls of
analysis and explanation in terms solely of either external social, “objective” structures or internal individual or collective, “subjective” factors. With Sayer we want to rescue the moral dimensions of the social world in terms of sociological explanation and, with García Durán, work out a rationally justifiable normative position in respect of helping to bring about a “just, sustainable and peaceful coexistence.”

However, before this we need to focus on the question of explaining human action that is crucial for empirical work. MacIntyre points out that the distinction between what really moves men to act in certain ways and what the same men themselves believe to have moved them to act lies at the heart of the Marxist theory of ideology. However,

Marx and Engels also asserted that men could find reasons for action in the modern world which would not only enable them to act effectively, but which would be such that what they believed to be moving them to action would indeed be what was in fact moving them to action. The empirical investigation of these questions cannot proceed successfully unless it is preceded and accompanied by a philosophical account of the relationship between the kind of explanation of human action in terms of intentions, reasons, and purposes which is native to human life itself and the kind of causal explanation which is familiar in the natural sciences. (MacIntyre 1971e, p. 94)

MacIntyre notes that “If moral considerations are important...then we shall have to understand what part reasoning and deliberation play in bringing about one sort of action rather than another” (ibid., p. 94). This is what the study of how peaceful coexistence and justice can be achieved needs to understand.
MacIntyre points out that we must begin by characterizing a given society or community in its own terms if we are to be able to identify the matter that requires explanation and if we are to be able to proffer sociological causal explanations. Therefore, “Attention to intentions, motives, and reasons must precede attention to causes; description in terms of the agent’s concepts and beliefs must precede description in terms of our concepts and beliefs” (ibid., p. 223). Using the example of suicide drawn from Durkheim, MacIntyre showed how causal explanations of suicide necessarily had to make reference to the agent’s motives and reasons. The causal generalization formulated on the basis of a statistical correlation, “isolated living of a certain kind tends to lead to acts of suicide”, still requires us to ask whether it is the pressure on the emotions of the isolation or certain other problems that lead to suicide. MacIntyre then pointed out that “we cannot raise the questions about motives and reasons...unless we first of all understand...acts...in terms of the intentions of the agents and therefore in terms of their own action descriptions” (MacIntyre 1971f, p. 226). Therefore, in order to understand actors’ reasons for acting we need to understand the conceptual scheme that informs those beliefs.

However, in debate with sociologist Peter Winch, MacIntyre denied that action could always be adequately explained in terms of agents’ own concepts and beliefs. Insisting that this is so leaves us unable to account for certain social and cultural transitions. As Kelvin Knight notes, “What he argued against Winch was that social science should ‘uncover’ the partial ‘mechanisms which blind agents to or enable them to ignore the irrationalities of their own social order’” (Knight 2007, p. 114), which requires a different kind of explanation from rational actions and beliefs. I noted previously that for MacIntyre
rationality is a sociological category, which if he is correct about “then once again the positivist account of sociology in terms of a logical dichotomy between facts and values must break down. For to characterize actions and institutionalized practices as rational or irrational is to evaluate them” (MacIntyre 1971c, p. 258). But this evaluation must itself, on a MacIntyrean view, occur from within a particular tradition with its own account of rationality, and will also necessitate fully comprehending the conceptual scheme and notion of rationality that is to be evaluated. MacIntyre points out that the social scientist “must be able to decide what constitutes the rationality of a scientific belief, or a moral belief, or a religious belief”, which is “to do philosophy” (ibid., p. 259). Therefore the philosopher cannot be merely “an external commentator on the social sciences; for philosophical arguments will actually enter into and forge critical links within the sociologist’s explanations” (ibid., p. 259). What this means is that philosophers “cannot be restricted merely to interpreting the social sciences; the point of their activity is to change them” (ibid., p. 259).

In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* MacIntyre argues for the re-conceptualization and re-structuring of the modern liberal university around distinct traditions of moral enquiry in order for rational progress to be made and to enable systematic encounter and conflict between rival traditions to occur. As Peter McMylor (1994) notes, such institutions might represent or articulate the outlook of distinctive communities within society, and provide plans and criteria for those communities to realise their conception of the good life. The social sciences would have important roles within such universities, though these would differ between the contending institutions “depending on the place of a social science in the tradition the institution set out to embody” (McMylor 1994, p. 172). An Aristotelian university, for example, Thomist or
otherwise, “would have to share a common moral framework committed to constraining economic growth, and the unfettered use of the criteria of market efficiency as life’s framework” (ibid., pp. 172-173).

In the case of the Colombian conflict I have argued that the connection between the social sciences and moral philosophy is important and needs to be explicitly articulated. If the social sciences are to play a role in understanding and transforming conflict, then they will need to move beyond the fact-value divide and move in the direction of MacIntyre’s proposals.

Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda wrote in the classic sociological study of La Violencia: “The ‘total’ conflict [referring to an informal phase of conflict that has not passed to the formal ‘bellicose’ stage] is shapeless…but it has objectives that can be manifest or latent, hence the confusion the study of it produces. One group might organize to cruelly avenge its own dead in the name of a political party, killing those of rival political colours, but in reality it is to appropriate for itself the victims’ goods; another might proclaim itself a defender of the faith and expel or kill members of other sects, but in reality it is to defend locally created interests; and so on almost ad infinitum…” (Guzmán et al. 2005, p. 444). The question is how we can determine what is the case. For what reasons, intentions and motives were people acting in such ways? What was the relationship between these and the social structure? Were people driven by ideological distortion, that is, by a false consciousness about the real motives for their actions? Fals tells us that the conflict produced the conditions for criminal and savage violence, but what produced the conflict? What lay behind the “social conflict” that served as fuel to the violence? Fals suggests the conditions for “open” social conflict included “those created by impunity and other failings of justice, the deficient
distribution of land, illiteracy, individualism or egocentrism of the people, the ethnocentrism of the elites” (ibid., p. 439). In other words, a litany of possibilities that combine normative and empirical elements. Yet Fals also affirms the separation of facts from values, declaring that “The demographic, psychological and economic disruptions and adjustments effectuated during the two stages of conflict were of great significance...However, whether they were good or bad is not for the social scientist to say, as these concepts are subjective” (ibid., p. 444). Fals then suggests that the occurrence or lack of violence is explicitly related to social values, proffering his own value judgement when he suggests as a hypothesis for the relative lack of violence in the Caribbean coast region the “lack of intolerance”, which contrasts with the “closed and fanatical world of the Andean communities” (ibid., p. 448). Fals also tells us that the problem was accentuated by the generation of Durkheimian “anomie”.

We can thus perceive the difficulty for sociology to explain such a complex phenomenon that combined socio-structural (objective) and individual (subjective and normative) elements. Fals notes that modern sociological analysis is based on the “neutral” premise that sees conflict as “natural” in all societies in order to interpret changes within them. Such analysis excises normative judgement from social explanation but, as we have seen, this leads to real problems. MacIntyre has noted that political scientists, for example, despite their aspiration to value neutrality have no real alternative to using the same explanatory or evaluative criteria of ordinary agents who will frequently cite evaluations of moral character in their explanations of political action and outcomes (MacIntyre 1971b, p. 277). This means that political science is in effect a “moral science” (ibid.) In the same way, sociological and political
scientific study and explanation of the Colombian conflict will need to become a moral science if it is to begin to make sense of actions in it and if it is to illuminate ways in which justice and peaceful coexistence might be achieved. But if it is to become a moral science that overcomes the theoretical and philosophical problems of contemporary morality and moral theory, it must on MacIntyre’s view have to be a science and form of social research based on radically different assumptions.

**Tradition, communities and research**

If our research unavoidably implies a moral and normative position in respect of the social, economic and political structures and policies of the countries we study or in which we study, then, as I have previously noted, we cannot avoid participating in moral and political conflict about how things are and how they should be. Yet as MacIntyre has pointed out, we cannot simply choose a theoretical position or framework and thereby hope to have settled the issues of rational justification and arbitrariness. We need to participate in communities of practice, to engage in praxis through which our theories and criteria can gain rational authority and earn the rational respect, if not the rational assent, of those against whom we argue. This points us in the direction of a radical transformation in the way we conduct our academic enquiries. But might it be so radical that it effectively prevents most of us from engaging in important academic research? I shall return to this question further on. Beforehand I want to explore some possible ambiguities in MacIntyre’s argument.

MacIntyre implicitly argues that Catholic religious practice is a form of participation in a community of practice that provides a rational moral
framework in which to make judgements pertinent to living in and researching the social world. Within this, Maclntyre’s own philosophical position of Thomism provides a non-relativist epistemology, and MacIntyre holds in respect of this that we can indeed study other cultures in light of concepts that are not appealed to or known about within such cultures, but also that we must necessarily begin from the concepts used within such cultures. In other words, a MacIntyrean position rules out cultural and moral relativism but takes a critical stance in relation to its own claims to rational and moral superiority.

However, is there a tension between the implicit notion of Catholicism as a practice with its provision of a moral theory on the one hand, and MacIntyre’s claim that moral theory must emerge from concrete contexts of local community practice, which I take to mean communities that include Catholics as well as others, on the other? David Solomon points out that “MacIntyre wants ethical theory to grow out of the ethical activity of communities but to aspire to make universal claims that reject any putative provenance from an impersonal or value-neutral perspective. Theory will be rooted in particular practices and the insights available only from within them, but will make claims that can conflict...with those of alien communities” (Solomon 2003, p. 146). Therefore, is it the case that MacIntyre sees the Catholic tradition itself as a “community”? If so, then does he see those who work within the tradition of Nietzschean genealogy or liberalism as a community? I doubt it, but it seems to me there may be an elision of tradition and community that is leading to (at least my) confusion. I might be entirely wrong in perceiving a tension or a problem here but I am slightly puzzled by MacIntyre’s insistence on the one hand that moral enquiry needs to occur in the way he describes in *Three Rival Versions*, which centres on, and proceeds
through conflict between, major intellectual-moral-political-social traditions, and on the other his claims that rationally justifiable moral theory can only emerge from certain local communities of practice. What is the relationship between the traditions and these local communities?

David Solomon writes, “In *Whose Justice?*...[MacIntyre] gives an elaborate account of how rational debate among competing communities about the moral rules that govern them can be carried on without any appeal to perspectives or points of view abstracted from the concrete life of the competing communities” (ibid., p. 147). However, I read *Whose Justice?* more as elaborating an account of how rational debate between competing *traditions* can be carried on, not so much between competing *communities*. If we elide tradition with community then we can read MacIntyre as providing such an account, but MacIntyre clearly does not see communities as homogenous exponents and adherents of any one tradition. Within Greek society there were “competing” communities but it seems to me MacIntyre essentially narrates how the Aristotelian account of justice emerged from the conflicts within Greek society that despite their often sharp disputes still inherited from a common tradition going back to Homer. The rest of *Whose Justice?* is an account of how the Aristotelian tradition was transformed and its internal incoherences resolved by Aquinas’ synthesis, and then how rival traditions to the Aristotelian tradition emerged, including the incoherent morality of the liberal tradition.

In today’s modern, pluralistic communities we will no doubt find adherents of the different traditions MacIntyre discusses (and plenty that he does not) and it is this fact that to my mind raises questions about the generation of moral frameworks and theories within such communities and the role of traditions within them in relation to generating such frameworks and
theories. It seems possible to read MacIntyre as saying that despite the
importance of traditions, it is the practices of certain communities that
potentially can lead to the elaboration of rationally justifiable ethical theories
that do not necessarily have any strong relation to the particular traditions
MacIntyre describes. MacIntyre has elsewhere argued that individuals in
communities always begin their enquiries and engage in community life and
debate within some perhaps unacknowledged and inchoate tradition that has
partly made them what they are. Individuals “are not morally naked” (MacIntyre
2002, p. 259). Yet in the context of modern, pluralistic communities, even
those that retain strong “traditional” elements as in Latin America, for example,
there are an array of different traditions available, and individuals might identify
with more than one. It seems to me that MacIntyre’s later arguments have
recognized the implicitly arbitrary position of the individual he describes in A
Short History of Ethics and later Whose Justice? who has to choose,
seemingly without any presuppositions, to adopt some tradition or mode of
theoretical enquiry in order to be able to engage with others and avoid “social
solipsism” (MacIntyre 2002, p. 259). MacIntyre has increasingly emphasized
that it is the involvement in shared practices within local forms of community
life that can provide individuals with the presuppositions and authoritative
criteria with which to evaluate, critique and act- that is, to build ethical theory-
rather than through the different versions and traditions of moral enquiry that it
is possible for individuals (and sometimes whole communities) to locate
themselves within. If academic enquiry were to be reconstructed along the
lines that MacIntyre suggests, the different traditions of enquiry could engage
with particular communities, helping to elaborate theory and aiding practice.
But it does seem as though the emphasis on moral theory as emerging from
particular communities relegates (but far from eradicates) the importance of
traditions.

So what is the upshot of this? I am suggesting that if it is only through
participation in local communities of practice that we can elaborate rationally
justifiable ethical theories, then this appears also to apply for developing
rationally justifiable normative frameworks for conducting social scientific
research and analysis. Therefore, researchers have to be members of such
communities or at the very least share their presuppositions and engage
systematically with them and advocate their particular perspectives. Anthropologists can lay claim more than most other academics to genuinely
participating in and learning the symbolics and idioms of different cultures and
communities. However, anthropology’s historical commitment to cultural
relativism (Bourgois 1990) would appear to disarm it from taking a critical and
effective moral standpoint in relation to external threats and impositions such
as those emanating from neoliberalism. Moreover, the participation of
anthropologists, no matter how thoroughgoing and enduring, is always
temporary and always coloured by prior theoretical commitments and social
and intellectual distance that rule out viewing the community’s mode of life and
conception of the good in non-relativist, ethnocentric terms. As MacIntyre
points out, all cultures are ethnocentric- they do not live by relativism but imply
their way of life is the best and most morally suitable one (MacIntyre 2006j, p.
54).

Further, can anthropologists and other researchers from the “first
world”, the imperialist and colonial centres of global power, engage in research
in contexts in which the effects of this power are most acutely and
devastatingly felt without seriously challenging our own presuppositions and
allowing for the possibility of undermining our own positions and the structures of power that enable and perpetuate them? Such a question has been and continues to be a guiding insight of radical pedagogical theory and practice influenced by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire. It was Freire who put praxis—critical reflection on practice, or the dialectical relationship of theory and practice—back on the agenda in the context of committed social, educational and political engagement with the poor in Latin America. I suggest that MacIntyre’s emphasis on the importance of conjoining theory with practice, and the implications I have drawn from MacIntyre’s work for study of the Colombian moral-political situation, have some important affinities with Freire’s work. There are resonances between MacIntyre’s philosophical work and that of Freire which can illuminate the relations between research and ethical-political commitment, which relates to the overarching problematic I have discussed of the relation between moral theory, social science and social conflict.

The following quote from Freire reveals some of the resonance with MacIntyre’s concerns:

The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection—true reflection—leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection. In this sense, the praxis is the new raison d’être of the oppressed...this raison d’être is not viable apart from their concomitant conscious involvement. Otherwise, action is pure activism...To achieve this praxis, however, it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in
their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiqués, monologues, and instructions. (Freire 1970, p. 48)

Freire's concern for authentic “revolutionary praxis” speaks to MacIntyre's arguments about rationally justifiable revolutionary action. Further, Freire insists on the historically and socially mediated form of ethical consciousness:

As men and women inserted in and formed by a socio-historical context of relations, we become capable of comparing, evaluating, intervening, deciding, taking new directions, and thereby constituting ourselves as ethical beings. It is in our becoming that we constitute our being so. Because the condition of becoming is the condition of being. (Freire 2001, pp. 38-39)

For Freire, “Right thinking is right doing” (Freire 2001, p. 39), which strikes a definite Aristotelian tone. The radical challenge Freire poses to prevailing educational theory and practice could also be seen to constitute a wider challenge to all social theory and social science analogously to MacIntyre's philosophical critique.

We can now return to my question above as to whether the implied radicality of this effectively rules out much if not all prevailing kinds of academic research, including my own. Certainly, MacIntyre and Freire pose a radical challenge to those of us who would seek to conduct social scientific research with the purpose of making expert-like recommendations from a standpoint outside of particular traditions and communities. However, I suggest that because my own research is not about developing a social
scientific analysis of the conflict *per se*, or a policy prescription in relation to it, perhaps it is not bound by the requirement to either be a member of a particular community (such as the one I studied) or radically engage with and explicitly advocate its presuppositions and positions. It is an “observational” study with philosophical and theoretical aims that does not pretend to be normatively or theoretically neutral or impartial in respect of the overall Colombian situation and the political and moral dimensions of the conflict. It also implies a prescription in terms of seeing restated Aristotelian theory and practice as what communities should aspire to embody. However, I do not seek to impose any of this on the community I study.

What it implies in terms of “research ethics” is that the dilemmas of informed consent and so forth are decided in terms of my own tradition’s standpoint, which does not of course rule out moral error on my part. Further, my research in no way aims to speak for those I studied, still less to inscribe my account of the community’s practice and discourse within the terms of “neutral”, positivist, “scientific” research. Yet I cannot avoid inscribing it within the terms of my own (perhaps too lightly worn) tradition or those of MacIntyrean enquiry, which runs the risk of misunderstanding and misrepresenting the community I studied. My only defence is that no study of this or any other community can be normatively or theoretically neutral.

Clearly, MacIntyre thinks “we” can engage in comparative study of particular local communities in order to illuminate the way such communities actually function in respect of moral discourse, theory and practice (MacIntyre 2001, p. 143). We can learn something philosophically relevant through the historical and sociological study of real communities (MacIntyre 1983, 2001).
and also learn from such examples important insights into the possibilities and pitfalls of our own communities.

**Conclusion**

I have argued that social scientific study of the conflict cannot avoid participating in the conflict. The excision of moral/normative stances from the social sciences has not only prevented understanding of the moral dimensions of social conflict, but inadvertently also led to the social sciences themselves reflecting, and adding a further level of conflict to, the implicit and explicit conflicts within Colombian society. But it must now be asked: from what perspective, within what kinds of moral framework and tradition can analysis of and prescriptions in relation to the Colombian conflict proceed? MacIntyre has expounded three rival *versions* of moral enquiry, one of which is what he refers to as “tradition”, which he argues provides the most rationally compelling “theory so far” (MacIntyre 1991, pp. 61-66; 1998d, p. 264). The other versions are the encyclopedic, Enlightenment mode of enquiry, and the Nietzschean genealogical mode. As I have pointed out, any analysis of the conflict necessarily presupposes an account of morality such that it can make sense of what are deemed to be the moral dimensions of social life and conflict. This thesis argues for the relevance of MacIntyre’s philosophy and therefore presupposes MacIntyre’s account of morality. It is in terms of this account and MacIntyre’s general diagnosis of the modern moral disorder that I now explore the empirical dimensions of the Colombian moral crisis.
CHAPTER 4

The moral dimensions of the Colombian conflict through a MacIntyrean lens

This chapter looks at various moral aspects of the Colombian conflict in light of MacIntyre's framework. From the moral corruption and "schizophrenic" nature of the Colombian state (Giraldo 1999), to the process of "state construction" and the ambiguities of human rights discourse, I demonstrate the moral problems with politics and the state, as well as the challenges for effecting revolutionary social change and the transformation of politics in an ethical and rational way. I claim that MacIntyre's philosophy points to the need for slow, creative, and often frustrating processes of social, cultural and political encounters in which moral bonds and shared political visions can be constructed, something that practitioners of peacebuilding and grassroots conflict transformation have also underlined. I postulate the hypothesis that MacIntyre's philosophy is already partly implicit in certain practices of social organizations and communities of resistance in Colombia, and propose MacIntyre's moral-sociological framework as a model for empirically exploring the peacebuilding process of a small-scale Colombian community that has spent ten years attempting to transform local conflict through public participation and deliberation. Arguing that what is required is a form of MacIntyrean ethnographic fieldwork, I conclude the chapter with a justification of my case study and a brief excursus on my methodology.
The ethical collapse of justice

Father Javier Giraldo, perhaps Colombia’s most important and committed human rights defender, recently wrote a powerfully moving letter (Giraldo 2009) to a public prosecutor who has filed charges against him of “false accusation” and “slander” in light of accusations made by an army General implicated in a savage massacre of civilians in San José de Apartadó in February 2005. In the letter Giraldo explains his “conscientious moral objection” to presenting himself before Colombia’s judicial institutions to face the charges. Father Giraldo has been a tireless defender of the rights of the Peace Community of San José de Apartadó, and following the massacre in 2005 he and the community accused the Colombian military of being coauthors with paramilitaries of the brutal murders of eight people, including three children. Father Giraldo and the community were immediately slandered and stigmatized in the media and by the government as being linked to guerrillas, and accused of distorting the facts about the killings as part of their alleged “political war” against the Colombian state.

However, evidence soon came to light that backed up everything the community and Father Giraldo had said. Ten military personnel have recently been charged as coauthors of the massacre.26 The case brought against Father Giraldo, which clearly does correspond to a “political war” by the state against human rights activists, was shelved in 2006 but was reopened shortly after the charges brought against the military for the massacre. Mauricio García Durán, head of one of Colombia’s most prestigious conflict research institutes (CINEP), deplored “the investigation of those who denounced those

responsible for the massacre in San José de Apartadó.\textsuperscript{27} Jorge Eliécer Molano, Father Giraldo’s defence lawyer, stated that the process “has the aim of covering up the perpetrators of the San José massacre by diverting the investigations and promoting impunity.”\textsuperscript{28} Given Father Giraldo’s decades long experience and his profound knowledge of the workings (rather, the grotesque failings) of Colombia’s justice system and the impact of the conflict on society, his decision to take “conscientious objector” status has to be seen as a highly significant symbol of the deeply troubling moral degradation of Colombia’s institutions.

Father Giraldo points out that there has never been a single act of justice in any one of the multiple cases of murder, torture, and forced disappearance that he has brought before Colombia’s judicial institutions. Even in the high profile case of the Trujillo massacre in which the Colombian state was effectively forced to open an investigatory commission, 14 years later none of the recommendations of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights have been implemented, and impunity reigns. Giraldo observes that

This all demonstrates that the Public Prosecutor’s Office presents a façade of justice to the country: it claims to adhere to the constitutional principles that mark it as an independent entity that acts according to universal principles of the administration of justice, but the crude reality is that this is not the case. Its “truth” is not constructed on the basis of elementary parameters of impartiality and independence, but on the dependence of powerful social and political interests. This presents a profound ethical problem for those involved, actively or passively, in the processes. (Giraldo 2009, p. 19)
According to Father Giraldo, at the heart of the “moral decomposition” of the judicial system and the “ethical collapse of justice” (ibid., p. 20) is the “mercantilization” of justice in the form of paid informants and the testimony of “re-integrated former guerrillas” or masked individuals who fabricate the required testimonies under the coaching of the military. The vicious irony of this is that those civilians who are signalled as guerrillas because they have had some form of contact with actual guerrilla members— an utter inevitability given their presence throughout the Colombian countryside— and which itself often takes the form of coercion and victimization, are themselves treated as subversives, not victims of the conflict. In many cases humble peasant farmers are threatened by the military if they do not agree to accuse particular social activists and community leaders of being guerrillas. The precarious economic situation of many peasant farmers, which is systematically worsened by deliberate acts of economic warfare such as the burning of crops and the blockading of food, ports and markets, is seen as part of a strategy to tempt people to “get a better life” as a paid informant or as a “witness” in the form of a “demobilized former guerrilla” who has decided to “collaborate freely” with the military. Father Giraldo has witnessed queues of young men waiting outside an army base in Barrancabermeja who told him they were there to “negotiate information” (i.e. sell their false testimony):

Added to the radical moral repugnance this generated in me was a profound sadness and indignation at the thought of how the misery of our people is exploited to turn them into ‘informants’ and ‘denouncers’ against their own neighbours. Who can trust in the ‘truths’ obtained in this way, as if the truth were merchandise? This represents an inconceivable debasement of truth; its
total dehumanization. It is, moreover, a politics of destruction, at a very deep level, of the moral conscience of a people and a society. (Ibid. p. 19).

The deep levels of corruption in the Colombian justice system and the military have led to the violation of the principle of the separation of powers. The military frequently takes charge of “investigations”: seeking out “witnesses”, illegally capturing people, taking testimonies in military installations without the detained having lawyers present, presentation of “evidence” that has not passed legal procedures, and so forth. This leads to rampant impunity and favours perpetrators of crimes against humanity. As Father Giraldo argues, “the judicial and disciplinary system of the State, induced by the reigning juridical positivism that has gradually cut every connection with the world of values, ethics, political ideals, humanism, and religion, turning itself into a supposedly ‘aseptic’, autonomous technique, has constructed the notion of the sovereignty of ‘process truth’ as the foundation of justice” (ibid., pp. 34-35), which has itself been completely perverted by the mercantilization of process and the systematic fabrication of testimony.

The question is: what is it that has led to this profound moral crisis of institutions? Father Giraldo’s own diagnosis itself suggests resonances with MacIntyre’s argument about the autonomy and arbitrariness of liberal morality that have conduced to render the principles of law increasingly arbitrary and incoherent (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 253; 1982, p. 306). In terms of the specifics of the Colombian context, there are of course deep socio-historical factors relating to the nature of politics and paramilitarism in Colombia. From a MacIntyrean perspective these socio-historical factors need to be read in terms of a philosophical understanding of the nature of state and other institutions.
Father Giraldo himself has proffered an analysis of the “schizophrenic state” in Colombia in which one part of it is expected to investigate the involvement in state terror of another part. This linkage ensures that justice in relation to the conflict fails in most cases. As Giraldo suggests,

Perhaps the contradiction is inherent to the state’s role: on the one hand, the state appears to be a steward of the law, from which its legitimacy derives. This is the rationale for the fact that only the state is allowed to maintain coercive instruments such as a judiciary, penal codes, and police. On the other hand, the state is also a social manifestation of power. Power, defined as dominance, embodies many kinds of oppression when it fails to represent the consensus of its citizens. (Giraldo 1999, p. 27)

This is entirely resonant with MacIntyre’s critique of the modern state and suggests that any (re)construction of political community and morality cannot centre on “state construction” in the dominant terms in which this is understood today.

Giraldo reveals another telling insight into the nature of the Colombian situation. In a meeting he had with the Prosecutor General in relation to various cases of grave human rights abuses and crimes against humanity Giraldo recalls that he was told he had to be clear about “which side” he was on (Giraldo 2009, p. 5). This points to the dangerous polarization of Colombian society and also raises the issue of individual moral agency in relation to social institutions and structures. Had the judicial official in question allowed the standards of the institution that defined his role to entirely govern his moral reasoning? As MacIntyre notes, we can always ask of someone who claims to
have acted solely in accordance with their role what reason they had for believing that the established standards governing their deliberations were the best standards (MacIntyre 2006c, p. 189). Yet in order to put certain moral and evaluative standards to the question we need the capacity to do so, to be able to be moral agents. To be a moral agent is to understand oneself as accountable to others. However, as MacIntyre points out, how human beings are able to understand themselves in large part depends upon and is limited by the nature of the social and cultural order they inhabit (ibid., p. 189). For MacIntyre the key question is therefore, “are there or might there be types of social structure that would prevent those who inhabited them from understanding themselves as moral agents?” (Ibid., p. 189)

And so we can also ask to what extent moral agency is possible in the dominant milieus of Colombian society, and how Colombia’s social and political institutions have disabled and disfigured the ability to be a moral agent.29 On a MacIntyrean perspective, the nature and compartmentalization of the state, its “schizophrenic” nature, can erode moral agency but its obliteration depends on other factors. As MacIntyre notes,

Accountability to particular others, participation in critical practical enquiry, and acknowledgment of the individuality both of others and of oneself are all then marks of the social relationships and mode of self-understanding that characterize the moral agent. Strip away those social relationships and that mode of self-understanding and what would be left would be a seriously diminished type of agency, one unable to transcend the limitations imposed by

29 This kind of analysis is missing from the majority of moral philosophical studies in relation to the conflict.
its own social and cultural order. Moral agency thus does seem to require a particular kind of social setting. (Ibid., p. 192)

In the case of the collapse of ethics in Colombia’s judicial and other institutions (such as the military, the intelligence service, the Congress, etc.) we can ask, then, to what extent the individuals within them have lacked other social milieus in which they have been able to stand back and critique the evaluative and moral norms of the dominant social and institutional order. Increasingly in modern society we are deprived of such milieus, and MacIntyre has of course called for their (re)construction. I want to suggest, following MacIntyre, that the most successful forms of moral resistance in Colombia are to be found in relatively marginal and ‘deviant’ social movements and community organizations. Those outside such communities in the dominant milieus of modern society increasingly lack the ability to be moral agents and fall prey more easily to external inputs and free-floating discourses and justificatory frameworks and arguments.

An added important factor in the Colombian context is the impact of intimidation and physical attack on people’s ability to exercise moral agency. Father Giraldo has argued that such intimidation and the fact that it is nearly always backed up has had a devastating effect on the moral consciousness of countless individuals and, cumulatively, on the whole of society. The ability to resist such intimidation requires strong community and inter-community links.

In the Colombian context the nature of the current “state-building” project needs to be understood in order to see how it is constructing a certain kind of social and cultural order that undermines moral agency and which is morally corrosive in the way Father Giraldo describes. Described by some as a
“communitarian” or “mafia” state, the view from the critical wing is that former
president Álvaro Uribe Vélez\textsuperscript{30} consolidated an authoritarian consensus
around a charismatic-populist leader that sought to imbue the state and
Colombian political community with a hybrid ethos of “tradition”, “order” and
neoliberal bureaucratic rationality (see Mejía Quintana et al. 2007). Such a
characterization cannot, of course, avoid entanglement with normative
frameworks and judgements. Nevertheless, from a critical angle one important
characteristic of the current state is its attempt to unify state and society, which
has taken sinister form in the shape of certain structures like the so-called
“informants network” in which well over a million civilians are paid to inform on
“suspicious activities” to the military or other state agencies, which follow on
from the infamous “Convivir” “security cooperatives” that legalized the carrying
of weapons by civilians in support of the military, becoming the early nuclei of
the paramilitary structures (Romero 2003).

Added to this I suggest the “with me or against me” line of discourse
contributes to a climate in which there is strong social, cultural and moral
pressure to conform. Populist “community councils”, constant stigmatizing of
political opposition, human rights activists, trade unionists, etc. and a
combination of authoritarian, moralistic rhetoric with reference to neoliberal
discourse against corruption, in favour of “modernization”, “security” and “state
construction”, plus the sheer weight of overwhelming media support, combine
to produce a heady atmosphere conducive to an authoritarian consensus and
the justification of a means-ends morality. Add to this the economic

\textsuperscript{30} Whose policies are to be continued if not deepened by new president Juan Manuel Santos
who, incidentally, was the Defence Minister at the time of the “false positives” scandal in which
over 1000 innocent Colombians were deliberately killed by the armed forces in order to pass
them off as guerrillas killed in combat. Soldiers received financial and other rewards for
registering guerrillas killed- so-called “positives”. 
vulnerability of large sectors of the population, including the middle classes, which makes jobs highly sought after and important to hold on to once found, particularly jobs in local, regional and national state bureaucracies and agencies; national service, inversion of facts about the conflict, widespread fatigue with the war and legitimate anger towards the guerrillas, etc. and we have some reasons for thinking that moral agency is extremely difficult to exercise. Historic dependence on the state for work, for ad hoc favours and benefits also contributes to an uncritical or conformist attitude towards the state and the dominant social order.

Social complicity with paramilitarism

The so-called “para-politics” scandal is another measure of the moral crisis. This refers to the alliance of paramilitary terrorist organizations and politicians that radically altered Colombia’s political landscape in the build up to the 2002 election of president Uribe (Romero 2007). In 2001 a formal pact outlined the agreement between paramilitaries and about thirty politicians in the department of Córdoba and wider coastal region, which had the stated goal of “refounding the nation” and establishing “a new social contract” (Cepeda and Rojas 2008, p. 84). In less rhetorical terms the pact had the more pragmatic goal of formalizing the proxy electoral strategy of the paramilitary project. The ballot and the bullet would combine to sinister and dramatic effect as the alliance between paramilitaries and politicians radically altered Colombia’s political, social and economic landscape. A plethora of small political parties emerged, shifting the balance of power for the first time from the two traditional parties in a very short space of time, despite their recent emergence. The
paramilitaries’ military control and reputation for brutal terrorism in various regions was used to threaten, intimidate and discourage alternative candidates from running, which resulted in highly abnormal electoral outcomes (Romero 2007). As of May 2009 179 Colombian politicians have been linked to the investigations.31

The social, political and moral implications of this are hugely significant. In terms of social morality the “scandal” reveals the shocking extent of paramilitary penetration of the state and society, and the disturbing levels of social support for the paramilitary project. Discussing human rights reporting and its conceptual limitations in terms of illuminating the “why” of violence and human rights violations, and the production of alternative “knowledge about resistance and agency, [which are] critical sites for understanding how violence affects local populations” (Tate 2007, p. 302), Winifred Tate cites a Colombian activist involved in local efforts at transforming politics:

Our problem was the conception of human rights. We just focused on the military, on state responsibility. We didn’t see that behind the faces of the militares were the caciques, the political bosses. We reported the facts without judging who makes those facts happen. It is the same now, people talk about the paramilitaries, denounce the military. But who talks about the mayor, the council, what happens with that? It has taken a long time to realize the social and economic support for the paramilitaries. We didn’t think it would happen, didn’t think about the political project beyond the denuncia of the events. (Cited in Tate 2007, p. 302)

31 Source: http://www.verdadabierta.com/web3/parapolitica/nacional/1230-la-ultima-ola-de-la-parapolitica
The social immersion of the paramilitary project, which is at its clearest in the documented structures of the Convivir security cooperatives, informants networks and links with the armed forces, is at its murkiest at the level of everyday social life, in the subjectivities, mentalities and interactions of everyday Colombians. If we take agency seriously, then it is not enough to focus solely on factors like coercion and intimidation in accounting for paramilitary support. We need to recognize the way ostensibly moral reasons, intentions and motives play a role. Equally, we need to exercise caution in too readily referring to “interests” as a factor in such social approbation. The diffuse grey areas have to be the subject of any attempt to understand the complex of factors that constitute individual and collective relations and responses to paramilitarism and its social, political and moral dimensions.

The notions of “social contract” and “refounding the nation” in the Ralito pact reveal more than some paramilitary ideologue’s attempts at sophistication and rationalization inasmuch as they imply the sociological reality of “new forms of social cohesion” (Cepeda and Rojas 2008, p. 134) that partly correspond to shifts in social structure and the generation of new moral frameworks and discourses. Iván Cepeda and Jorge Rojas observe:

The power that the paramilitary project achieved in terms of the control of society and its institutions was omnipresent and forced a collective consensus. Under the form of consent obedience was produced. In a controlled society, each individual must make a public demonstration of their support for the predominant state of affairs. A conformity of the masses is created. That pressure comes from the fear of being rejected by the group or, even, of being excluded from society. The progressive imposition of silence becomes a
mechanism of adaptation to dominant opinion. That attitude leads to the gradual lowering of the threshold of ethical demands and to the general consent to crimes and violations of the law as minor infractions or necessary evils. (Cepeda and Rojas 2008, p. 154)

But perhaps this is too neat and places too much emphasis on the coercive side of the equation, which must of course be taken into account. However, if we focus solely on this aspect we risk misunderstanding agency and missing other important factors in social “support” for the paramilitaries. We also thereby risk misunderstanding how moral consensus can be constructed and social reconciliation achieved. Any serious attempt to understand the moral dimensions of conflict (expressed partly in radical disagreements in relation to attitudes towards the state, paramilitaries, and guerrillas) and to seek a resolution in the form of some kind of moral-political consensus needs to look beyond force and coercion as explanations.

**Constructing the state**

The violent contestation in Colombia in which different armed groups have the ability to control territories and populations is seen by some theorists to be partly the result of the failure to consolidate the state (Ortiz 2007; Romero 2003; Uribe 1990, 1999). However, from a MacIntyrean perspective the Hobbesian answer to this cannot work (see F. Giraldo 2008). Or rather, it cannot work without the gravest of costs in terms of social morality. As political philosopher Fabio Giraldo points out in relation to the “dilemma” of “dirty hands”- whether to achieve the monopoly of force “legally” or extra-legally, or,
in other terms, to “pacify” and “re-institutionalize” the country at significant “social and ethical costs”:- “a recognizable majority of the Colombian people, led by the current government and directed by the mass media, fervently concurs with the idea that the dilemma should be definitively resolved, without concern for the cost, in order to avoid what has already been paid spiritually and materially throughout fifty years of sustained violence” (F. Giraldo 2008, p. 16). Yet this has too many troubling assumptions. It appears to see the violence in ahistorical terms, abstracting it from its social context, a context in which the state itself is a dominant actor in the conflict. It ignores the fact that the “dilemma” that the state now claims the authority to “resolve” was in significant part created by the state itself. The question must also be asked in light of the above discussion of moral agency: to what extent are those who support such a project in a position to be able to rationally evaluate the social and moral costs of constructing the state in this way? Whence derives the moral authority for taking such a morally significant decision?

The evidence clearly shows that the violence in Colombia has been asymmetrically split between the state, paramilitaries and the guerrillas, with the state and paramilitaries responsible for roughly 65-70% of crimes connected to political violence, and the guerrillas responsible for approximately 30-35%. As Jairo Ramírez, executive director of Colombia’s largest human rights network, the Permanent Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CPDH), explained to me, the guerrillas have responsibility for massacres of civilians and forced displacement but “it is evident that the guerrillas have committed these on a much lesser scale, there is simply no comparison; a

symmetry cannot be established, responsibility is not equally divided. Doing so
does a serious disservice to humanity. The fact is the paramilitaries have
committed the vast majority of crimes, which is not just my own view but is
established by the courts.” In this case it must be asked by what moral
authority, by which moral standards, the state can claim the right to the
monopoly of force? A further assumption appears to be that gaining the
monopoly of force and constructing the state/re-institutionalizing the country
means having to act immorally and with a modus operandi in which serious
dialogue, negotiation and deep reflection are simply ruled out.

Those who argue for the imposition of the state in terms of some form of
consequentialist or cost-benefit calculus clearly adhere to the modern ethos in
which ethics and politics - social morality and politics- are radically separate.
The assumption appears to be that a viable and morally healthy political
community can emerge on the basis of abstract “institution building” without
taking into account how institutions need social legitimacy and, in MacIntyrean
terms, the support of the virtues in order for them to flourish and serve the
human good. Political institutions might enjoy social legitimacy in terms of their
popular support (as is constantly repeated in Colombia, the president enjoys
vast popular support), but public opinion is clearly manipulated in modern
societies by the power and logic of the mass media, and in any case,
legitimacy does not entail *moral* legitimacy. As political theorist David Held
observes, what counts as legitimacy is also connected to particular moral and
evaluative stances (Held 1989, pp. 101-102.)

The emphasis on “state construction” as a partial answer to conflict is
further problematic as it tends to rely on a picture of the Colombian state and

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33 Interview, Bogotá, April 2008
Colombian democracy as “besieged” (Pizarro 2004), trapped in the middle of warring factions, which is a distortion. It portrays the state as a wholly abstract entity above the contestation of the conflict. The profound moral crisis of Colombian institutions is partly connected to rival conceptions of the state, political community, society and economy. The arguments for state-building therefore necessarily participate in the incommensurable moral-political contestation that exists at many levels within Colombian society. These arguments also lack philosophical coherence and, in a MacIntyrean perspective, suffer from the arbitrariness of liberal moral argumentation. For example, Iván Orozco has argued:

It is problematic that we in the periphery and semi-periphery cannot rescue some distinctions and fundamental dilemmas from the historical process of the construction of the European states. Therefore, for example, to be able to affirm when a country is still immersed in civil war the primacy, even if only temporary, of negative peace over positive peace, of procedural and majority democracy over ethical-material democracy, of peace over justice and particularly of clemency over punishment, constitute strategic alternatives that must remain available for the people and their governors. (Orozco 2005, p. 290)

But it is clear that Orozco speaks in the name of a particular “we”. The fact of serious rival contestation of this view highlights the problem of morally justifying particular positions in respect of constructing the state and the required steps for conflict transformation, let alone reaching a moral consensus. I showed in chapter two how Orozco had to resort to discrediting the moral epistemology of certain human rights organizations and social
movements in the attempt to rationally support his own position. It was clear, however, that Orozco’s position could not be rationally supported and was in fact merely an arbitrary expression of preference in the emotivist mode.

There is much emphasis on “state formation” as an important part of the answer to conflict, both from NGOs and in the academic literature (see Bolívar 2006; González et al. 2002; González 2008; Orozco 2005). As I have pointed out, arguments about state construction implicitly presuppose normative positions. In many cases the modern European state is the implicit or explicit model deemed appropriate for Colombia. However, because MacIntyre is writing out of and in terms of the context of the “developed” and at least internally stable states, there is an important argumentative burden for those advocating his perspective in contexts like Colombia. Nevertheless, I argue that MacIntyre’s approach provides a necessary critical perspective on the modern state as well as highlighting the inevitable normative entanglements that *advocacy* of state construction and *processes* of state formation entail. MacIntyre brings to our attention that “institution building” and “strengthening” has an inherent moral dimension and cannot unproblematically be prescribed as a solution to Colombia’s institutional and social crisis.

Besides MacIntyre’s critique of the modern state, the problem in prescribing European liberal states as models includes the fact that these liberal states appear to be unravelling in terms of their political justification and the moral dimension of their politics. In my view this is evident in the increasingly authoritarian treatment of dissent, the increasing cynicism of political discourse, and the inability to address adequately and rationally the problems of multiculturalism, and the failure (or, if you like, “success”) of capitalism. Nevertheless, it might be argued that these states have
implemented the “civil war by other means” that in Colombia would be a huge advance in terms of preventing violence. However, my argument is that Colombia not only is in no position to build this but that doing so necessarily entails engaging in morally questionable acts of violence and coercion. Moreover, the end result of a liberal state, even if it could be achieved, can only lead to the suppression of conflict and therefore to the likely probability of future conflict and violence. Further, by taking a MacIntyrean perspective on the issue, activists and theorists in Colombia can better address the deep-rooted problem of radical conflict that has plagued its past and continues to plague its present.

There is a tension between the rich and nuanced body of work that documents the complex and contestatory process of state formation in Colombia, and the normative theoretical work that advocates the modern liberal state as the “only viable option.” As González et al. point out, “it is important to underline that violence is generated not because of a “lack of state”, nor because of an excess of it, but rather due to conflictive relations between the state and society” (González et al. 2002, p. 225). These conflictive relations constitute an essential part of the conflict and therefore prescriptions for state construction unavoidably enter this contested terrain. In relation to the current conflict, prescriptions for state presence and the institutionalization of the country by the state need to be looked at critically—what kind of state is being advocated, what conception of citizenship does it embody, what socio-economic model does it imply, etc?

The roots of Colombia’s multiple conflicts are seen to lie in the history of the tortuous construction of the state and the citizen-state relationship. The social problems generated by colonization of various relatively depopulated
departments by landless peasants created political tensions and problems. In many areas there were conflicts between state domination and communitarian forms of social regulation (see González et al. 2002, p. 265). As González et al. point out, “The attitude of communities towards the centralizing efforts of the state depends...on the coincidence or not between the state and the local community on a concrete political interest as well as on cultural conceptions that the same community has of itself and the state” (González et al. 2002, p. 287). The central state offended the hierarchical structures of certain local communities that held a conception of social order which revolved around Liberal and Conservative families who regulated access to public posts and services. González et al. observe,

The successful resistance of traditional powers has managed to block the efforts of the state to expand its dominion over society. This means that the modern, impersonal and bureaucratic institutions of the state must continually negotiate with the existing local and regional power structures. This obstructs the modernizing demands of the central state but at the same time moderates its excessively centralizing and homogenizing tendencies, which generally express the mentality of technocratic elites who are ignorant of regional and local diversity. (González et al. 2002, p. 293)

However, we need to exercise caution in classifying resistance to the state solely in terms of implied “backwards”, “traditional” and “clientelist” communities and social forms. As Ingrid Bolívar notes, liberal political philosophy, political science and sociology have tended to classify forms of social and political relationships and formation in terms of “primary”/“modern”
and “traditional” identities. “‘Real’ politics was seen to be the arrival of citizenship in the dark world of traditional identities; as if such traditional identities were not constructed and contested”, she points out (Bolívar 2006, p. 10. See also Sanders 2004). Bolívar explicitly highlights the normative problematic of viewing processes of political formation and state construction in light of implicitly loaded, normative categories like “modernity” and “modern citizenship” (Bolívar 2006, p. 21).

I suggest that Colombia’s historical state-building trajectory is a kind of photographic negative of the European state-building process that reveals the ultimately arbitrary and non-rational nature of that project in terms of its normative justifications (the myth of the social contract, etc.) The geographical and socio-cultural realities and complexities of Colombia have meant that no one central force has been able to impose the state and successfully retrospectively justify it in terms of the social contract myth. The discursive element of forging a national political community has therefore remained transparent and has not been mystified or pushed to the margins of collective consciousness as with the European state-building process. Therefore, and given MacIntyre’s diagnosis, an alternative moral-political philosophy is required for understanding how a rationally justifiable conception of political community can be elaborated and constructed.

The ambiguities of human rights

The radical breakdown in dialogue and shared moral referents highlighted by Camilo Torres in the 1960s, which was ultimately understood in terms of class polarization, has also come to fracture movements for human rights and social
change, adding a further dimension to the moral crisis. I suggest part of the moral degeneration of Colombian society has to be connected to the confusion and discrediting of human rights as a discourse and moral framework, which is related to MacIntyre’s diagnosis of how morality has become a free-floating idiom, available for ideological deployment. The devaluation of human rights is arguably one important reason for the lowering of individual and social moral thresholds. The extent of social and political polarization in Colombia has also contributed to the instrumentalization of human rights (Restrepo 2001), but more is at issue than mere ideological use. The Colombian situation simply more clearly reveals the way moral discourse is always somebody’s particular discourse. The appeal to human rights has been made within very different social contexts and milieus, and the incoherencies and disagreements within the human rights “community” reflect this and the deeper philosophical problems of emotivism and incommensurability. This calls into question the view of one Colombian philosopher who argues:

Given that no agreement can exist between people without rules that fix limits to what is permitted and prohibited, the need for a foundational ethical code is made clear. In our time, human rights and International Humanitarian Law ostensibly serve as such a foundation and come prior to any particular content to the public policies that the opposing parties negotiate. The principles stipulated therein provide the ethical and juridical conditions for any possible accord and therefore adherence to them cannot remain at the discretion of the disputants. (Tovar González 2002, p. 50)

The problem is that moral rules and norms, as MacIntyre points out, presuppose an important degree of prior social and moral agreement.
Moreover, human rights as enshrined in international declarations and charters are the product of particular, contestable social and political contexts and forms. They do not in fact come “prior” to any political content but are intimately connected to and emerge out of particular political contexts, structures and ideological standpoints.

The first human rights organizations in Colombia emerged from embattled leftist political movements struggling for recognition and social transformation in the closed National Front political system in an era of aggressive U.S. imperialism. Originally wary of the discourse of human rights—many felt it was irredeemably compromised because of its “bourgeois” origins and ideological usefulness and affinity to capitalism and US interests—activists eventually adopted the framework but naturally interpreted and coloured it in terms of their political, social and cultural visions and agendas (see Assman 1978). Many activists were initiated into the human rights framework by participation in consciousness-raising groups organized through the Catholic Church, universities and trade unions. The influence of liberation theology in particular left its imprint on the first human rights activists. These activists focused on social and economic rights as much as political and civil rights and were driven by an agenda of profound social change. As liberation theologian José Comblin noted, given the background of the horrendous repression experienced under the National Security regimes it was not surprising that the various declarations of the Church and social organizations regarding human rights were not “theoretical studies of an ethical doctrine conducted in a vacuum. They [were] public acts of confrontation with a political system” (Comblin 1979, p. 105). The state was naturally viewed as the enemy.
The liberation theologians gradually moved towards a nuanced appropriation of human rights that fitted with the “preferential option for the poor” (Engler 2000), and a partiality in human rights language was permitted on the basis that it was unnecessary to defend the rights of those whose rights were not at risk (Comblin 1990). As Winifred Tate points out, “These views profoundly shaped the kinds of violence on which early human rights campaigns focused...The ambivalence toward guerrilla violence extended from defending individuals accused of participation in guerrilla groups to defending the rights of guerrilla groups themselves, using the so-called right to rebellion” (Tate 2007, p. 104).

Tate traces the development of these first politicized human rights groups through to the early 1990s when many became properly professional organizations with paid as opposed to voluntary staff, and with increasing connections to the also emerging state human rights agencies and international organizations. This amounted to a seismic shift in the landscape of human rights culture and activism that sparked emotional debates within. A particularly important debate centred on the issue of documenting and categorising guerrilla violence. For the newly professionalized organisations, guerrilla violence had to be categorised either as human rights abuses or violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). In contrast, for those whose understanding of human rights was formed in the course of engagement with radical politics the very idea of criticizing the guerrillas and documenting their violence was unthinkable. In response to suggestions by another human rights activist that they document guerrilla violence, instead of invoking the theoretical argument that only states are party to international human rights treaties and therefore only states can violate human rights, one human rights
activist in Tate’s account invoked the narrative of political persecution and social injustice from which the guerrillas emerged and with which early activists sympathised and identified. For such activists, human rights are inscribed and given meaning within the context and practice of political struggle for social transformation. As one activist commented, “What is not easy is to recognize that in this country when people are killed because of what they think, the guerrilla is legitimate [sic]. And that the state is not legitimate, to think that it is recognised by the international community. What am I basing this on? On human rights” (cited in Tate 2007, p. 166). This speaks to the problem of deciding what is and who are legitimate (cf. Arango 2002, pp. 18-19) as well as indicating the kind of dichotomous moral thinking characteristic of the discourse about the conflict in Colombia.

For the externally funded professional organisations like the Colombian Commission of Jurists, in contrast, the human rights organizations had to support and address the victims of all the armed actors in the conflict. This was partly out of a conviction that the “violent abuse of the innocent and defenseless [was] indicative of larger patterns of social injustice” (Tate 2007, p. 150) and partly out of pragmatic concern for continued international diplomatic support and funding. For activists on this side of the debate, human rights did not displace their political convictions but rather provided a different framework for their continued political activism.

But every concept appealed to refers us back to another dimension of the conflict and the discussion. So the notion of the “innocent and defenseless” is bound up with one way of reading the violence and the conflict as well as with a particular view of individual agency in relation to it. The shift in the 1990s towards a humanitarian reading of the conflict and the urgency of
attending to millions of displaced people arguably contributed to a view of “passive” victims in need of “paternalistic” humanitarian intervention. In the view of one human rights lawyer, the notion of “protecting the innocent” is far more complicated than merely appealing for IHL to be adhered to. The reality of war and the nature of power mean that the abstract principles of IHL cannot simply be “applied” to such a context. “The war involves everyone. Who is outside of the conflict? How can we distinguish who is part of the war and who is not? In the logic of IHL, everything is untouchable” (cited in Tate 2007, p. 166).

For likeminded activists, adopting IHL to criticize the guerrillas would fuel the government’s campaign to deflect accountability and responsibility for political violence. Documentation of guerrilla violations and public censure by human rights organizations would, so it was argued, be used to shift attention from the state’s overwhelming responsibility for the violence. In this sense Colombian human rights organisations had a “political” conception of human rights. They have been criticised for adopting such a “political” conception of human rights instead of an “ethical” conception (Restrepo 2001). However, from a MacIntyrean perspective there can be no such thing as a purely “ethical” conception of human rights. Human rights, as with any moral concept and framework, necessarily imply or are embedded within some conception of the good and therefore some political conception and vision.

But other human rights organizations took a different view. Some argued for the inclusion of IHL as a category for censuring the guerrillas on the basis that not doing so would undermine their credibility and legitimacy. When an important number of Colombian NGOs took the decision to integrate IHL into their frameworks and to condemn guerrilla “kidnappings” and forced
disappearances after national level discussions, “At stake were the diplomatic relationships. No one doubted the benefit of having the embassies on board. They were huge pillars of support in dark times”, as one activist recounted (cited in Tate 2007, p. 164). In order to keep these diplomatic ties the NGOs therefore had to “take a position” (ibid., p. 164). The final declaration in support of this move was read by a prominent activist who had suffered a forced disappearance in her own family, allegedly “giving her greater moral authority to argue the position”, as Tate puts it (ibid., p. 164). However, this implies the arbitrary modern notion of moral authority critiqued by MacIntyre.

The episode reveals the moral complexities and ambiguities faced by social activists in Colombia but also underlines the philosophical incoherence of “moral” positions and evaluations in the context of international human rights activism. Activists are forced to divorce their moral reasoning from the concrete history and context of the conflict and to make moral judgements on the basis of pragmatic considerations. These considerations might of course themselves be based on further moral evaluations in terms of ultimate consequences, but this nevertheless risks making the internal issues less determinate and more abstract. The logic of international human rights defence inevitably moves in this direction and risks leaving social activists morally resourceless and ineffective within the specifically Colombian context of seeking social transformation. The important gains in international profile that can have significant impacts in impeding state violence, for example, can also bring significant costs in terms of establishing a precedent for the state to judge guerrilla actions which, for many activists, whilst deplorable in many ways are nonetheless deeply political and historically rooted. This can lead to the establishment of a moral framework that is inappropriate for addressing
and transforming the particular social, political and moral dimensions of the conflict and, moreover, also has important implications in terms of moral truth.

The professionalization of human rights organizations also served to highlight internal class differences within the Colombian human rights community. Some activists complained that international funding saw once radically committed activists shift to ambiguous positions with different interests. The interests of the “international community” and the matrix of global institutions through which human rights activism was channelled meant, from the perspective of some activists, the inevitable neutering of a wider transformatory and oppositional agenda. “In the name of professionalism, activists were forced to use diplomatic, officialist language, ‘light’ language, and weaken their critique of the state, hiding the seriousness of the human rights situation and the depth of state responsibility” (Tate 2007, pp. 153-154).

As Tate points out, the stakes are high in these debates in terms of both gaining domestic constituencies and international support. The proliferation of human rights and other NGOs has brought with it a dependency on, and a competition for, external funding. Beyond this though there are issues of personal moral-political identity. As Tate observes, “For activists, these debates also signal a shift in political identity and culture; they must decide whether or not they align themselves with radical left movements for social transformation or with an international movement that uses human rights norms to protect vulnerable citizens, establish accountability, and work for social transformation through the defence of the rule of law” (Tate 2007, p. 163). These are significant, consequential issues for Colombian activists, which are also philosophically and practically important in terms of how the
A decisive shift in the Colombian human rights landscape occurred in the years immediately following the historic change of the Constitution in 1991. Colombian human rights activists played a significant role in rewriting the charter, which dramatically expanded the kinds of rights enshrined in the previous Constitution as well as creating new mechanisms through which citizens could claim the implementation of rights denied to them. The experience of those activists who engaged in lobbying the members of the Constitutional Assembly translated into optimism about engaging with the state on issues of human rights and effecting social change “from within”. Perhaps inspired by this ostensibly more positive political climate, in 1992 an important group of fifty Colombian intellectuals wrote an open letter to the leadership of the FARC, the largest guerrilla group that was not involved in the demobilizations and peace talks that preceded the constitutional changes, condemning the armed struggle and urging them to seek change through political means. In line with the emerging shift in positions amongst the Colombian human rights organizations the intellectuals made reference to human rights in their letter: “Your war, understandable in the beginning, now goes against the tide of history. Kidnapping, coercion, forced contributions, which are today your most effective instruments, are all abominable violations of human rights...Your war, gentlemen, lost its historical relevance some time ago” (cited in Bergquist et al. 2001, pp. 214-215).

Whereas human rights were once appealed to by those who justified or sympathized with guerrilla struggle, they were now seen to raise a moral barrier to the kind of actions required by such struggle. The reference to
history is revealing as its use here effectively implies the irrelevance of history to the moral evaluation of the war and to moral evaluation per se. 34 “Historical relevance” appears to be measured by the “tide of history”, which, it is implied, is one of progress, rights, and civil society. I see this particular moral judgement as the photographic negative of the historical determinist morality of Stalinism that MacIntyre so cogently critiques. The “tide of history” and the conception of human rights appealed to are reflections of a particular social order. They are ultimately arbitrary notions that stand outside of history. The guerrillas are condemned on the basis of “human rights”, which are what are held to be “relevant”, and in contrast the entire social and political trajectory of the guerrillas is deemed historically irrelevant. Because the guerrillas are not marching in tune to the “relevance” of liberal morality, their actions can simply be morally condemned. The question is why the so-called “tide of history” is more relevant than the actual and particular history of guerrilla struggle in Colombia in relation to any moral evaluation. MacIntyre provides the answer. The “tide of history” is simply the historical dominance of liberal, autonomous, arbitrary morality in which human rights, although embodying many profound human moral aspirations that have been formulated and discovered through social struggles for modern citizenship, are an increasingly arbitrary and abstract set of norms that are increasingly put, purposefully or inadvertently, to ideological use.

The differences within the Colombian human rights and social activist community over the interpretation of the scope and implications of human rights as a framework for analyzing and denouncing violence therefore reveal,  

34 The argument neglects the history of the Patriotic Union, which by 1992 had seen thousands of its members and militants murdered. More on this below.
and are a reflection of, social fissures and fragmentation. The continuously evolving nature of the conflict means that activists are constantly forced to rethink and reframe the categories and classifications they use for defining and denouncing violent acts. The debate over the appropriate classification of state and guerrilla violence in terms of the two different schemes of human rights and IHL is intricately bound up with historical, philosophical and moral standpoints and frameworks.

These can of course shift. The debate within CINEP over how their database on political violence is to be analytically framed has shifted over the years and led to different stances at different times. I spoke to current director Mauricio García Durán about the nature of this debate. He underlined how it had and would continue to have serious implications for the dynamics of the conflict and the discussion about the conflict. He gave the example of how “there was a debate...about whether the blowing up of electricity pylons could be considered a legitimate act of war, which would mean it could not be classified as a violation of IHL, or vice versa.”35 This speaks directly to the normative problematic of the social sciences but in this case has particularly clear implications for the conflict, for the kind of knowledge produced about it, how this will affect many different people’s views, the way the state will react, etc. We then spoke about the differences in view between the Colombian government and certain civil society organizations in relation to human rights and the conflict:

I think that underlying the whole discussion ultimately what is at issue is the question of the legitimacy or lack of legitimacy of political violence. This has

35 Interview, Bogotá, April 2008
two angles: the legitimacy of the guerrillas’ armed struggle and, on the other side, the legitimacy of the struggle against the guerrillas. These are two competing narratives. There is also a third narrative in the midst of these about the legitimacy of opening democratic horizons without resort to violence.36

I also spoke to Father Javier Giraldo of the Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace about this debate. He explained the differences in position between CINEP and Justice and Peace, the two organizations that collaborated on the “Noche y Niebla” database on political violence. At one point the collaboration between the two organizations stopped due to insuperable differences in relation to characterising and categorizing acts of violence. CINEP and Justice and Peace then separated their databases and analyzed conflict data through their respective lenses. However, a rapprochement occurred after the intervention of a former head of CINEP, who argued that this had serious implications for the victims of violence so they ought to work out their differences and attempt to develop a shared analytic framework. This was gradually achieved, with Father Giraldo doing the bulk of the intellectual work on the model. However, the fragility of the consensus is real and could shift again. As Father Giraldo told me, the decision to adopt the perspective in which the state is seen as the only agent that can violate human rights (in terms of the political violence) and the guerrillas violate IHL, “was very polemical. CINEP accepted it after a negotiation between the director of Justice and Peace and the director of CINEP, but it was imposed against the

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36 Interview, Bogotá, April 2008
wishes of many researchers in CINEP who did not accept it as an appropriate framework.\textsuperscript{37}

Father Giraldo told me how the issue tended to centre on the notion of “impartiality”. There was a strong perception amongst many in CINEP and other organizations that they had to take an “impartial” and “symmetrical” position in respect of classifying and denouncing acts of political violence. Father Giraldo felt strongly that this was misleading and dangerous:

The recourse to symmetry is very common amongst the intellectual community and the Church. During the time I worked as executive secretary of Justice and Peace I was subjected to intense pressure by my religious superiors to adopt a symmetrical position in the way Bishop Rivera did in El Salvador after the death of Bishop Romero. The guerrillas would commit two or three violent acts a week and the government three hundred, but he would choose three acts of the government’s and three of the guerrillas’ to achieve a total balance, which would always give the impression that there was a symmetrical violence, not a greater or lesser violence in which one was more legitimate than the other, but in which everything was equal. This was done in an artificial way to force the appearance of symmetry.\textsuperscript{38}

The view of IHL “as universal, equalitarian and equidistant guidelines for judging violations and abuses of human rights of all actors in the conflict” (Orozco 2005, p. 354) has generated ongoing debate and controversy related to the characterization of the conflict and the violence. The problem is that these supposedly “equalitarian” guidelines are both abstracted from social and

\textsuperscript{37} Interview, Bogotá, May 2008
\textsuperscript{38} Interview, Bogotá, May 2008
political contexts but are inevitably formulated and used within particular social and political contexts and structures.

Within the terms of a MacIntyorean perspective on ethics this tendency might be connected to the dominant liberal notion of morality as an autonomous realm of pure reason, and to the liberal conception of moral agency as expressed in abstract reflection on the rational precepts enjoined by morality as such, rather than as embedded and embodied reflection in particular historical, social and cultural contexts and social relationships. In resonance with a MacIntyorean position, Father Giraldo criticized the way “many intellectuals” who adopt the moral position of “impartiality” and “symmetry” do so at a great social distance from the concrete social milieus and struggles of those who are the objects of such moral evaluation: “They have a problem of conscience in that they are far removed from the people who suffer and yet they consider themselves upright and just in comparison to the rest who are the morally bad ones, who are ubiquitous; the good ones are those who coolly observe and take a symmetrical position, those who do not do this are the morally questionable ones.”

This desire for “balance”, “impartiality” and “symmetry” is arguably connected to dominant liberal moral assumptions, which as I argued in chapter two are firmly embedded in the so-called ethics of minimums/citizenship ethics approaches. The liberal view of the state as “neutral”, and of the “democratic” political arena as having reached a consensus on a “moral” position that condemns violence impartially, whether of the left or right, is prevalent in the Colombian discussion (see Villegas 2008). What it ignores is not only the fact that this is factually and historically highly questionable, but also that the

39 Interview, Bogotá, May 2008
impartial, “moral point of view” that passes judgement on certain acts of the guerrillas or the paramilitaries ignores the systematic role of the state in the conflict and the fact that such a moral point of view inevitably presupposes a particular evaluative stance in relation to the dominant political and social order, a stance that on a MacIntyrean perspective must necessarily be called into question in terms of its rational justification.

**Ambiguities of the armed struggle**

Yet the question of morally evaluating guerrilla actions remains. As Mauricio García put it,

> I think the Left and many human rights organizations have not been sufficiently critical of guerrilla abuses and have lacked a critical stance in relation to the armed struggle generally. Let’s say that a basic assumption has been to accept the legitimacy of armed struggle without questioning its effects or the relation of its legitimacy to minimal ethical standards. I think there is a schizophrenia in terms of discourse; the legitimacy of the armed struggle is defended but there is no capacity to evaluate the kind of military and political acts demanded by such legitimacy. There are very complex issues and situations in relation to this separation of discourse and practice.⁴⁰

One of the most tragic and painful episodes in Colombia’s recent history was the annihilation of the Patriotic Union (UP) political party in the 1980s by an alliance of drug-traffickers, paramilitaries, and active and retired army officers (see Dudley 2004). Emerging from formal peace negotiations between the

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⁴⁰ Interview, Bogotá, April 2008
state and the FARC under the Belisario Betancur government in 1984, the Patriotic Union represented for the first time in Colombian history a genuinely independent opposition to the dominant twin-party system. In its first local, regional and national elections the UP made relatively significant gains, winning seats in Congress, mayoralities, and various regional assembly seats. Viewed by its enemies amongst the landowning and cattle-ranching classes as the armed wing of the FARC, the party’s civilian militants were ruthlessly hunted down, tortured and murdered. By the early 1990s some 3000 of its militants had been assassinated, including the party’s two presidential candidates, Jaime Pardo Leal and Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa (Dudley 2004).

The ambiguities of the FARC’s struggle for social change are highlighted by this tragic case. With the Colombian Communist Party having maintained (in contrast to the rest of the world’s Communist parties) its adhesion to the doctrine of “all forms of struggle” (Brittain 2009), the UP, of which the Communist Party was a principal component, presented an ambiguous face to Colombian society. Notwithstanding the ideologically motivated claims of its sworn enemies who were virulently “anti-Communist” and opposed to any challenge to the status quo, the combination of electoral politics with ongoing armed struggle, despite a formally declared ceasefire by the FARC, was enough to raise some legitimate concerns about the modus operandi of the FARC through the UP. The possibility of “armed clientelism” (cf. Peñate 1997), by which is meant the historically rooted practice of establishing electoral clienteles through a combination of patronage and the insinuated threat of violence, was real. The ambiguous meshing of armed struggle and legal political activity arguably contributed to a blurring of ethical boundaries and to the maintenance of violence as a perceived legitimate
option for all political forces. Under the pretext of “self-defence” against guerrilla violence that it was claimed used the UP as a cover, reactionary political forces found a useful rationalization for using violence to further their own political ends. As we have seen, this dynamic continues today in the case of the para-politics phenomenon whereby legal political parties formed alliances with far-right paramilitary organizations.

Those who retain sympathy with the guerrillas’ political project recognize that the guerrillas have substantially changed from the initial core of peasants that formed “self-defence” militias in response to the violence of landowners and the state. Today they are a sophisticated, militarily powerful organization that wants to take power, which has arguably only been possible through engaging in activities like “kidnappings”/“retentions”, alliances with drug processors and traffickers, weapons smuggling, etc. The logic of engaging in guerrilla warfare has obliged the guerrillas to engage in these activities, yet at what point do these activities cross moral boundaries? Despite the asymmetry between the guerrillas and the paramilitaries/state, the fact is that responsibility for 30 percent of killings, forced displacement, etc. amounts to a serious level of morally transgressive activity by any moral framework’s/tradition’s standards. Have the guerrillas lost their moral compass? Do they adhere to a means-ends morality akin to the Stalinist morality that MacIntyre criticizes?

The impact on moral agency of the structure of guerrilla organizations and the nature of their activities is surely significant. From a MacIntyrean perspective, the moral evaluation of the guerrillas would need to consider how they have embodied the modern ethos found in Marxism as well as liberalism. The radical shifts in social context and the nature of the guerrilla movements
need to be taken into account in any evaluation of guerrilla actions. MacIntyre argues that “Attempts to reform the political systems of modernity from within are always transformed into collaborations with them. Attempts to overthrow them always degenerate into terrorism or quasi terrorism” (MacIntyre 1998d, p. 265). Thus from a MacIntyrean standpoint we should expect guerrilla movements to morally degenerate, to lose the moral resources adequate to resistance. In MacIntyre’s view, Marxists have misunderstood the nature of rational self-determination and also adhere to the ideology of bureaucratic authority. This leads them to misapprehend the nature of morality. As Ezequiel Adamovsky points out, “One of the most serious tragedies of the Left tradition has been (and still is) its refusal to consider the ethical dimension of political struggle” (Adamovsky 2008, p. 353).

In Colombia one of the most troubling aspects of the guerrillas’ activities has been their imposition upon and disregard for the autonomous political and social processes of the indigenous movements. Their physical attacks on indigenous communities, who should be considered allies of the guerrillas’ ostensible project of defending the poor, are justified in extremely unsatisfactory ways. They frequently claim that indigenous leaders work for the paramilitaries or favour the state and the army. This not only denies the difficult situation that the indigenous movements find themselves in where they inevitably have contact with the armed forces and the paramilitaries against their will, but is also testimony to the guerrillas’ overly simplistic analytic and moral schema in terms of which indigenous negotiation and contact with the state is read as “collaboration”.

The desire of the indigenous movements for social and political “autonomy” has been denigrated by some Marxist intellectuals. For example,
Jasmin Hristov writing from a Marxist perspective in the Journal of Peasant Studies writes: “The contrast between the approach of the FARC and ELN and that of the CRIC [Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca] is obvious: while the CRIC is concerned merely with enhancing the well-being of the indigenous population living in communities under its administration, the FARC had - and has - a much wider programme that involved social, economic and political transformation at the national level” (Hristov 2005, pp. 105-106). However, the indigenous organizations would surely contest that they are “merely” concerned with their own communities and would contend, rather, that their project contains essential elements for any national project of social transformation. In this way rival conceptions of the good, of the strategies appropriate to, and the nature of, social transformation are in contention.

The above comments are also blind to the way the FARC have undermined and openly attacked the indigenous political project and how their ruthless sectarian infighting with other guerrilla movements has compromised possibilities for radical social transformation. According to activists I spoke to this was notably the case in Urabá where the FARC’s attacks on the EPL guerrillas helped the paramilitary organizations and undermined social and community organizations’ work (see also Ortiz 2007; Suárez 2007). 41 Hristov admonishes the CRIC for not siding with the FARC to build a “united rural and systemic opposition to neoliberalism”, yet neglects to mention how the FARC’s militaristic approach has outweighed serious political initiatives in recent years and has served as another pretext for the state to crush these important and promising movements.

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41 The FARC are also engaged in an internecine war with the ELN in Arauca department, which has led to the deaths of several civilians in the last month (June 2010).
The moral onus is on the FARC to provide a justification for their actions and the consequences they bring. However, the FARC’s moral justifications have increasingly resembled emotivist assertion and simply resorted to the delegitimization of the obvious moral hypocrisy of the state and paramilitaries rather than putting forward a rationally grounded moral position of their own. I suggest the divorce of theory and discourse from alternative forms of social practice lies behind this. The increasing mimicry of the guerrillas and paramilitaries, and the guerrillas’ own aspirations to be a state and to supplant the state in the regions it controls mean that, on a MacIntyrean view, they must lack the moral resources for a non-arbitrary form of discourse and a corresponding rationally grounded moral practice.

The link between abstract, autonomous theory and the guerrillas’ attitude and behaviour towards the indigenous movements is highlighted by Hristov’s comment that “True empowerment of the indigenous population...is accordingly impossible without first confronting - and then dismantling - the national class structure which controls the state and thus drives the policies of violence and force inflicted on them locally. In short, and rather obviously, eliminating grassroots poverty and violence requires changing the system as a whole, and the failure of CRIC to address this can be considered a major weakness” (Hristov 2005, p. 106). Here we can perceive the ideology of expertise that MacIntyre argues underlies both modern managers and revolutionaries; a Marxist intellectual presumes to know what “true empowerment” of the indigenous population is. Secure in this knowledge the guerrillas can therefore justify their actions and their means on the basis of the ends they seek. The indigenous communities are implicitly taken to be suffering from ideological distortion whereas the theorist is able to peel back
the masks of reality, to see what really “drives the policies of violence and force inflicted on them” and thereby finds a justification for bringing about the necessary changes, which it is implied in this case require armed struggle and the subsequent militarization of Indian reserves against their wishes.

Towards a MacIntyrean moral ethnography

The moral crisis in Colombia is a complex amalgam of action and discourse that encompasses concrete social and political actions, justifications for and narratives about such actions, and theoretical accounts and explanations of them. In many ways the Colombian conflict is a large-scale radiography of the moral disorder of modernity that MacIntyre diagnoses. Conflict about the conflict is evident in social scientific analysis of the conflict and implicitly and explicitly in moral philosophical reflection on it. As MacIntyre puts it, “Moral philosophy, as it is dominantly understood, reflects the debates and disagreements of the culture so faithfully that its controversies turn out to be unsettled in just the way that the political and moral debates themselves are” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 252).

MacIntyre’s proposal is for a radical re-conceptualization of the relationship between theory and practice such that social, political and moral conflicts (which on a MacIntyrean view all ultimately come under the purview of the moral) become more tractable. The implications of MacIntyre’s philosophy are radical, if not revolutionary. It points towards a participatory politics of the common good in which theory emerges from concrete social practice such that rationally grounded criteria of choice, evaluation, critique and action might be developed.
MacIntyre’s philosophical framework and argument has empirical content inasmuch as it presupposes “a sociology which aspires to lay bare the empirical, causal connection between virtues, practices and institutions” and “provides an explanatory scheme which can be tested in particular cases” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 196). His thesis, he points out, also has empirical content in another way; it entails that “without the virtues there could be a recognition only of what I have called external goods and not at all of internal goods in the context of practices” (ibid., p. 196). MacIntyre adds that any society in which only external goods were recognized would soon descend into Hobbes’ state of nature. Divorcing theory from contexts of shared practices, and divorcing practices from a theory of the good and of the virtues, risks allowing external goods to occupy our ‘existential horizons’ as well as our social horizons. In a MacIntyrean view, the divided and compartmentalized modern selves of our Western social order need to be healed through the reconstruction of moral character that is the cornerstone of the reconstruction of political community and shared social life- coexistence that does not mask conflict but which, when it does erupt, implements civil war by other, more rational means.

Andy Alexis-Baker (2007) has suggested that MacIntyre’s philosophy presupposes a particular moral stance in relation to social change: that of non-violence. However, MacIntyre’s own tradition of Thomistic Aristotelianism allows for the possibility of a just war, and some of MacIntyre’s later arguments about the requirements of the virtues explicitly allow for the use of proportionate violence in defending particular common goods from external threat (see MacIntyre 2006h, p. 135). Nevertheless, what MacIntyre does argue is that any shared project of rational enquiry into the common good forbids us “to endanger gratuitously each other’s life, liberty or property”
(MacIntyre 2006a, p. 78). The precepts necessary to and presupposed by shared rational enquiry “will forbid us ever to take innocent lives, to inflict other kinds of bodily harm on the innocent, and fail in respect for the legitimate property of others” (ibid., p. 79). Further, these precepts “are universal in their scope”: “There is no one with whom I may not find myself in the future a partner in deliberation concerned with some good or goods that we have in common. Therefore there is no one with whom my relationships can be in violation of these precepts” (ibid., p. 79). Moreover, these precepts are exceptionless in that they constitute the necessary conditions for all cooperative rational enquiry.

On a MacIntyrean perspective, therefore, the social relationships within a shared mode of rational enquiry must be structured by these exceptionless norms, which for MacIntyre express the precepts of the natural law. So here MacIntyre makes an argument that at first sight seems not too far removed from the Habermasian and neo-Kantian arguments of the ethics of minimums and citizenship ethics approaches I critiqued in chapter two. Moreover, are not these allegedly universal precepts part of another contending, partial and situated moral perspective that is only as rationally justifiable as any other?

To the first point the response is that, in contrast to the neo-Kantian perspective, MacIntyre argues that these shared, minimal norms arise from the presuppositions of our deliberations in respect of particular social practices. Such deliberation does not seek the “moral point of view” or the “strictly normative” in abstraction from our particular social and cultural practices. The minimal set of deliberative norms that we must inevitably come to see as universal are not meant to, nor could they, ground a consensus on justice, on what is right, but are what are required for philosophical enquiry and
deliberation into which one of our contending, often implicit, conceptions of the
good, of our ultimate end, is the correct one. Through the realization of the
facts of moral conflict in terms of rival conceptions of the good and human
flourishing we are led not to enquire into what the norms of rationality tell us
about justice/what is right (because on a MacIntyrean view these are always
located within wider conceptions of the good), but to ask “what good reasons
we have for taking the conception of human flourishing that has been
embodied in our actions and relationships up to this point to be the most
adequate conception available to us” (MacIntyre 2006a, p. 71).

MacIntyre points out that disagreements concerning the truth of
theoretical accounts of human flourishing and the human end first come to our
attention indirectly in the form of practical disagreements about what we ought
to do here and now in a given situation. In the face of these disagreements
rationality (understood within the terms of MacIntyre’s Thomism) requires that
we deliberate further with others about how to resolve such disagreements.
MacIntyre says that it has not been sufficiently remarked that deliberation is by
its nature an essentially social activity, which is required as a safeguard
against the one-sidedness and prejudice that are a constant risk of isolated,
individual deliberation. Yet because social deliberation can be equally
misleading and dangerous, the virtues of objectivity are required. “So it is not
just that deliberation will fail unless it is social, but also that the social
relationships in question have to be governed by norms of objectivity. And we
can only hope to resolve deliberative disagreements rationally with others who
agree with us in respecting certain norms of objectivity” (ibid., p. 74).

Certainly MacIntyre is assuming a social context in which deliberation is
itself recognized as a necessary part of the transactions of social and political
life. Completely Hobbesian, asocial contexts must lack even the most basic shared assumptions necessary for conceiving what deliberation means beyond the isolated deliberation of assessing the best means to the ends of the external goods of power, wealth and “security”. But this is why MacIntyre insists that it is only within certain already existing contexts and forms of social practice and relationships that we can begin to move towards such an understanding of the presuppositions of deliberation and shared enquiry. This is what makes MacIntyre’s philosophy one for the real world of social mediation, not the utopian one of idealized inter-subjective communication. There must be something minimally shared for us to generate, to discover, the universal precepts that govern any form of social deliberation. This is also what makes MacIntyre’s work relevant to contexts of peacebuilding and conflict transformation in which some degree of deliberation and dialogue is presupposed.

To the second question noted above, that of whether the appeal to what MacIntyre calls precepts of the natural law is itself just part of one more contending moral perspective, the answer he gives is that it is insofar as any one person- who holds a particular conception of the human good and flourishing that is at least implicit in any moral or political perspective- encounters other, rival standpoints that they are forced to question their own standpoint and the rival standpoint of others; and this can only be done in conjunction with those others, which presupposes and necessitates universal norms of shared deliberative enquiry. Hopefully, through the systematic deliberation that moral disagreement calls us to undertake, the bases for the rational, non-violent and non-coercive resolution of conflict can be laid and the civil war of contending moral and political positions can be continued by other
means. In this way deliberation is a practice that needs to be cultivated within which we can discover the objectivity of the binding norms that MacIntyre enunciates.

However, “insofar as the social relationships between those who disagree are not governed by the norms of reason, they will be open to the solicitations of pleasure, money, and power” (ibid., p. 81). And it will be power that therefore decides the outcomes of these conflicts. This might paradoxically lead to social agreement rather than disagreement, but as MacIntyre notes, the “moral and social agreements arrived at only or primarily because of the seductions and the threats, the hopes and the fears, that are generated by pleasure, money, and power will exhibit failures in practical rationality of a sometimes more dangerous kind than disagreements generated by those same seductions and threats, hopes and fears” (ibid., p. 81). I suggest this encapsulates important aspects of the Colombian situation including those relating to clientelism, the influence of armed actors, and the state.

These dangers are particularly prevalent in the modern spaces of civil society where the sheer fact of physical and social distance between discussants, and the inevitable seductions and solicitations that permeate the modern ethos, render utopian any idea of rational agreement or resolution through dialogue alone. The presumption that dialogue alone is sufficient for reaching agreements across the moral and political divide has been empirically disproved time and time again. This has been the case in encounters across the social divide within Colombian civil society, as various activists made clear to me.
MacIntyre’s philosophy implicitly points to the need for slow, patient, creative, and no doubt often painful processes of social, cultural and political encounters in which moral bonds and shared political visions can be constructed, something that practitioners of grassroots conflict transformation have also underlined (Lederach 2005). What MacIntyre adds to the peacebuilding framework is an emphasis on the importance of philosophy to “plain persons” and the theorists who engage and work with them. In terms of processes of political formation and social reconciliation, MacIntyre’s philosophical standpoint urges us to maintain a concern for the search for truth amidst the conflicting moral and political standpoints in society. However, this search does not imply dogmatism. On the contrary, it presupposes humility in the face of the recognition that the truth is something necessarily worked towards and sought after in the company of others. All of us unavoidably have partial perspectives that require the correction and insight of others. This is what differentiates MacIntyre’s philosophical approach to others that stress the plurality of values but which imply that an emphasis on truth can only lead to conflict. MacIntyre sees moral conflict as having a positive function inasmuch as it directs us to scrutinize our own positions in the search for more adequate conceptions and theories that can better approximate and lead us to truth. To disregard this emphasis on philosophical and moral truth is, on MacIntyre’s view, to perpetuate the emotivist mode of public interaction and debate, even though this might be done in the interests of tolerance and coexistence. It is the removal of the notion of truth in relation to moral and political positions, not its assertion, that MacIntyre contends has led to the conversion of public debate into a rhetorically masked struggle for power and the imposition of power to settle disagreements.
In this, MacIntyre is slightly at odds with the view of sociologist Daniel Pécaut who argues that the task facing Colombian society and the work of the National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR) “is not only about ‘reparation’ but is also about giving meaning to what happened, constructing narratives that permit the expression of diverse experiences and the acceptance of the legitimacy of multiple interpretations of the facts. Perhaps, ultimately, the formation of democratic sensibilities requires, at first, the acceptance of the multiplicity of points of view” (Pécaut 2008, p. 322). MacIntyre’s position is not against recognizing multiple points of view as such, but only against the assumption that we cannot nor must not enquire into their truth. This is not insignificant in a context in which the search for truth in relation to the devastating crimes committed in the conflict has an official seal to it but which is in reality obstructed and covered up. As we have seen, the notion of truth and the moral epistemology underlying it has been directly called into question in relation to the search for justice in Colombia by at least one intellectual, and it has been indirectly and implicitly challenged by others.

MacIntyre also insists that only relatively small scale communities can be the sites for the reconstruction of practical rationality based on practices and deliberation. The reconstruction of public language, the schooling of human desires and the virtues, the development of moral character, and the construction of common goods require relatively small social spaces.

John Paul Lederach says that the challenge of transcending destructive relational patterns and cycles of violence whilst still living in the context that produced them requires the “disciplines of the moral imagination” (Lederach 2005, p. 61). For Lederach, the moral imagination “understands relationships as the center and horizon of the human community. It therefore develops a
vocation based on an unconditional commitment to build authentic relationships” (ibid., p. 61). I argue that this resonates entirely with MacIntyre’s philosophy, which is conversely a philosophy that can, and I argue needs to, inform the search for peace, which has been described as the “activity of cultivating the process of agreeing” (Cox 1986, p. 12).

In terms of social change I would agree with Jenny Pearce that “the capacity to dialogue, to enter formal spaces and to make good use of them can be just as important as direct action on the streets” (Pearce 2006, p. 26). A MacIntyrean caveat would be that much depends on how moral agents conceptualize such spaces, how such spaces themselves limit moral agency through their implicit framing of the issues, problems, solutions, etc., which in turn depends on the kind of social order people inhabit and the social milieus available to them to enable effective moral agency and the development of practical rationality. On a MacIntyrean view, such formal spaces cannot be based on the “modern ethos” otherwise they can only perpetuate irrational agreements and social orders. Nevertheless, I see a strong affinity between what MacIntyre and Lederach propose and what Pearce argues; that through “Intensifying our repertoire of participating actions and the ethics that sustain them, rethinking our power and its meaning in political life as well as our capacity to forge relationships across cultures, perhaps we can simultaneously strengthen our ability to achieve change without violence” (ibid., p. 27).

A hypothesis I propose is that MacIntyre’s philosophy is already partly implicit in certain practices of social organizations and communities of resistance in Colombia. I employ MacIntyre’s moral-sociological model for empirically exploring the peacebuilding process of a particular, small-scale Colombian community that has spent ten years attempting to transform local
conflict through public participation and deliberation. In doing this I also aim to critically explore MacIntyre’s politics of local community and its contemporary relevance.

Using MacIntyre’s philosophical framework

In the Colombian case I contend that we need empirical work on the moral dimensions of conflict, resistance and coexistence in concrete social contexts so that we might better understand how debate, deliberation, and political participation can lead or not lead to the elaboration of new languages for addressing conflict and talking about politics and peace; to shared moral-political discourses and practices; to new forms of political culture and moral-political subjectivities. What we need is empirical work in places that are trying to deal with the fraught issues of conflict, resistance and coexistence in contexts of historical and contemporary conflict and violence. We need “moral ethnographies” that can illuminate the relationship between morality, social practices and state and non-state institutions. We could usefully compare examples of grassroots peacebuilding processes and also compare these to alternative, non-grassroots processes to throw light on the “empirical connections between virtues, practices and institutions” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 196).

MacIntyre has explicitly called for comparative study of the politics of local communities (MacIntyre 2001, p. 143), which he argues are the only loci for the reconstruction of practical rationality and rational political community. The community I set out to study was in the process of attempting a significant degree of social transformation in light of an explicit critique of the dominant
way of doing politics. MacIntyre’s philosophical standpoint also adopts a critical stance towards the dominant norms, values and institutions of the contemporary social order. However, he notes, “What may seem missing is any statement of an alternative to that order...But it is important that the construction of such an alternative cannot begin from any kind of philosophical or theoretical statement. Where then does it begin? Only in the struggles, conflicts, and work of practice and in the attempt to find in and through dialogue with others who are engaged in such struggles, conflicts, and work an adequate local and particular institutional expression of our shared directedness towards our common goods” (MacIntyre 2006i, p. xi). There is no blueprint or model for what such communities must look like or achieve, although MacIntyre makes clear that an adequate conception of practical rationality based on the virtues will necessarily require certain attitudes towards economic and political matters and institutions.

Therefore, adopting a MacIntyrean standpoint on which to conduct empirical work means we cannot avoid taking a moral stance in relation to what the politics of local community- a politics of resistance and “self-defense”- should be like to an important degree. However, MacIntyre makes clear that the contemporary restatement of Aristotelian ethics and politics can take many different social forms- we are not looking for the reincarnation of the *polis* but for different kinds of social contexts within which Aristotelian modes of thought and practice might and do flourish. Comparative study will also enable us to see how different communities fare, what led or leads them to success or failure. As MacIntyre observes about such communities, “even when they are at their best, the exercise of shared deliberative rationality is always imperfect and what should impress us is not so much the mistakes made and the
limitations upon its exercise at any particular stage as the ability through time and conflict to correct those mistakes and to move beyond those limitations. The exercise of practical relationships in communities always has a history and it is the direction of that history that is important” (MacIntyre 2001, p. 144).

There are few examples of empirical work using MacIntyre’s philosophical framework (Coe and Beadle 2008). Some recent work has begun to address this deficit and I draw on a paper by Samantha Coe and Ron Beadle (2008), who have both used MacIntyre’s work for empirical study, to outline some of the methodological issues raised by such research. Coe and Beadle note that there are some incontestable methodological limits to such research based on “what has remained almost unchanged in MacIntyre’s writings on epistemology and the conduct of enquiry” (ibid., p. 10). These would include:

- Enquiries which do not relate themselves (including the possibility of critically relating themselves) to a tradition-constituted community of enquiry.
- Enquiries seeking to create law-like generalisations through the testing of hypotheses about causation through measurement of a defined list of variables.
- Enquiries which do not report their findings in a narrative form.
- Enquiries which exclude agents’ self-understandings in attempting to account for their behavior.
- Enquiries which exclude either features of institutions (structure) or the agency of subjects in their explanations.
- Enquiries which do not recognise the ineliminable presence of the enquirers’ judgments in the accounts they present. (Ibid., p. 10)
In terms of my own study, the way we look at the Colombian, indeed, any conflict and set of problems is never neutral but theory and value laden. My own commitments are to what is often broadly termed “social justice”, which I shall define here as the concern for the equal dignity and empowerment of all social groups in relation to material and immaterial needs and goods. Influenced by liberation theologies and philosophies concerned with the emancipation of the oppressed and poor, my own standpoint is not, nor could be, politically, ethically or philosophically neutral. However, a complication arises from MacIntyre’s work, whose philosophical-ethical theory provides the overall theoretical framework for my thesis. MacIntyre’s claims about the problems and incoherences of modern analytic moral philosophy necessarily call into question the rational supportability of my own moral position and views in respect of social justice:

For whenever an agent enters the forum of public debate he has already presumably, explicitly or implicitly, settled the matter in question in his own mind. Yet if we possess no unassailable criteria, no set of compelling reasons by means of which we may convince our opponents, it follows that in the process of making up our own minds we can have made no appeal to such criteria or such reasons. If I lack any good reasons to invoke against you, it must seem that I lack any good reasons. Hence it seems that underlying my own position there must be some non-rational decision to adopt that position. Corresponding to the interminability of public argument there is at least the appearance of a disquieting private arbitrariness. (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 8)

MacIntyre of course argues that discussion and debate about justice and practical rationality have to take place from within particular traditions of moral
Therefore, is it possible to proceed without adopting some moral-political standpoint or tradition of enquiry?

If I were to locate my own thinking about morality, as distinct from particular moral stances on certain issues, it would broadly fit within the Catholic tradition, although on its outer left wing. Brought up a Catholic, I gradually moved away from it, then read theology under the influence of an Anglican, Barthian liberation theologian. My own thinking about ethics and politics has shifted increasingly to the left, moving from a critique of MacIntyre from a Rawlsian perspective to a realization that I had not adequately understood the depth and power of MacIntyre’s thought, eventually coming to realize that MacIntyre powerfully articulated certain ideas and intuitions about morality and justice that I continued to hold and which led me to question the liberal paradigm. Whilst not a practising, “fully signed up” member of the Catholic Church, and despite my own huge reservations about its rigid, all-male hierarchy and, no less important, its historical and ongoing role in oppression, I learnt from MacIntyre the importance of being able to separate the tradition from the institution. I also thereby better understood the role of tradition, in MacIntyre’s critical sense of the term, in my own moral thinking and its importance for rendering all moral discussion coherent. My own inchoate but strongly felt moral ideas about justice and oppression cannot be separated from the tradition into which I was inculcated. Although I later felt they could be best expressed within the liberal framework and in terms of human rights activism, I increasingly came to recognise that this paradigm did not in fact adequately express or account for my moral attitudes. I also felt that MacIntyre’s account of the incommensurability and emotivist nature of modern

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moral discourse provided a compelling explanation of moral disagreement and its increasing tendency to self-righteous expression, both in myself and in others. I also came to see how the moral ideas and attitudes I had about the world could not but inform my own analyses and studies. MacIntyre helped me to realize that academic research is profoundly affected by the moral worldview one holds to, and therefore to recognize the importance of bringing this into the open.

Therefore, I can say that my own academic enquiries are located broadly within the Catholic moral tradition. However, there are of course rival philosophies within the ongoing Catholic argument, which imply different epistemologies and accounts of practically rational action. Coe and Beadle (2008) suggest that research using MacIntyre's work constitutes a “new tradition of enquiry” (ibid., p. 19) albeit one located within the wider Aristotelian tradition. By virtue of the fact that I am highly convinced of MacIntyre’s account of morality and its relationship to the social world, I inevitably presuppose the rational superiority of what he calls Thomistic Aristotelianism, a synthesis of the Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions with a (critical) realist epistemology and teleological (social and metaphysical) conception of the human good. Therefore, the framework I bring to my own analysis of the Colombian situation and, specifically, to the issues of conflict, resistance and coexistence inevitably shapes this analysis and the questions I pose.

Empirically exploring the politics of local community

The aim of this thesis is to enquire into certain dimensions of the “moral crisis” in Colombia and its connections to conflict, resistance and coexistence.
Inscribed within the terms of MacIntyre’s thesis and philosophical framework, it follows his claim that the rational reconstruction of practical rationality, of ethics and politics, can only occur in certain local community contexts. MacIntyre makes clear that such communities are practice-based and live and resist on the margins of liberal capitalist modernity. He highlights fishing crews, farming co-operatives, and Mayan towns as examples (MacIntyre 2001). However, in my view, whilst such communities are key to what MacIntyre sees as the only way of restoring rationality to our moral and political positions and actions, they are possibly too marginal and too idealized. If MacIntyre’s philosophy and politics are relevant to complex contexts of conflict and to those who are struggling to build alternatives, as I claim they are, then it is important to look for partial embodiments of MacIntyrean practice and politics where contradictions are bound to exist. Thus I sought to locate a community that was on the margins of prevailing political conceptions and modalities but which was ostensibly trying to address the problems of conflict, resistance and coexistence in a non-idealized context.

There are plenty of examples of communities in Colombia that are struggling to resist the impacts of the conflict and/or resist certain incursions of the state and the armed actors whilst trying to contribute to peacebuilding and social and political coexistence and transformation. For example, “neutral” Peace Communities are desperately struggling to defend what can only be described as autonomous moral and political spaces where they reject the impositions and the pseudo-moral justifications of the various armed actors, including the state (see Sanford 2004). Indigenous communities are engaged in complex dynamics of resistance, defence of community autonomy, and engagement with the state in the search for peace and social justice (Galeano
Rural social movements and organizations are attempting to defend peasant cultures and economies from the ravages of rapacious neoliberal agribusinesses and their frequent armed allies—the paramilitaries and the Colombian armed forces who are directly involved in forced displacement and intimidation of peasant communities (ACVC 2008). Small municipalities are trying to overcome conflict, resist authoritarian and clientelist political practices, and coexist peaceably through deliberative assemblies. All of these would make important sites of research.

I initially explored the possibilities for conducting research into all of these, taking field trips to conflict zones and marginalized urban barrios as well as conducting interviews and observations with a radical, persecuted rural social movement. My main criteria were feasibility and safety. My personal circumstances as a researcher with a wife and two young children had an important bearing on my choice of case study. Having ruled out several options due to feasibility in terms of distance, required length of stay, and safety considerations in respect of internal conflict dynamics, I opted to study a local Municipal Constituent Assembly in the rural village of Tarso in southwest Antioquia, some three hours from the city of Medellín where I lived.

Besides meeting my criteria in terms of feasibility and safety I discovered that Tarso Municipal Constituent Assembly offered compelling intellectual reasons for making it my principal case study. The Constituent Assembly movement emerged in the late 1990s as part of the unprecedented social mobilization for peace across the country (see Garcia Durán 2006). The concept of “territories of peace” was formulated within the main peace movement networks, and the municipal assemblies play pivotal roles in these spaces. The peace territories are understood as pedagogic processes that
attempt to involve all citizens in a municipality and which aim at constructing a “culture of peace” that overcomes the sedimented “competitive, aggressive and violent practices” that have dominated Colombia’s social landscape for decades (Redepaz- undated, p. 7).

Tarso itself has been described as a “microcosm” of the conflict (Córdoba 2003) in which the main elements of Colombia’s armed social and political conflict have been present, including “political violence, social exclusion, wars, inequality, inequity, injustice, state abandonment, the weakness of civil society, bad governance, political and administrative corruption, clientelism, and extreme poverty in the midst of abundant natural resources” (Córdoba 2003, p. 2). Tarso has embodied conflict in terms of rival political ideologies and class conflict between landowners and peasant labourers; resistances in the form of left-wing guerrilla movements and militant peasant organizations; counter-resistance in the form of paramilitary organizations; and coexistence in the form of community efforts at addressing conflict and establishing the bases for social reconciliation and sustainable peace. In terms of the latter, the establishment of its Constituent Assembly represented a formal effort at reconstructing local political community through shared, participatory deliberation on key issues affecting the community. Luís Sanabria writes:

Citizen projects like the Constituent Assemblies that have attempted to appropriate a new political reality are proposing a novel dimension of complementarity and feedback between participation and democracy, leading to a new mode of living with the state that at the same time calls into question, redefines and reconstructs the state. Not only to legally protect citizens’ rights,
but to guarantee the political, social, and economic inclusion of everyone, enabling harmonious social interaction... This new society attempts to transform conflicts without suppressing them, and incentivizes the development of virtues and a commitment to commonly identified goals and objectives that are based on community consensus.... The democracy proposed by the Constituent Assemblies demonstrates that as well as being a constant and intensive effort this democracy has to be of a high quality, that is, of great density, based on knowledge and practices, committed to the marginalized and capable of proposing, executing, monitoring, reasoning and transforming, empowering the individual to appropriate a new form of citizenship that is based on the collective decision to work towards common objectives. (Sanabria 2006, p. 14)

These are clearly Utopian standards (as well as clear MacIntyrean standards). As MacIntyre puts it, such standards are “not too often realized outside of Utopia, and only then...in flawed ways. But trying to live by Utopian standards is not Utopian, although it does involve a rejection of the economic goals of advanced capitalism” (MacIntyre 2001, p. 145).

Thus I saw Tarso as embodying key aspects of the problem I sought to explore and also as touching on key MacIntyrean themes in relation to moral and political philosophy. It provided an opportunity to study a concrete community effort in light of MacIntyre’s framework that could hopefully illuminate the way morality, politics and efforts at social change operate and combine in a real life, conflictual context.
Conclusion

This chapter has explored various dimensions of the Colombian moral crisis in light of MacIntyre’s philosophy, highlighting the need for a new moral-political language and alternative forms of political practice and constructing political community. I have argued that MacIntyre illuminates how it is possible to develop a rationally grounded moral critique of state-building, dominant forms of politics, and the modality of social change associated with the revolutionary armed left. I have claimed that we need to empirically explore possible alternatives for social change, resistance, coexistence, and the construction of political community. I suggested that MacIntyre’s prescription of the “politics of local community” resonated with the Municipal Constituent Assembly project, and proposed the community of Tarso as a case study based on what I posited as a “MacIntyrean moral ethnography”. I now turn to this in the following two chapters where I present the narratives of the principal protagonists of Tarso’s Municipal Constituent Assembly.
CHAPTER 5

Conflict, resistance and coexistence in a Colombian municipality: voices from a microcosm of the conflict.

Part 1: From armed resistance to critical citizenship.

This chapter aims to expound the ethical-political discourse and narrative of Tarso Municipal Constituent Assembly through the voices of its principal protagonists. Based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews and participant observation of the Assembly, the local state administration and the local community carried out in a six month period in 2008, I aim to give voice to an important process of “bottom up” peacebuilding and participatory politics. First, I briefly recap the context of Tarso’s Assembly before exploring the narrative of the process. 2009 is the 10th anniversary of the Tarso Assembly- as such the interviews represent important reflections on the successes and failures of the process, the difficulties faced and the challenges to come. They provide an insight into the construction of an ethical-political process that remains in via. The questions I brought to the interviews were of course various. I wanted to know the narratives of the individuals involved, their perceptions of how the process began, where it is now and where they think it is going. I wanted to know what ethical and political terms, categories and concepts they would use to describe their own commitments and their perceptions of the process.
The Constituent Assembly process in Colombia began in Mogotes, Norte de Santander department in the mid-1990s as a direct response of a local community to the “kidnapping” of the local mayor by a front of the ELN guerrilla group. Whilst this was the proximate cause of the community’s decision to exert its “sovereignty” over its political life and destiny by convening as a political community in the form of a Constituent Assembly, the response has to be seen in the wider context of incursions and impositions upon the community by all the armed actors- paramilitaries, guerrillas and the official armed forces-as well as the corrupt, clientelist practices of the local state. In Mogotes the mayor was held by the ELN under allegations of corruption and misuse of public resources. Appealing to article three of the 1991 Constitution, the local community organized itself as a sovereign political community and demanded the release of the mayor. The allegations were addressed in the form of a Community Assembly hearing in which it was decided to uphold the allegations and to demand the resignation of the mayor. The community is thus seen as having exercised autonomy in the face of both armed actors and the state by implementing political rights and mechanisms established in the Constitution. Mogotes thus served as an example to other municipalities in Colombia.

There is scarce information on Tarso in its own right and I rely principally on a study of governance in Tarso carried out by sociologist David Marulanda (2004), with supplementary information provided by an article written by peace movement researcher Luís Sanabria (2006), as well as a historical text on the villages of southwest Antioquia by historian Juan Carlos Vélez (2003). Dating
back to the early twentieth century, Tarso is a small rural municipality located in the southwest of Antioquia department overlooking the river Cauca. It is divided into eleven urban sectors and sixteen “veredas” (rural neighbourhoods). Agriculture is the main form of economic activity in the municipality, especially cultivation of coffee and livestock farming, both of which are important cultural referents in Tarso and the wider region. As David Marulanda writes, “The historic presence of large coffee and cattle haciendas on which authoritarian relations of production obtained based on the figure of the ‘patrón’ left their mark on the culture of Tarso” (Marulanda 2004, p. 22). These include the system of the “jornal” (day-contract labour), which prevented the establishment of modern contractual relations with basic social security guarantees for workers. Marulanda notes that such a form of labour and its monotonous nature, “prevents the development of mental structures and abilities for...autonomous decision-making” (ibid., p. 22). Another cultural mark is the prevalence of coffee monocultures and the lack of a genuine peasant culture characterized by small-scale family production for self-consumption. A third element, according to Marulanda, is the absence of leadership and enterprise amongst the general population, which makes it difficult to establish profitable productive and other collective projects. Marulanda links this to the historic pattern of social relations that are based on dependence on the figure of the “patrón”.

In the 19th century, social order was governed by the “founders” of the towns of the southwest- men who enjoyed a good political and moral reputation amongst locals and regional elites and who were responsible for mediating local conflicts mainly in relation to land issues- land titles, fence limits etc. The “patrimonial” nature of this social control led to the direct
influence of private interests in local public administration. This set an important pattern for local politics that would easily fit into the national clientelistic political scheme. A conservative conception of public morality emerged in conjunction with this hierarchical and patrimonial social structure (Vélez 2003). Elite networks became real centres of “informal” power and local domination that effectively infiltrated local and regional institutions. They were successful in their aims of social orientation and managed to generate a (non-rational) local consensus and the legitimation of an elite political project. As Vélez points out, “Obedience was...a product of extra-institutional mechanisms of power rather than of a consensus or an agreement on established norms” (Vélez 2003, p. 229).

Yet these social relations have not gone unchallenged. There is also a history of resistance and organization amongst the peasantry in the region linked to migrants’ land struggles and to ideologies of popular democracy that emanated from liberation theology and the conscientization and radical pedagogy practised by sectors of the Church. The Christian Student Youth movement helped to strengthen the organizing work of the priests and nuns in the southwest as did the support of the National Association of Rural Workers (ANUC) and the Agrarian Workers’ Union (Sintagro). The political influence of the ELN is also a factor in shaping consciousness and ethical-political standpoints and referents in Tarso and the wider sub-region. Political and ideological formation classes were initiated and attended by ELN members, and many peasant leaders also attended. The ELN emerged in the 1960s in the context of industrial and rural social protests. Associated with anti-

imperialist nationalism and the search for social justice, the ELN comprised urban, student and intellectual sectors with a strong rural base. Dedicated to political work, in its early years it built a project called the United Front (Frente Unido), with sociologist and priest Camilo Torres its main intellectual protagonist. The involvement of Catholic priests meant the ELN would be open to liberation theology and the Freirean pedagogic processes it undertook. However, the death of Torres in 1966 eventually led to the weakening of the United Front and to the predominance of a militaristic approach over its political groundwork (Palacios 1999). In 1986 the ELN redefined its ideological stance from a nationalist perspective to a classic Marxist-Leninist position.

The land issue or what has become known as the “agrarian question” is essential for understanding and interpreting social relations in Tarso and the wider region. At the national level land concentration is extremely high- in 2002 a government report estimated that 61.2 percent of cultivable land was in the hands of 0.4 percent of landowners⁴⁴- and in Tarso it is particularly acute: In 1997, out of a total of 464 official plots of land in the municipality, 43 of these contained nearly 9000 hectares, which constitutes 75 percent of total land in Tarso. Concentration of land ownership has increased in recent years, according to recent figures.⁴⁵ Figures from the 2001-2003 Development Plan show that cattle rearing used by far the greatest extensions of land (over 8500 hectares) with 2700 hectares dedicated to other agricultural production. Before the crisis in international markets during the mid-1990s coffee cultivation covered a fifth of the municipality and was an extremely important source of

⁴⁴ This figure was cited by opposition senator Gustavo Petro. See http://www.cipcol.org/?p=353
⁴⁵ These figures were shown to me by members of CEPACT- Tarso assembly’s legal and administrative organization.
employment and general economic activity. Yet its precariousness as an agricultural product subject to the vagaries of global capitalism was highlighted by the international crisis that saw coffee prices plunge as other producers flooded the market. Production and employment fell, exacerbating social problems in the coffee regions, including Tarso. These included increased intra-family violence, rising levels of crime, and a general worsening of poverty.

The peasant struggle revolved around gaining access to land and securing basic labour rights. These struggles began in the 1960s and continued well into the 1990s when land titles were finally awarded to a nucleus of peasant families that had struggled to secure land rights. 75 families managed to secure a total of 540 hectares of land in three rural neighbourhoods. A key factor in this relatively small victory (given the levels of land concentration) was the support and advice of Father Ignacio Betancur who was killed by paramilitaries in 1994. This peasant struggle resulted in the establishment of two important social organizations: the Communitarian Corporation of La Arboleda (1973), and the Association of Tarso Agricultural Workers (1986). These organizations focused on associative production, the collective administration of community goods, education, and political formation. As Marulanda notes, these organizations “related the solution of internal needs to participation in the project of peasant organization in the municipality” (Marulanda 2004, p. 34). Although these organizations did not achieve all their goals in terms of socio-economic transformation, they served to generate new expressions of community organization, forming leaders and providing experience and insights into community participation. However, as Marulanda points out, “With the failure of some community projects
individualistic postures flourished and the community organisations weakened, which were natural niches of citizen participation” (ibid., p. 34).

Throughout the 1990s, partly as a result of the 1991 Constitution, different spaces and forms of participation were created such as: the Local Action Committees (JALs), a small producers’ co-operative (COMUTAR), the Communitarian Agricultural Corporation of La Arboleda, the Women’s Association (Asoma), the Municipal Workers’ Union, the Municipal Coffee Cultivators’ Committee, the Community Participation Committee, and the Rural Development Council, amongst others. However, according to the diagnosis of the 2001-2003 Development Plan, a significant number of these organisations depended on the “paternalism” of the state, which limited the autonomy of their members and the ability to develop processes in benefit of the different organisations and the community as a whole.

Traditionally, at the local level power has been concentrated in the figure of the mayor, with very little opening for public participation and decision-making. The municipal council in Tarso was not a space for questioning decisions, but rather a place “where the executive controls the legislature through the badly named coalition, which is nothing but a gentlemen’s agreement to concur with everything and to crush the minority that is only there as a token figure” (Arroyave 1999). Traditionally, the destiny of the municipality has been politically oriented by different groups and tendencies within the Liberal and Conservative Parties, although the Liberal Party has historically predominated. David Marulanda notes, “The model of production on the large haciendas, based on traditional social relations centred on the figure of the ‘patrón’, generated (and continues to generate) a culture of submission and subordination that favoured exclusionary political practices
that prevented the participation in public decision-making of the common people in the village” (Marulanda 2004, p. 31). Politics was reduced to periodic voting in elections.

Besides the political exclusion and dominance of the traditional parties and their dynamics in Tarso there has also been political violence exacerbated by the social polarization between peasants and landowners. The incursion of the ELN into Tarso began in the mid-1980s. This group was responsible for the kidnapping and killing of several major landowners in the municipality. Paramilitaries soon followed, carrying out selective threats and assassinations of presumed guerrilla sympathizers and peasant leaders.

The familiar stigmatization of being guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers has been applied to certain rural sectors of the population in Tarso and the wider region, and distrust and political and class antagonism remain significant obstacles to harmonious community and political life. As Marulanda notes, what this amounted to at the time was “a fragmented society, which limits the possibility of converging in common spaces to discuss things together as well as impeding the organized participation of the local community in the administration of public affairs” (Marulanda 2004, p. 36). It is this history that has led some to point to Tarso as a “microcosm” of the Colombian conflict (Córdoba 2003).

Tarso was the second Municipal Constituent Assembly in the country. Its proximate cause was the negative state of the local municipal authority’s public finances that had led it to financial unviability and the threat of being subsumed into the municipality of neighbouring Jericó and thereby losing political control over itself. However, this particular problem was an outcome of the wider conflict: corrupt political practices rooted in Colombia’s traditional
and clientelistic two party system, stagnant investment due to the presence of armed actors, poverty and lack of development related to traditional uses of land and unequal distribution, amongst other issues.

The Constituent Assembly process in Tarso was initiated by a former guerrilla who demobilized in 1995 as part of the ELN dissident group Corriente Renovación Socialista. In an attempt to prevent the disappearance of Tarso as its own municipality Alirio Arroyave convoked a forum whose aim was for the first time to get the residents of Tarso to dialogue and discuss together the diverse problems facing the municipality. Out of this emerged the formal structure of the Assembly in which different political voices from various social sectors with divergent interests convened in a new political space.

The interviews I conducted tell a human story of the hopes, fears and different outlooks and standpoints of people living in a small rural community all of whom have been in some way or other affected by the conflict and violence. The Assembly was conceived as a process of conflict resolution in the integral sense of addressing a variety of factors, not just the issue of violence, but the underlying roots of conflict. Ten years on from the inception of the Assembly process it is clear that violent conflict has not returned, which is a real achievement, yet it needs to be recognised that macro-level factors play a major part here. Despite the tranquility, today the question is to what extent the deeper level conflicts in Tarso have been rationally resolved and how the community has managed to address its failures and challenges in this respect.

My first contact with Tarso Municipal Constituent Assembly came through a meeting with Alirio Arroyave. Alirio is a 48 year old former ELN guerrilla who demobilized in 1995. We met in the small, poky office of CEPACT
I first asked Alirio to talk about the aims of the Constituent Assembly process when it began some ten years ago:

“With the Tarso project we wanted to begin a new social experiment from the local level in Colombia in relation to social coexistence in the country and the construction of development. In order to achieve this goal we had to break the traditional barriers erected and maintained by the traditional political parties, both at a local and a national level, where the municipalities have been governed for their own political groups, not for the people. This has had the consequence that one doesn’t think in terms of the community but in terms of benefits for the party, which led to the crisis in this municipality that generated social discontent.”

Politics was effectively a matter of private interests based on “gentlemen’s agreements”. The Assembly has attempted to slowly transform these political limitations through the construction of an alternative institution and form of political practice.

Social discontent was exacerbated by the financial crisis in the municipality and inevitably linked to the dynamics of the wider armed conflict. Public employees went unpaid for 18 months, and for unemployed youths the rival armed actors became alternative means of earning an income. “The aim therefore was to attempt an experiment at revindicating the notion of the public realm as well as generating a culture of unlearning violence that had been

46 Interview with Alirio Arroyave, May 2008, Medellín.
present for so many years; the only option was from the local level.” Alirio convoked a forum called “Tarso: towards a new millennium”, which was the first time that the diverse members and sectors of the community had come together to discuss local matters. The initial priority was the financial administration of the local municipal authority. The conclusion was reached that public participation in decision-making about the administration of the local budget was key to overcoming the problems of lack of accountability and corruption/clientelism. What was needed were spaces for discussing and planning the local budget as a community. But it was quickly understood that the budget alone was not the only issue. The Assembly could be and needed to be a space for permanent, ongoing discussion that involved all the active forces of the municipality. Participation was to go beyond the initial emphasis on the local state budget and was inscribed within the wider political context of the Colombian Constitution.

“We spoke about the importance of a Constituent Assembly because citizen participation is not just an adornment to make us look good, nor to make the state look good; it is for elaborating public policies. For that reason we gave ourselves constituent status...We took what is established in the National Constitution and brought it down to the local level. The National Constitution defines the essential ends of the state- what we are doing is applying what is in that document to the local municipal level.”

The financial crisis of the municipality was nevertheless central and also intimately connected to the historic practices of clientelism in which public policies were often tied to the furtherance of private interests. As Alirio
explained, “That bureaucracy was the result of the political favours of the traditional parties, which created public posts that the state was in no condition to provide.” The heart of the whole Assembly process for Alirio “is to look for that point of encounter around the issue of the public sphere. I think that here the fundamental problem at the heart of the conflict is the bad administration of the public sphere in Colombia, because the public interest has simply ended up being equated with private interests.”

The community in the form of the Assembly came to agreements around these issues. The local elections were approaching and it was decided that the Assembly would choose a consensus candidate for local mayor. Prior to the elections the objective was to first define the programme of any future mayor before deciding on which candidates to choose from. The Assembly defined the local political agenda in terms of “governance and peace” and then invited candidates to put their arguments to the Assembly outlining how they would implement the public policies defined and agreed by the Assembly. A single candidate was then chosen by the Assembly to represent it in the elections. Oscar Hurtado duly won the election for mayor. For Alirio, “This puts in question the electoral system in Colombia because the mayor assumes the post under the commitment to serve the people, to carry out the program and to be subject to the control of the Constituent Assembly where if in the judgement of the Assembly we declared the mayor incapable or if he didn’t carry out his mandate, he would stand down.” Whilst there are questions about the actual technical and practical feasibility of forcing the mayor to stand down, the fact that this is in principle accepted by the mayor is significant. As MacIntyre argues, the politics of local community has to put those who hold
political office to the question “in the course of extended deliberative debate in which there is widespread participation” (MacIntyre 1998c, p. 248).

The Assembly was comprised of 150 elected delegates from the different rural neighbourhoods, civil society associations, and public and private sectors in Tarso. To elaborate the local Development Plan the Assembly was divided into different working commissions to elaborate proposals by sector—education, health, economic development, etc. “Those who are involved in and know about education formed part of the education commission. Those involved in and knowledgeable about agriculture and development fell into that commission; those of us who knew about democracy and peace formed another commission and so on. We gave ourselves two months for the discussions in each delegation and when the first round of discussions had ended we entered a second plenary session in which the final municipal Development Plan emerged from the agreements reached.” Once the plan had been agreed upon the budget was assessed and divided up between the different commissions who then agreed amongst themselves how to distribute the money.

From a MacIntyrean perspective this is problematic as it is based on compartmentalization and implies the ideology of “expertise” that is so often used to stifle input and justify exclusions. Of course, the reality is that in such processes one has to begin with what one has. Semi-literate peasant farmers cannot really discuss the fineries of education or hospital administration, for example. However, they are more than capable of defining their needs and ensuring that development and other projects, whatever their particular technicalities, meet these needs. In a small community like Tarso it is much easier for people to see how particular projects cohere or not with what has
been agreed. It is also ostensibly easier to challenge projects that deviate from social agreements.

In terms of the peace agenda the decision was to declare the different rural neighbourhoods “peace communities”. As Alirio put it, “The fundamental aim was to take control of public issues in relation to the municipality and to create platforms for coexistence and peace.” Peace is also understood as a deeply political issue: “These processes are not purely peace initiatives. Beyond that is a political initiative, a political proposal, not an electoral one but a political one because we are intervening in public affairs...Peace is not about simply waving a white flag because that has no effects on public life. What does have an effect are the decisions that citizens take in their local area.” This is an important distinction between the electoral and the political, which points to how the Assembly is perceived as part of a radical political agenda.

This attempt to transform the system from within generated persecution by the insurgents against Alirio and his colleague William Zapáta. They were declared military targets and for a period were forced to leave Tarso and go to Medellín. As Alirio put it to me: “The guerrillas, our former comrades, considered those of us who had demobilized to be traitors because we had supposedly betrayed the political project.” However, the interventions made on their behalf by the local community to the guerrillas in the area were enough to prevent them from being killed. The same happened when the paramilitaries entered Tarso.
“We were against them both”: from armed struggle to critical citizenship

The shifting ethical-political currents and contestations in Colombia are brought into relief by the experience of former guerrilla combatants who decide to demobilize and seek to effect social change from within the system, while attempting to maintain a critical distance from it and to ultimately transform it. The shift from armed struggle to the arena of electoral politics has been made by dozens of former combatants (thousands have demobilized but perhaps only a fraction have been actively involved in political activity/activism), including Alirio and William.

Coming from a radical left-wing ideological position, Alirio and William made the decision to abandon the armed struggle to work for change at the local level. Their perspective is particularly important to capture as it can help us to understand the moral-political thinking and reasoning involved in negotiating Colombia’s complex ethical terrain. What leads to a shift in ethical-political outlook from one which justifies armed struggle to one that critiques it and seeks to work from within the system? This section explores this and related questions through the accounts given to me by Alirio and William, two former guerrilla militants.

William Zapáta Arroyave, a cousin of Alirio Arroyave, is a 42 year old former member of the MIR-Patria Libre [MIR-Free Homeland] guerrilla group that formed part of the larger ELN guerrilla organization. Born in nearby Pueblo Rico, William finished secondary school and went on to further education but was unable to continue his studies for “economic reasons”. As William
recounts, his family background was a formative influence on his ethical-political orientation:

“We began our foray into social issues in the 1970s, mainly due to our parents’ initiative in the National Association of Agricultural Workers (ANUC). There was a very strong peasant movement in Colombia in those days and peasant community organizations emerged across the country. In the southwest there were organizations in various municipalities and four of these peasant communities remained in Tarso. Our parents were strong rural leaders in Pueblo Rico in the southwest, encouraged strongly by the priest Ignacio Betancur, who was later assassinated. That kind of shapes you. You see your parents who are deeply involved in social issues working for their labour rights. So a formation process began when we very young. I remember there were some professionals who used to accompany the priest Ignacio Betancur- we had study groups, women’s groups, youth groups. You start to take a position of leadership in those groups. But then we started to touch upon deeper issues, structural issues about what was happening in the country. We got to know a bit more about the revolutionary experience in other countries- what had happened in Cuba, in Russia, they were our points of reference for thinking about initiating a process of social transformation in Colombia.”

These peasant organizations eventually led to the formation of a political organization called MIR (Integral Revolutionary Movement) that formed a clandestine military section which undertook small scale military operations against the armed forces and the police. “The MIR-Patria Libre arose out of that peasant movement. We functioned for several years, undertaking military

47 Personal interview, Medellín, August 2008
operations that were very weak because we didn’t have the training for that-our formation was more political, more about peasant militancy and social organization, and less about armed military militancy.” However, they thought that the conditions were not there to attempt to make radical, structural changes through the legal channels of democracy in Colombia. “We dreamt of social justice but we opted for clandestine activity because there were no legal safety guarantees for trying to obtain our rights and for seeking social transformation.” The aim of the military wing was to support the political organizing of the MIR and the peasant movements. However, in William’s view there were problems:

“After the initiative of the guerrilla coordination movement [La Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar that operated in the late 1980s], which united various insurgent movements, I remember that we all thought “now we’re going to take power”; we were no longer dispersed, we came together but I have to say also that looking back it had major faults. Let’s say that the agreements and accords came from the top, from the upper echelons and didn’t take the base much into account. In some way we fell into what we always criticised in others, in the traditional parties.”

The MIR-Patria Libre then became part of the bigger ELN insurgent organization. However, the differences in perspective between this much stronger, more militaristic organization and the smaller groups like the MIR that affiliated with it began to surface.
“We initially united with the ELN through what was called the Unión Camilista de Liberación Nacional, which also functioned for several years, but really there were big differences between them and us. We came from a more political background and formation of social and citizen militancy, of community organization and not military militancy. So there was a kind of disconnect and the project began to distance itself a little from the communities. Although the guerrillas said they sought to claim people’s rights, you began to realize sometimes that it wasn’t necessarily always the case, for example when burning buses and blowing up pylons became common.”

The logic of guerrilla militancy began to erode the essential connection between morality and concrete social practice- arguably the key to explaining the increasing emotivism of contemporary insurgent discourse and action. These differences eventually led to the splitting of the Unión Camilista. “So what we began to see was that there were two movements that had encountered each other but which had very distinct modes of operation, one more bellicose and military, and the other a little more political, without wanting to say that the ELN is not political. In fact I would say that the ELN has been more political than the FARC.” William and likeminded comrades were also aware of the seismic changes in the bipolar world order of the cold war post-1989. For William, this had the effect of instigating a period of reflection on “socialism” and the model for social change within the guerrilla organizations.

William and his comrades realized they didn’t identify with the more militaristic project of the larger guerrilla organization and made the decision to leave, knowing the personal risks were high. Having entered a clandestine guerrilla organization, William and his likeminded colleagues then had to desert it clandestinely in fear of “revolutionary justice”. This was a painful
experience for William and made him reflect on his own ethical-political commitments and reasons for having entered the guerrillas in the first place. “Ever since I joined the guerrillas and during the time I was part of it what kept me thinking I had to be there was the search for social justice. I didn’t see that the state was guaranteeing fundamental rights- so it was just that dream of social justice. The main thing was social inequality, you know, between rich and poor. One just couldn’t accept that there were such poor people and others with so much wealth.” The decision to enter the world of clandestine guerrilla activity was therefore based on a strong ethical-political conviction that derived from William's background and lived experiences. “You start to understand that guaranteeing human dignity therefore means employment, education, housing, health, having your basic needs satisfied, which was not the case. That's the real argument for deciding to get involved in clandestine activity, not because you like war or walking non-stop for days, or going without sleep or bearing the heat of the day or going hungry- it’s not for that but for the fact that there was a real argument for it.” As William pointed out, it was a strong argument that resonated deeply with many and was strong enough to enable people to withstand the adversities involved in the daily grind of guerrilla life. The desire for a new society outweighed the adversities and personal deprivations and dangers. However, William acknowledged that the logic of subordinating oneself entirely to the interests of the collectivity was extremely hard and ultimately led to him and others questioning aspects of guerrilla ideology, strategy, and its deeper efficacy:

“We were always told to wear the insignia of Che Guevara to remind us that he was always prepared to struggle and to die at any time and any place without
being attached to anything in particular. But today I continue to think that it’s not like that. Nevertheless, the main argument was always about renouncing individual interests and fighting for the interests of the collective."

This highlights the abstract, Kantian moral notions that underpinned the ethical dimensions of the ELN. Complete detachment from social particularity is the hallmark of Kantian ethics, which in the concrete context William narrates is arguably what has contributed to the increasing dogmatism and absolutist claims of the armed left. William’s questioning was not based on “self-interest” or a concern to put one’s own interests above those of the collective or the “greater good”, but was connected to arguments about alternative modalities of social change that William was led to elaborate and reflect upon through his engagement with communities. As William puts it,

“I went from working with communities in the cities- I was part of the urban guerrilla- and they transferred me to the jungle. It was always a case of going wherever the revolution required you to be, not where you felt yourself you should be. I couldn’t accept that situation- in the jungle I used to say ‘look comrades, here we’re only going to conscientize monkeys. I don’t see any people, we have to get out of here, we’re not going to make the revolution here, we have to be with the social base, working in the communities.’”

Another element to William’s thinking which led him to critique the dominant modality was his concern about the ethics and efficacy of the logic of imposition with which the guerrillas operated:
“I didn’t agree with that mode of operation because it was about arriving in a peasant community and making our presence known, but it seemed to me it was about imposing ourselves. Things like the following even used to happen: there might be one family that didn’t like us to go to their house so therefore it was to that house where we had to go the most, not with the idea of convincing them but simply to harass them. Those who sympathized with us we didn’t bother at all. I thought ‘this is not the way to operate, we cannot work with a rifle over our shoulders.’ In fact they challenged me because once they sent me on a commission with twelve men. I was the ‘political’ chief and I went with a military chief. We got on well and I said to him, ‘let’s not do it this way. Let’s split into pairs and take only handguns in a rucksack so they can’t be seen- let’s put civilian clothes on and go into the community.’ That generated a discussion in the front- they used to call us the ‘cool boys’, the ‘pretty boys’ because we passed ourselves off as civilians to talk with people and nothing ever happened to us. It was a different methodology.”

The idea was not to impose on people but simply to put the argument to the community about why they were there. However, that often combined with intimidation. As William pointed out, people feel intimidated when they see people with guns, in combat uniform. “I think people then don’t do things voluntarily- the mere fact of carrying a weapon and the presence of uniformed men generates intimidation.” William assured me that there were many people who sympathized with the guerrillas but who then began to resist them when attacks on public infrastructure like electricity towers and buses occurred with more regularity.
“People would complain: ‘they’ve blocked the transport. Those buses they burned aren’t used by the rich but by us, the poor.’ It’s the people who in fact show you the way. When we had the discourse about land struggles and claiming rights we were accepted but when the people begin to see a guerrilla that has shifted its modality...The fact was we cared more about military triumphs than political defeat and I always said we needed to re-evaluate that.”

This is highly suggestive of the way William’s moral position was ultimately worked out through communication with people in the communities. The abstract principles of insurgent ethical-political discourse lacked persuasion compared to the principles learned from concrete social engagement with the poor.

This also gets to the heart of much historical polemic within Colombia’s insurgent movements. The arguments about the priority of the armed struggle or a more hybrid political approach embracing electoral politics go back to the 1960s and the split between the Russian and Chinese Communist Parties. This ultimately led to bitter internecine warfare, especially between the FARC and the EPL, leading to multiple massacres of peasants, workers and perceived rival militants by these opposing left-wing guerrilla groups. As Andrés Suárez (2007) observes, the derogation from general social and moral proscriptions represented by massacres of unarmed civilians was facilitated by the instrumental logic of armed struggle in which rival political movements were seen not as adversaries, but absolute enemies. Social space was hyper-politicized by the guerrillas and their connected trade unions, leaving little room for moral agency and independent reflection on the moral dimensions of the conflict.

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48 Ejército Popular de Liberación, formed in the late 1960s, later comprised of FARC dissidents.
political struggle. Painful memories of comrades killed and maimed intensified feelings of moral outrage and strengthened sectarian political identities, polarizing discourse and entrenching attitudes of resistance and struggle at all costs.

I suggest that the process in Tarso can be seen as an important micro-level effort at subverting this logic and re-centring the moral dimensions of conflict, resistance and coexistence.

The logic of William’s ethical and political thinking culminated in his demobilization along with hundreds of others in 1995 as part of the Corriente Renovación Socialista. Seen as traitors by their former radical comrades and as “communists”, subversives and “internal enemies” by the paramilitary far-right, William and Alirio faced persecution from both sides and saw many friends killed. As Alirio put it, “We were against them both.” Despite various personal threats and the feeling of security that being armed provided, William decided against going clandestine again and engaging in the armed struggle. “I withdrew because I realized that the armed struggle was not really leading to social transformation. Everyday it isolated itself more and was becoming a more terroristic guerrilla movement that had lost many of its principles to which it had been dedicated. It was deeply involved in drug trafficking. I decided that wasn’t the way and that I’d better renounce it.” But what William did not renounce were the ideas about justice he held and the desire for a transformed society. The decision to negotiate and to adopt a different modality of social change had not changed William’s view that structural changes were necessary. His former comrades remained in arms, convinced of the moral basis for their armed struggle just as William was convinced about the moral basis for his own decision to go down a different path. Nevertheless, despite
the seeming arbitrariness, William's decision to demobilize is arguably an example of the subversion of sectarian political identity and abstract moral thinking that was ultimately grounded on the social particularity of community life and experience.

William was also led to reflect on alternative modes of social change. As he explained to me: “today I think the power of conviction is much stronger and can bring about more substantial transformations and more enduring changes than you can with a gun. For sure you can achieve things with a weapon, but not that guarantee sustainability. It was that realisation which convinced us to move out of clandestinity and to disarm ourselves and continue working within our communities.”

It was then that William and Alirio went back to Tarso. They started a cooperative that marketed agricultural produce and helped develop a farmers’ market. They were involved in those activities when the ELN threatened them both. Later the paramilitaries arrived offering “protection” and charging their “vacunas” (extortions). But William and Alirio refused to pay and were subsequently threatened and forced to go into hiding. However, the community spoke with the guerrillas and the paramilitaries and they permitted William and Alirio to go back to the municipality, although they were frightened.

William commented that the sense of community and the political work and organization in it had played a role in this defence of them:

“There was a very strong organization around the Constituent Assembly. There was a sense of civic value expressed in the decision not to cooperate with any armed group and there was a real recognition by the community of our work. It was the same community who engaged the paramilitaries in
discussions and managed to get them to agree to let us back into Tarso. That gesture committed us even more and enabled us to put up with many other things, many adversities...When you see that a community looks out for you and supports you, you feel more committed. That’s why today I am convinced that weapons are an obstacle to advancing in citizen formation, in the search for citizens’ rights. They were an obstacle because we couldn’t work calmly or transparently like we do here. It was more limited, there was more intimidation.”

By going down the route of arms William and Alirio admitted that they were “destroying citizens”. Many people died because of the weapons of both sides. In their view the emphasis on a “top-down” militaristic approach to social change was not achieving anything fundamental and ultimately could not bring about the deep transformations required. As William puts it, “You become convinced that weapons are not the way and begin to work more on the basis of formation, the political subject, the citizen, and that begins to generate substantial transformations in municipal life, which was what we sought in clandestinity in the guerrillas. But we thought it was simply a case of staging a coup and that we would be able to change and transform everything.”

William and Alirio see the necessary transformations as coming about gradually, which for them means they will be more sustainable and deeply rooted. They see it as a process of “cultural transformation” that needs to take into account the importance of ethics for social change. “You can impose it by way of the armed option, you can attempt a coup but the question I ask myself is: if we had really managed to do that would we be governing how we should be and with politically conscious and formed citizens?” This has a definite
Aristotelian ring and reveals a consciousness of the importance of ethics in social transformation and politics. William suggests that if the guerrillas had taken power there would have been a question mark over their moral suitability and legitimacy.

“Today what is illegal is legal in Colombia:” legality vs. legitimacy

Both Alirio and William made the point that the Constituent Assemblies are about rebuilding the legitimacy of politics and the local, and ultimately national, state. For them the current clash between legality and legitimacy is central to understanding the conflict. In terms of local politics and participation Alirio told me that,

“The local councillors have not wanted to participate because the Assembly from the juridical-political point of view is legitimate and the administrative part of the state is merely legal; that is, we appeal to the Constitution and they appeal to the law. That’s the contradiction between what is legitimate and what is legal.”

As we have seen, MacIntyre’s argument is highly relevant to this and underlines the separation of law from conceptions of the good as a central part of the modern predicament of radical disagreement. For William and Alirio the Assembly is ultimately aimed at rebuilding national political community from the local level- only here can the conflict between legality and legitimacy be addressed. This is a radical position that resonates with MacIntyre’s philosophy. It also implicitly calls into question prevailing modes of political and
social science that operate on the assumption of the legitimacy of the national state, making abstract policy prescriptions for “more state” as part of the solution to the conflict.\textsuperscript{49} Furthermore, the argument and debate between the legal and the legitimate would ultimately become an argument and debate between rival institutions- between the local state and the Municipal Constituent Assembly.

For Alirio, the Assembly was based on the Constitution which itself is based on more “universal” principles in terms of its conception of the public sphere. However, in Alirio’s view the law is based on the dominant narrow conception of the public sphere as an instrument for the furtherance of private interests as opposed to public political interests. In Alirio and William’s view politics has been seen as an extension of private business, “and that business is protected under the law. As we Antioquians say- “hecha la trampa, hecha la ley”\textsuperscript{50}, so they make laws in accordance with their own interests.” The nature of representative democracy covers this up in the name of the interests of the majority, which for William is what fundamentally calls into question its legitimacy. “We’ve always been against representative governance...Representative governance has negated the role of the citizen in public affairs so what we propose today is a shared governance that is legitimized through the community”, a strong resonance with MacIntyre’s position.

The tension between legality and legitimacy in Tarso has so far been resolved in favour of legitimacy. As Alirio observes, “The Council has approved

\textsuperscript{49} This is a position taken by mainstream conflict analysts and think tanks such as the International Crisis Group.

\textsuperscript{50} Usually “hecha la ley, hecha la trampa.” Lit. “Made the trap, made the law”, roughly meaning the law is made by those whose aim is to deceive or serve their own interests.
everything that has come via the Assembly despite being against it. Why? Because they would look really bad if they said no to what has been approved in the Assembly as they know that it is made up of the people and it would mean turning the people against them.” This is where the relatively small size of local community politics can help to discourage unethical behaviour. As Kelvin Knight points out, “A local network of social relations affords little room for duplicity. If one is an excellent person, one will be known as such. If, conversely, one manipulates others, then one will have a reputation for manipulativeness and will not be entrusted with power” (Knight 2007, p. 180). According to Alirio, the governors “feel that governing with the community means making less mistakes, it generates greater legitimacy, more tranquility. I say it as a member of that institutionality, because that’s what you really feel.”

This conception of shared governance is a deep challenge to the status quo and the historic, hegemonic form of politics in Colombia. It is also a challenge to guerrilla notions of seizing local political control. As Alirio comments in relation to the local administrative council,

“From our point of view, with a deliberative Assembly that decides on public issues the Council is not really necessary, it’s superfluous. Because of that they say that we think we are the owners of the municipality. But it’s a waste for the municipality because we deliberate and we don’t cost the municipality anything, unlike with the Council. They deliberate and then we have to pay them. We are the ones who occupy ourselves with planning, being with the communities and seeking out resources whilst they don’t lift a finger.”
Here we can see the tension between rival institutions through which political and moral arguments are ultimately embodied and put to the test. Alirio evinces a somewhat MacIntyrean notion of justice in which it is through contributions to the common good that resources (money) should be allocated. Why should the community pay for a separate, specialized clique of professional politicians if it is through the Assembly and intra-community deliberation and consultation that genuine and legitimate planning and decision-making is carried out? Moreover, we can perceive here the way the Assembly in its institutional practice presents a reason, an argument, for its superiority to local representative politics.

Local councillors have seen the Assembly as a threat to their traditional privileges and practices. In William’s view, by seeking to effect change from the top down the armed struggle shifted attention and energy away from the political arena where these privileges and practices were defended and carried out. “When we were militants we used to have a slogan: ‘don’t vote, fight.’ We didn’t want to vote because we didn’t feel represented...but we also fell into the error of allowing others to get away with things more easily because of that.” The vision was to eventually seize power and reinvent or pull down and rebuild the institutions of the state, effecting change all at once. As William recounted, “In the past when I was in clandestine activity I was against institutionality in its totality; we had to change institutions, replace them and reorganize them, but that was about destroying institutionality. Today through these processes we are realizing that the problem is not one of institutions but about the citizen, a citizenry that does not assume its role in the taking of public decisions.” The aim, says William, is “to transform mentalities”. For him the problem has been that people always blame someone else but never look at their own
responsibilities. This responsibility has to be exercised in vigilance over elected representatives and, preferably, in the vigilance and participation of the whole community in local political decision-making, planning and execution. “If we do that it makes corruption more difficult and it is more possible to take decisions that benefit the community.” Furthermore,

“If there are bad governors it’s because we haven’t been interested in putting in good governors. A bad governor means bad investments, bad administration, corruption. But if we bring in politically formed, conscious and transparent governors and on top of that there is a vigilant citizenry, then surely things are going to be different. This is very different to the aims we had in the guerrillas, which were to take power and throw out everything and everyone there and put in a new governor. I don’t think that’s the way either.”

This all implies a radically different theory of social change. It focuses on subjectivity and character. Clearly William does not mean that the nature of institutions does not matter. I take William to be saying that simply occupying institutions by overthrowing those who control them is not enough to generate sustainable, ethical change. Both William and Alirio are against representative democracy and its institutional embodiment, but they emphasize the need to cultivate alternative mentalities and characters if it is to be replaced with something radically different. On a MacIntyrean view these go hand in hand. Changes in institutions can help to shift or transform individual consciousness, and virtues of character, once developed, can serve to monitor and maintain the transformations in institutions. In Tarso, the Assembly is an alternative institution and practice that William and Alirio see as able to generate shifts in
attitude and the virtues required for political deliberation and social coexistence.

Contrary to the past when William and Alirio were involved in the armed struggle the aim is to “occupy spaces of governance”. This is completely at odds with the guerrilla practice of occupying these spaces by “proxy”, which is to say through intimidation of current incumbents or through some form of clientelism. The focus is much more at the level of transforming political subjects who can then, so it is hoped, transform the doing of politics from within and from below. “The Political Constitution permits us to occupy spaces of governance with a differently formed political subject and that's where we think it is more enduring...New councillors then come in because there is an interest in the public sphere. It seems to me that these changes are much more substantial in that we are not just combating the consequences of the problems- we are attacking the causes.” This shifts the classic Marxist focus on structural factors to an integral focus on character and institutions, on agency and structure.

The violence in Colombia is intimately connected to what Alirio refers to as the preceding 50 years of a state of siege rather than a “Social State of Law”. As Alirio told me, “The 1991 Constitution establishes Colombia as a Social State of Law. However, in Colombia there never was a State of Law. There was rather a State of Siege for 50 years.” The Constitution changed in 1991 but:

“It didn't modify the structures of the previous state. Those who govern Colombia are the same ones who controlled and governed the State of Siege for 50 years. The Liberal and Conservative parties continued governing the
Constitution. The violence in Colombia has been generated by that. The Colombian state was incapable of transforming that reality and it permitted things to get worse. The tale today that the media tell about the guerrillas having lost their ideals is not the whole story. I recognize that the guerrillas have committed and continue to commit many errors, but they had their origins in a political project of resistance to the state— that’s the truth of it. So now they say that they have lost their ideals and I ask myself ‘when were they ever recognised?’

This is a nuanced position that to my mind demonstrates an important awareness of history and complexity. Alirio also talked about the destruction of the FARC’s political vehicle, the Unión Patriótica (UP). I suggest this is important because the “genocide” of this political movement is often entirely neglected or fleetingly passed over in accounts of the conflict and prescriptions for change based on a belief in the possibilities for democratic change in Colombia. Several civil society activists I spoke to never raised this crucial episode in Colombia’s recent political history. The fact that Alirio talks about this shows he is not disconnected from wider, politically sensitive concerns that other guerrilla groups and radicals often appeal to. The destruction of the UP is appealed to by some, including human rights activists and the guerrillas, as a justification for continued armed struggle. Alirio shows he is aware of the terrible, unjustified atrocities carried out against the UP but this does not lead him to condone armed struggle or to view processes for social transformation within the system as futile.

51 See Restrepo 2001
Both William and Alirio understand the Constituent Assembly process as one that is congruent with what they perceive to be the initial ideals of the guerrilla movements in Colombia. They point to the need to address people’s basic material needs and link this to the causes of conflict and the perpetuation of insurgent groups: “The State is not guaranteeing conditions for life so therefore people look for any alternative that an armed actor or a drug trafficker might offer. It’s on the basis of need that people join armed actors.” This is something that the guerrillas have often claimed- people join them because of material needs and grievances. However, the guerrillas also appear not to take into account the fact that people’s “needs” do not necessarily converge with guerrilla objectives and ideology. The guerrillas often impose their own ideological-ethical framework on people’s needs, thereby both misunderstanding and impinging on rational self-determination.

Importantly Alirio and William differentiate the Assembly from the way NGOs characteristically address these issues. The Assembly process is radical in the way it links material needs to a political not a humanitarian or administrative agenda. “The Assemblies cannot become legal entities; their function is to provide legitimacy, to reach consensus, to support things, but what they must not do is become yet another NGO that administers resources. The day that happens the Assembly will lose its essence.” This is consonant with MacIntyre’s critique of the bureaucratic normativity of the state and the “standpoint of civil society”. However, as we shall see, the criticism that the Assembly has become another bureaucratic institution is one that some level at the Assembly, which implies a division within the community in terms of perceptions of the process.

An important characteristic of the Assembly is its openness:
“The key to the Assembly lies in its inclusiveness. Nobody can be left out. It has to be based on tolerance because there is diversity of thinking, of customs- cultural diversity requires a diverse political expression; it has to be respectful, tolerant and inclusive and about constructing in the midst of difference where we attempt to reach agreements on certain issues- we don’t have to agree on everything.”

Again this resonates with MacIntyre’s conception of local community politics (MacIntyre 1998c, p. 248) but raises certain issues. First, it points to the importance of living amidst disagreement and alternative cultural and social visions. The Assembly is seen as part of a process of inculcating an alternative political culture of tolerance of diversity and dissent. Second, it also highlights the tensions between the need for tolerance and respect of others and the need for substantive consensus and agreements on important public matters, including those in relation to justice and development. These difficulties remain, which, as we shall see, currently threaten to undo many of the gains achieved. The question is whether these tensions can be dealt with and whether the community has the moral resources for addressing them.

Empowerment and agency

A crucial characteristic of the process is its emphasis on agency allied to a conception of seeking deeper cultural transformation in order to ultimately effect political and social transformation. Participation is seen as key to generating political agency and therefore greater legitimacy. Empowerment is
another term William and others refer to in relation to this. As William comments,

“I think the best way of forming citizens is to learn by doing. It’s not about a bunch of academics coming down and putting the right ideas into people’s heads. How many people would think that to implement an initiative such as this- an alternative model of governance- one would have to study a lot, read many documents, go to I don't know how many workshops or leadership courses so that people could acquire certain skills/knowledge and know how democratic governance works? It turns out that our practice has demonstrated that it is on the ground doing which is the best way - it is to learn by doing.”

This strikes a definite MacIntyrean tone. It is clearly a step away from vanguardist forms of political conscientization and is connected to a recognition of the need to be aware of and sensitive to local social and cultural realities. As William pointed out, “We have achieved transformations in terms of how public municipal decisions are made but we haven’t carried out a coup on the state in order to make the municipal budget more just.” In their view, “You have to use more dynamic methods, more novel ideas that fit with people’s daily experiences and culture. We can’t go about imposing other things.”

However, this does not translate into a validation of social and cultural limitations. In William’s view these include the tendency to always blame others for social and political problems.

“But I think also that the community is beginning to comprehend what is meant by cultural transformation. People understand that others are not only to blame
but that everyone is to blame when they don’t assume their responsibilities. When I go from merely claiming my rights to recognising that I also have responsibilities—when we get that clear it generates empowerment of citizens in terms of the public sphere. You start to form a sense of belonging, to feel that the public realm does not belong to the administrator but to you; it is part of your rights.”

The idea of participation that William and Alirio hold to aims to make these notions of rights and responsibilities less abstract through concrete political practice. It is not enough to talk about these concepts. Concrete political practice in the form of the Assembly thus “begins to instill a new culture of participation and appropriation of the public sphere...One starts to care for that heritage and therefore it results in social benefits and begins to combat the causes of conflicts and to improve the conditions of coexistence in the municipality. The new culture of participation begins to inscribe itself in people’s minds.”

This certainly resonates with an Aristotelian notion of ethics and politics. According to Alirio and William the Assembly served as a space for public political deliberation and the development of certain dispositions and virtues necessary for coexistence. By taking certain key political decisions out of the closed channels of clientelist elite political decision-making and “gentlemen’s agreements” and putting them in a public arena open to all, the Assembly took an important step in generating a space for the development of moral and political agency. It thereby also provided a framework for rationally critiquing the dominant forms of political practice and discovering criteria for alternative political practice.
In William’s view the process is about generating the desire to participate, to lead people to re-evaluate their relationship to the public political sphere. Instead of stultifying criticism from the sidelines that leads to the maintenance of the status quo or, worse, to a resignation and indifference that allows the public sphere to be manipulated by private interests or armed actors, the aim is to make participation a means for challenging this and developing political agency. “That’s very different to when something is done only through imposition- when people have to accept something because it has been imposed on them by an armed actor. In this case it is the will of the citizenry that generates social transformations. It is about autonomy, not impositions. It’s about feeling, desire, empowering oneself. I think that is the most interesting thing in all of this.”

In William and Alirio’s view, in the process of selecting candidates for the local municipal elections the Assembly has had a big influence and has managed to put forward councillors, which has meant that councillors from the traditional parties have not been able to get enough votes and so have lost influence. For them, “What that shows is that here there is a new citizenry in an ongoing process of formation, that thinks differently, that participates. Because of this we have managed to get new councillors into the administration.” The Assembly therefore aims to work within the bounds of state-centred, representative politics but is also circumspect in its dealings with the state. What needs to be borne in mind is the fact that political consciousness in Tarso, as in many areas of Colombia, has been strongly conditioned by the culture of clientelism. My field research has shown how deeply rooted this is, and it is therefore significant that in Tarso, where clientelist relationships are more direct and personal and therefore more vulnerable to intimidation and
abuse, people have been persuaded to challenge this and to vote for candidates on a different basis.

“I am a founder member not a secretary”: women's voices

Having laid out the perspectives of two of the original founder members of the Assembly, both of whom are male and from a radical/leftist ideological and ethical-political standpoint, I now turn to two female voices that represent an equally important perspective on the process.

Eucaris López is a 46 year old married mother of four who has spent 18 years living in Tarso. She completed her secondary school education through night classes in Tarso later on in life. Her political orientation is Conservative and she had been a local councillor before getting involved in the Assembly.

Oralia Botero is a 40 year old married mother of one. She has lived in Tarso most of her life, finished her secondary schooling and then studied a specialization in agricultural technology. Her political orientation is also Conservative.

I begin with Oralia who explains how she got involved in the Assembly process. “I really liked the idea of the Assembly. It seemed to be something that filled my expectations; the political parties have never done anything for me or my family, we have never depended on them for anything, such as a job, for example. When they spoke to me about creating a community and organizing ourselves I decided to support it and since then I have not missed a meeting.” Oralia didn’t realize at first that William and Alirio were demobilized guerrillas, which she admits could have prejudiced her if she had known. After she had been in the process for a while she discovered who they were and
was open to discovering their stories and the history of their struggles in the region. Oralia told me how she understood their reasons for joining the armed struggle and spoke of how their decision to work as part of a community was “an example of life.” Participation ultimately enabled Oralia to transcend political and social prejudices and prior moral judgments to openly admire William and Alirio for who they were and what they were trying to achieve.

Oralia was a founder member and part of the steering committee that went out into the rural neighbourhoods to raise awareness of the Assembly and to gather information about people’s lives, needs and expectations. For Oralia the participatory space provided by the Assembly gave her the confidence to begin to challenge some of the cultural norms in relation to women and their roles:

“I formed part of the executive committee of the Assembly, I was a collegiate president and initially the only woman in the group. That was hard because we still have that machista culture and as I was the only woman. Oralia was the one who took the notes and compiled the minutes. But one day I said, ‘I am a founder member, not a secretary; any colleague is in a position to assume that responsibility.’ Alirio and William understood my position and delegated that task, which made me feel proud; because of something so minor I was able to make my own space within the executive group of the Constituent Assembly.”

Whilst this might seem like an insignificant point, I suggest that it signals something important about the way not only “formal” principles espoused by the Assembly (based on many of the values in the Constitution) such as equality can be used to challenge prevailing attitudes, but also how the actual
practice of participation and social, face-to-face encounter can be empowering by bringing into the open what are often taken for granted discriminatory social attitudes and practices.

Oralia unsuccessfully attempted to get on to the local council as a Conservative candidate but for her, like Alirio, the Assembly is the space of legitimacy. In her view what she and other women do in the Assembly “legitimizes what we are as women.” However, this kind of personal empowerment for Oralia through participation is put into perspective by Oralia’s own account of the limitations of the Assembly in getting its message across and integrating itself into the lives of people in the community. For Oralia the Assembly is the key to overcoming the deep social problems and conflicts in Tarso but there is still much work to be done. As she explained,

“I like the Assembly and I support it because it is the only way of getting out of this crisis. In Tarso we have been participating for nine years although the citizens are still not sure about what the Assembly’s purpose is. Despite the fact that everyone knows the Assembly exists there are many who don’t want to get involved with it because they consider it to be a movement that was designed to overthrow conservatism, liberalism and the old ways of doing politics. There are many people who remain tied to that way of doing politics and they don’t want to commit themselves to the proposal of the Assembly.”

The problem remains of challenging the dominant political culture. “When the electoral period ends you realize that there is a still very big gap between the active participation of citizens and the kind of participation that is about choosing some representatives. We citizens still think that participating means
voting every four years and we forget that participation is something we can do at every moment, that it is a genuine right and not something merely on paper. I think that is what we are still lacking.”

I asked Oralia if the Assembly had had any impact: “Yes, for sure. We’ve been doing this for nine years now...and the development in the town is clear; it now has things that it didn’t before and at least the people claim their rights more, they have a greater capacity to get involved.” Oralia says that people in Tarso now have a wider perspective and that the resources that come their way are producing results. According to Oralia, through the Assembly’s administrative body (CEPACT) and the project in the rural community of La Arboleda the investment there is really doing something, although it is slow. “The social impact is still weak and it’s not how one wishes it would be.” I asked Oralia how she wished it could be: “My dream is that this and other municipalities in Colombia be dignified places to live, where people have at least their basic needs satisfied: food, health, housing, education, and where the environment is more pleasant and allows us to live well.” I then asked Oralia why these things were not being achieved: “I don’t know, perhaps because of corruption, because of not keeping an eye on the resources that come into the municipality which end up being administered by less than ideal people. Perhaps our own lack of knowledge means that many things happen that we’d rather not happen.” Oralia here makes oblique reference to moral character as part of the explanation for the corruption and social deprivation in Tarso.

For Oralia what time has revealed is which people are genuinely committed to the Assembly process and the community:
“At the beginning of the process everything looked marvellous, but with the passing of time you realize who are the ones really committed to the process, who are halfhearted and who are definitely not interested. Perhaps the landowners are interested in the Assembly because it guarantees them adequate conditions in terms of public order, because it’s a peace territory their farms have greater security, but they don’t participate much in the process.”

This suggests serious limitations to the process and calls into question the notion that Tarso is constructing a new politics and social reality based on the common good. However, it is significant that someone of a Conservative political orientation like Oralia has a perspicacious critique of the landowners. For Oralia, the material, productive part of the process is important:

“We have tried to form alliances with those people who have resources and land in order to develop enterprises and employment, and some have committed themselves to it. Tarso has an economy that depends on coffee but unfortunately the coffee harvest is only a short period, so what happens to people the rest of the time? The idea is to create alliances- some have accepted and committed themselves to working with us and the local government to help generate alternative sources of income for the citizens of Tarso and the poorest people. On that side of things there has been some success.”

I then asked Oralia about the issue of overcoming the traditional sectarianism associated with politics in Colombia, which has been historically linked to the treatment of peasants and the politics of land:
"I don’t know what others have told you but it has been difficult to deal with. In fact those of us here in the Assembly belong to different political groups and we all work together. Sadly, however, when the electoral season arrives we leave that ideal behind of working collectively to build citizenship through a more participatory democracy and we relapse into the old ways of doing politics of the traditional parties where if I want to gain power I need to offer citizens what they want: money or other things."

What is needed to combat this, in Oralia’s view, is better organisation. “We still haven’t learnt to organize ourselves. In the Assembly there is a diversity of political viewpoints and we work well together, but when the elections come around the differences begin to surface. It’s complicated trying to deal with that.”

In Oralia’s view the current government administration does not look favourably upon the process:

“They are from a traditional clientelist political viewpoint and want to gain all the power and put their whole family in the same political posts at the national, departmental and municipal levels. That’s an old way of doing politics because it’s about concentrating power in one family. After nine years of this process of a group of citizens working together on this we are asking ourselves why we have a mayor who doesn’t support the Assembly and follow its line.”

I asked Oralia what in her view was the answer to this old political problem:

“Educating our young people in what democracy is about would be one of the ways of ending that problem. It’s not about telling them that when they reach
eighteen they’ll find someone to vote for who gives them some money for supporting their campaign. The idea is to generate consciousness in them about what democracy really is and how we have to build it in this country.” But allied to this is an emphasis on addressing some of the material dimensions of the problem: “On the other side, it’s about creating productive projects that positively impact on people, helping them to earn more, especially women. The population of Tarso is mainly rural, agricultural and we live basically from our crops and cattle. The idea therefore is to create projects that are more profitable for people.” Oralia made the connection between this emphasis on the productive/material side of democracy building and the clientelist problem—economically vulnerable people are easily tempted to sell their votes for short term gain. “People feel vulnerable because they don’t have a job, access to health or to higher education and then a politician comes along and says he will give them a certain amount of cash to work on his campaign, which means he buys people. I think the most adequate way of dealing with this is to make sure that people have these needs met and to have them provided for locally.”

Oralia then spoke about the differences in vision between the Tarso process and the national government:

“There is a very big difference. For example, the current government of President Uribe is investing more in war than in social and economic development. I am a strong critic of the Free Trade Agreement because this country has so much potential and if we do not support the countryside then

52 The so-called Free Trade Agreements with the United States and the European Union are resisted by all the trade union federations as well as by social movements and many civil society organizations.
other producers will flood our markets and we won’t be able to compete and to produce in a dignified way what we can if we don’t have economic support.”

Oralia expressed her indignation with the government “that invests in things that don’t favour the majority of people. We Colombians are more poor than rich. It would be good to have a technologically developed country but first we must think about rural development.”

Oralia’s position certainly appears to challenge the “standpoint of civil society” that the national political parties are locked into and is strongly influenced by her connection to Tarso as a local community. To illustrate an important contrast, one of Colombia’s most important civil society organizations, the Bogotá-based think tank known as Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris, is supportive of the Free Trade Agreements on the basis that these will supposedly improve “human rights” in the country. The position taken by this civil society organization is based entirely on abstract moral argument and the “standpoint of civil society” which, on a MacIntyrean view, revolves around an unquestioned acceptance of the modern ethos.

I now turn to Eucaris. She described her arrival in Tarso: “When I arrived in Tarso I was a hopeless person- lonely, withdrawn. I hadn’t even finished my secondary schooling, I did that here at night school. Then I got the chance to work at the local radio station and through that I got to know people. I was also working for a local Christian foundation. Through that I got to know many people, their stories, how they lived, what their experiences were, their needs...The aim was to look for ways of helping people in need... Then someone suggested I try to become a local councillor.” Eucaris’s candidacy
coincided with the beginnings of the Assembly process. Alirio approached her and asked her to get involved. However, “when we had the first meeting I didn’t believe in the process much. I said that if it continued the way it seemed to be then I’d have to think again because it didn’t convince me.” At first Eucaris thought it was merely another form of clientelism when she saw that some people were simply telling people at the Assembly meetings who to vote for in terms of local candidates for councillors and the mayor. “I objected to that and they intervened to stop it. Those who were involved left the process. I carried on going to the meetings and became enamoured with the process because I saw that things were going in a different direction to what I’d thought.”

Eucaris’s experiences as a councillor shaped her outlook. She was shocked by the lack of integrity of some of her fellow councillors and was disillusioned to discover that debate on local issues was foreclosed by those who conformed a majority in league with the political orientation of the incumbent mayor.

“We used to have council meetings, say, on a Friday evening but a couple of hours before that the councillors who were of the same political side as the mayor would meet in his office and when they went to the official council meeting everything was already decided. In the session they simply read the protocols, registered attendance, put forward the proposals, called to vote and that was that. There was no debate because everything had already been decided...That impacted on me a lot because to come to discover that there were councillors who didn’t attend meetings but who simply said to their colleagues not to worry, that although they hadn’t been present they supported whatever was decided, that to me was the last straw.”
However, raising questions about this historically rooted political practice was not easy: “If I questioned anything they simply said I was ‘politicking’, which hurt. But I carried on with the Assembly process because the idea of being part of a community has always attracted me; what one can do for and learn from children, youths, adults and the elderly.” I asked Eucaris about her perception of the Assembly process and how she understood its purpose:

“The Assembly process is about that encounter and engagement with the community, to get to know directly through contact with people their experiences, to share those experiences and to put yourself in the shoes of others… I have always enjoyed working with children and women. In terms of the latter, we’ve tried to organize them from the point of view of feeling able to do things differently, in terms of self-esteem, loving oneself and the person you live with. I would say that the work has been more on the personal level because that’s the basis on which to address many issues.”

This is a far cry from traditional conceptions and modes of political practice. In Eucaris’s perspective, the Assembly brings social issues of day-to-day life and culture under the deliberative lens of political enquiry and also encourages a more solidaritous form of social coexistence. Politics is not seen as some separate compartmentalized sphere in which decision-making is carried out in abstraction from social realities. In Eucaris’s perspective, the actual face-to-face encounters in the Assembly were what enabled people to begin to overcome social and political differences and distances. An example of how this process has potentially radical social and cultural implications is the awareness of domestic abuse as a real problem in Tarso, which is
acknowledged to be a “taboo” issue in Colombia, especially in rural areas. This issue was brought up by Eucaris and a diverse range of people in Tarso, some of whom I would not have expected to have discussed or even considered it. This is at least suggestive of the power of the practice of the Assembly to raise culturally sensitive issues and generate some form of consensus.

Eucaris also raised the issue of the “culture of dependence” in Tarso. The expectation many people seem to have that the Assembly should personally benefit them economically or in some other way is recurrent. “That’s what I’d like people in the municipality to understand about the Assembly process- that the Assembly wants the community to show us their economic reality, not the economic reality of “who’s going to bring us money?” but in terms of how our children, youths and adults are. It seems to me that we are still not solidaritous, we need more support from each individual.” In Eucaris’s view this lack of solidarity is also related to a lack of tolerance, which has negative implications for deepening the community’s social and political process:

“If we had the consciousness that we need others we could more easily create businesses, associations, whether it’s just a reading group, a “tertulia” or whatever. The problem is a lack of tolerance. We women have a difficulty that I think is ridiculous but it’s that if you don’t like me, if you don’t really get on with me then you don’t go to the meeting just because I’m there; and that’s not the spirit. If we were more assertive, if we had greater respect for difference and other people we could find ways of resolving our conflicts. But our failure to deal with them respectfully and constructively means we remain in conflict, we are enemies and that’s just the way it is.”
Eucaris points out how this cultural issue of individualism is taken advantage of by the status quo of the traditional clientelist-populist system:

“There are people who take advantage of that through the same ‘welfarism.’ I’ll help you and give you certain things but there’s a hidden interest there because I need you for a particular time. Let’s say that in an electoral campaign I offer to buy your shopping for a month but afterwards I give you nothing. But then the next election comes around and I offer to mend the wall in your house. Those things break solidarity.”

This negatively affects the community and the Assembly’s wider transformative agenda. People often don’t believe in the process simply because it doesn’t operate in a clientelist fashion, which is of course part of the problem that the process aims to transform. “For example, one lady got annoyed with us because we didn’t build her a house, but that’s not the philosophy of the Constituent Assembly. Let’s build that house, but between us all. And how do we build that house? With a change of attitude and the realisation that the Assembly doesn’t give away houses or money. Yes, it manages resources but in a way that all can benefit.”

For Eucaris the Assembly has made people conscious of a sense of community and given them an awareness of being able to achieve things together. Women have consulted the Assembly about claiming their rights in the form of official legal demands (“la tutela”) and have been empowered through participation. Eucaris also pointed out how it is the rural communities
who are the most active in terms of participation and community organization and spoke of the concrete, day-to-day obstacles to participation:

“The urban sector of the community has not been as participative, they seem quite sceptical about the process, many because they don’t leave their houses, they’re too distracted with TV soap operas that clash with meeting times, others don’t like meetings or because when one talks about public politics people take it as if it were merely yet another electoral campaign. They are unfamiliar with the concepts and the dynamics of the meetings. The people who live in the urban areas are different to those who live in the countryside who like to participate out of curiosity or whatever. The other thing is that people from the urban zone work in the countryside so they arrive home late and tired, which you have to take into account. Getting people together for political meetings on weekends is understandably difficult when it’s many people’s only time off.”

But Eucaris also relates these obstacles to participation and the attitudinal problems she highlights with the more structural issue of unemployment: “The other thing is also that because there are no stable jobs in the municipality, when you talk about processes like the Assembly people think you’re telling them you’re going to give them a job.”

For Eucaris one of the principal changes needed is a change in attitude at the local political level: “While people carry on thinking of their own good before everyone else nothing is going to change.” Eucaris points out that this is still the pattern in local politics:
“A woman came up to me to tell me that someone had proposed that she became a councillor and she wanted to know what I thought. The only thing I told her was that if she was convinced, if she liked working for the community and seeking proposals then she should do it. She told me that the people who were motivating her to do it had promised her they would give her money and help her run her campaign. I said to her that that was not what being a councillor meant and I suggested she attend the leadership training school that the Assembly ran so she could think about whether she really wanted to be a councillor or not, because the idea that someone should run a campaign for you is not ethical. If you are an honest person you cannot allow someone to pay your shopping bills in order to persuade you to join the council. That would make you as corrupt as them. The sad thing is that all of them were like that. The current president of the council got there on the back of doing some housing improvements and building some new houses. People didn’t look at those benefits as the result of a public policy but as a favour from the ‘honourable president’ who took care to ensure the improvements were done because the elections were coming.”

In Eucaris’s view, the question is how to get councillors to understand what the Assembly process is about and not to think about what they can get out of it in terms of serving as a springboard for their own political agendas in future elections, “which is what we can’t allow but is what happened with Oscar [Hurtado- former mayor] when he aspired to the national congress.” The tension between the local council and the Assembly and the future mode of their relationship is an ongoing issue. “It’s horrible because you see that distrust and rivalry between the Assembly and the Council. However, we have tried to find concrete points on which to agree. The idea is that they come to
recognise the Assembly process for what it is, not as an instrument for strengthening any political group but to develop that social and political unity in the municipality. In order to achieve that we have to rid ourselves of a lot of things.” This shows the inherent problems of building an alternative political culture and a genuine politics of the common good. After ten years of the Assembly process in this small municipality there are still deep-seated clientelist and individualist attitudes.

I asked Eucaris how in the Assembly it was possible to reach agreements on certain public issues given the varied ideological and ethical-political standpoints within it: “Although we have our own political affiliations we are not so addicted to the political, but rather to the social. That’s what leads us to sacrifice many things although we have to fight it out in the good sense of the term; I give you my arguments, I listen to yours.” I asked her how participation in this space had helped people to discover certain social values, something beyond party politics that is shared:

“It’s that we don’t focus on the political party issue as such. If it happens to be the case that at any given moment in Tarso there are many liberals and few conservatives or vice versa, at the moment of evaluating a proposal that is oriented towards the development of the municipality as such, the idea is that we all pull together to achieve a project independently of political colour or banner.”

This suggests that it is the participatory process of common deliberation and the virtues required to carry out joint community projects that engender a sense of shared purpose and common criteria for evaluating social priorities
and tasks. Despite the fact that the projects such as building the hospital, school and housing were based on compartmentalization - different “experts” were brought in as consultants - the participatory nature of the planning and overseeing involved appears to have prevented a lapse into the dominant corrupt practice of such projects being constructed merely with a view to benefiting certain private and political interests. According to local people I spoke to, the transparency and the encouragement of participation and local monitoring ensured that the projects were carried out according to people’s needs. This participation also empowered people and gave them a sense of working towards commonly agreed upon objectives for a wider good.

Like Oralia, Eucaris referred to the concept of “dignity” as the criterion for development when I asked her about reaching consensus on this. In her view, “We can’t understand human dignity only in terms of employment. The majority think that dignity is only about a well paid job. Human dignity encompasses many things, it’s about the integrality of everything.” As Eucaris put it, “It’s about saying to the peasants that above all it’s they who rule, they who must tell us what we need to do because we don’t know, we don’t live in the countryside where as they, on the other hand, know what their specific needs are in the rural areas.” Again this suggests an implicit rejection of the standpoint of civil society’s modern ethos and also implies a radical position in relation to external consultants and experts who proffer local and national policy prescriptions. It is plausible to suggest that inclusive public participation and deliberation in the Assembly has encouraged the kind of solidarity and epistemological humility that Eucaris expresses.
Conclusion

This first section has focused on four of the Assembly’s founder members. In their view the Assembly has provided an important space for the development of an alternative form of politics, whilst also contributing to the development of the municipality. Both Oralia and Eucaris highlight the importance of addressing the development situation in the rural areas, which is perhaps the most urgent national issue facing Colombia today. It is to this issue that I now turn in the following chapter where I expound the perspective of a leading peasant militant, who was also a founder member of the Assembly, as well as the perspectives of some of his colleagues and family.
CHAPTER 6

Conflict, resistance and coexistence in a Colombian municipality: voices from a microcosm of the conflict.

Part 2: From peasant militancy to the public sphere

"You've got to begin with the masses": peasant militancy and the struggle for justice

There are several important voices yet to be heard and I now turn to the perspective of another founder member of the Assembly who was a militant peasant leader during the years of open class conflict between peasants and landowners. Albeiro López is 58 years old, married with four daughters and works as a day labourer on local farms in the municipality. Between 1995 and 1997 Albeiro was also on the local council in Tarso, hence he is well placed to discuss issues of politics, conflict and social change. For 27 years he worked as a farmhand on the farm of Gabriel Jaime Gómez, a landowner who was kidnapped by the ELN in 1991 (allegedly involving Alirio and William) and who took part in the early negotiations leading up to the Assembly. Our interview began with Albeiro recounting his experiences of peasant resistance and activism. We can immediately perceive how Albeiro’s personal experience has shaped his sense of justice:
“I worked for 27 years on the farm of Gabriel Jaime Gómez, starting in 1975. They never paid me the minimum wage during all those years. I also worked on a farm of Gabriel Jaime’s grandfather. It was a farm of 1200 hectares, with cattle and coffee. There were 200 workers. I worked there for 12 years. The owner died but the farm stayed in the family.”

This initiated a struggle with the workers when the family wanted to end their employment. Albeiro told me of his encounter with the priest Ignacio Betancur who was Albeiro’s primary school teacher:

“There was a priest in Pueblo Rico called Ignacio Betancur who they called a revolutionary but who for us was an advisor who defended our rights and was against injustice. We met with him and then the idea was born of forming a trade union with the objective of not letting the family throw us off the farm. We were affiliated to Sintagro- the banana workers union. Our demand was that they would have to retire us with full social and health benefits that we were legally entitled to. The inheritors started to negotiate with the workers and members of the union, offering them money to leave...The union was strong...Eventually we took the farm but the police threw us off it...In the end some left of their own accord because of threats and the general difficulty of the struggle, so we lost strength.”

The immediate inheritor was prepared to negotiate with the peasants but “his three brothers were against the other guy working with us; they were hardcore capitalists and started a struggle against us.”

Albeiro and other people in the community began a series of land occupations and “recoveries” because of their desperate situation. They lived
in “rotation”, staying on the “recovered” farms at different moments and cultivating the land at night. They couldn’t hold all 1200 hectares so they eventually settled on just 63 hectares. They would enter the farmhouse and during the night they would put barbed wire around the land. The police would arrive the next day with the owners and take it down but Albeiro and the others would simply re-erect it. Eventually only seven families remained in the struggle. “We had many difficulties because everyday people would turn up claiming the land and try to throw us off. We would always ask to see the proof, the papers. Then we started to seek help from NGOs, in this case the IPC\textsuperscript{53} where there were lawyers and people who worked as advisors to people like us. We were working for the common good- for our families and the village.”

In 1979 a wealthy man from Urabá arrived in the area and offered Albeiro 10 million pesos\textsuperscript{54} to cease organising land struggles and to persuade people to leave. Albeiro refused. All this led to further problems. “In the region they stopped giving us work because we were deemed troublemakers, revolutionaries. We had no support from the local administration, we were totally discriminated against because of our struggle for land.” Eventually in 1990 a court judgment was emitted that classified the land as unowned and therefore entitled to be claimed by the peasants. Finally in 1994 they received land titles and the land was officially handed to them with no outstanding claims. They started to work the land but 9 hectares were stolen from them by a landowner. They remained with 54 hectares and sowed it all overnight in

\textsuperscript{53} Instituto Popular de Capacitación. A Medellín-based NGO.

\textsuperscript{54} On today’s exchange rate this would be roughly £3500
plantain. They divided the 54 hectares up amongst 15 families with three community plots. Albeiro still has 5 hectares.

During these years Albeiro and other peasants had been involved in literacy campaigns and political conscientization programs. This involved legal NGOs as well as clandestine groups linked to the guerrilla organizations. Albeiro was one of the peasants who helped organize these programmes amongst the local rural population. As he put it, whilst they were learning to read they also learnt to “read reality” at the same time. Their involvement with the ELN was ambiguous. Albeiro was understandably a bit cagey about this but he eventually clarified that he had been part of a militia group with an indirect connection to the guerrillas that aimed to conscientize local peasants and to defend the land they were occupying. The ELN frequently passed through their rural area and Albeiro and others would give them food and water. However, Albeiro stated that he did not personally want to go down the route of clandestine military action. He preferred to make claims the legal way and did this in his capacity as president of the local trade union branch. In 1995, as president of the trade union he went to the headquarters in Fredonia to ask for an investigation into working conditions. As Albeiro put it, there was a “tremendous injustice by the rich against the poor.” Between 1995 and 1997 Albeiro was also a local councillor.

Between 1990-1996 the ELN engaged in the kidnapping and killing of landowners in the area. The police called Albeiro to a meeting in which he was accused of being a guerrilla and of helping them. Albeiro admitted that they passed through his area and that they gave them provisions but he denied being a guerrilla. Gabriel Jaime was kidnapped in 1991, “supposedly by Alirio and William, but they deny it. I was working on the farm when it happened and
people accused me of being involved in it. People started looking for me. I had to go into hiding for a couple of months— not sleeping in the house but in the mountains. I was signalled as a guerrilla.” In 1996 he was ordered by the paramilitaries to resign his post as president of the union. “I was not a guerrilla. I shared, I still share, some ideals of the guerrillas. Today they have lost a bit of their ideological direction, but not completely though.” He fled to Medellín but came back to find the paramilitaries all over the area. He went up to his rural neighbourhood where there was a checkpoint manned by the paramilitaries. He approached them openly and introduced himself to the commander of the paramilitaries. He gave his version of events to them and they let him go. There the immediate problem for Albeiro ended.

In 1999 Alirio called on Albeiro to get involved in the Assembly process that was proposed. When Alirio explained that the idea was to sit down to discuss things with people like Gabriel Jaime and other landowners Albeiro was unsure due to the mutual antagonism and distrust between the peasants and landowners. But Alirio assured him that “he is as afraid of you as you are of him.” Albeiro told me that he felt Gabriel and others like him got involved in the process out of a sense of self-preservation as much as anything, although Gabriel had recognised the injustices visited on the peasant classes. And so the first meeting with over 300 people was convened and the process took its first steps.

My interview with Albeiro took place almost ten years on from the commencement of the Assembly and so offered an invaluable insight into the ethics and politics of struggle, the ups and downs and the prospects for an alternative ethical-political project that it appeared to aspire to be. I began by
asking Albeiro about what drove him on throughout all his years of hard social struggle:

“I have exercised leadership for 35 years without seeking to gain anything for myself but only with the desire to organize, to live united with others so that this injustice doesn’t overpower us like it has been doing. That’s been my philosophy. I got involved in the Assembly as a leader to contribute my knowledge and seeking some kind of progress against social injustice, discrimination, unemployment, unjust pay, for health and education. With that objective I joined the Assembly.”

Albeiro recounted that he was a founder member of the Assembly and part of its steering committee. His role was to convene the rural population and so he brought the communal action committees into it (neighbourhood citizens’ committees). For 15 years Albeiro was a president of his local communal action committee, which gave him credibility and helped him to get other local committees to work together. He informed people that the committees were protected in law and were deemed credible at the government level. However, after a few years he began to have differences with certain goings on in the Assembly:

“I told them ‘friends, you’ve lost your direction’; the original philosophy of the Assembly has been lost because the Assembly focuses on working with three or four people in the urban centre. I say things honestly but emphatically and that has caused much controversy. The Assembly is no longer the Municipal Constituent Assembly of Tarso. For me it is the Municipal Constituent
Assembly of the Urban Centre of Tarso. The rural area is not touched on, it has not been addressed."

Albeiro sees the Assembly as another form of "politiquería" because it has followed the logic of the clientelist electoral system. He was put in charge of "conscientizing" the rural neighbourhoods about the Assembly, of organizing people into local action committees and getting people to formulate proposals for development and so forth. However, in the middle of doing this "a political campaign for mayor of Tarso began and Alirio, William and two or three others from the Assembly followed the path of this candidate [Oscar Hurtado]. Alirio said to me, "Albeiro, the 'contract' has finished because we're now in political campaign", so he removes me from there and takes over himself with the candidates for the Council and goes into the rural communities to campaign. What he did was to completely break up the work I had been doing for a general good, for a philosophy of the Assembly, and they totally changed it. Politics got changed for politicking, which is bad."

Albeiro is critical of the form of participation in relation to the Development Plan: "Today we are mourning, look at where we're going, look at this current administration. Yesterday we saw it with the Development Plan which was really poor...We are politically at zero."

Albeiro’s criticism centres on the lack of attention to the rural areas and a failure to deepen the actual meaning and practice of participation. For example, in his view: "The Assembly has concerned itself with- that's fine-making contacts with those in social sectors like education; so with the local rector, for example. But do they talk to the kids at the local school, with the
parents? No sir, just with the rector and the teachers.” He summed up his general feeling: “Sadly the reading I have of the Assembly- I say it with great sadness because I was one its founders- is it’s been going for nine years but the marginalised communities, the rural areas, have not seen any benefits.”

Recently Albeiro had been contacted by Alirio to get more closely involved with the Assembly but Albeiro remained sceptical:

“I said to them ‘put your boots on’. I said to Alirio, “You used to wear them but when you did that was to go fighting. Now you have to put them on and go out without your gun and get down in the mud, help us to sow beans, corn, manioc. That’s what it’s about! With diaries, sandals and mobile phones you’re not going to solve the problem, not in the square. That’s why I’ve been a critic. I’m involved again today because they asked me but I said ‘compañeros, thanks for asking me, I love the Assembly but until you guys change mentality I’m not getting any deeper involved.’”

In Albeiro’s view there is a problem in terms of the profile of the leaders of the Assembly:

“I’ve told them some of the leaders of the Assembly don’t have a profile for leadership, because a leader needs many qualities and many of them don’t have them. Besides the fact they are not much loved in Tarso, they don’t know the soil, the communities, reality. I’ve told Julián, who is the local director, earns a million and a half pesos a month and never leaves the office. And it’s like that successively. I admire some of them, for example Carmen Lucía, she’s a teacher, really committed, that woman was part of a political group, she’s more on the left than the right. She has a wide vision.”
This clearly points to social and political tensions within the Assembly. For Albeiro the problem remains of a distance between the peasant classes and others. He gives another example:

“There was a girl who used to work on domestic violence issues. When she arrived Alirio introduced her to me and I invited her to a meeting of the local action committee in my rural neighbourhood, but the first thing she said was ‘but we don’t have a car’. I said, ‘no problem, the road is paved and it doesn't take long to get there on foot...The local action committee has 70 people, it’s an important space.’ ‘Ok’ she says. I went to meet her as we’d arranged to take her up there but she was in another meeting with the rector, the head of the police, the manager of the hospital and the candidate for mayor. That made me realize she had other interests that weren't those of the communities. But you’ve got to begin with the masses.”

Albeiro told me how the initial executive group of the committee had effectively split: “I don’t really understand why it is that these issues are not addressed. In the executive committee of the Assembly there were thirteen of us but six of us were pushed to one side because we were the ones who fought for the people as a whole, not only to do little things around the square. I’ve told them in no uncertain terms, being the peasant I am, that they’ve lost their humanitarian sense, they lost that common interest and started to create personal interests-money.” This was the strongest hint that, in MacIntyrean terms, an emphasis on “external goods” had replaced the focus on “internal goods” related to participation and working for a common good, which can eventually only lead to the damaging of social relationships.
Albeiro then put his view of the Assembly in more stark, ethical terms. “It’s like a trade unionist fighting for the rights of workers and owners at the same time, terrible. Where will that lead?” It became clear that there was an increasingly damaging division between Albeiro, the peasants he felt able to represent and the current Assembly leaders:

I said to them recently that if the Assembly didn’t change direction I would be the first one to start to bring it down because I’m going to convene all the heads of the communal action committees, twelve of us, and we’re going to conform a group that could be an associative work group for carrying out public works, I’m not sure yet."

I asked Albeiro what the needs of these communities were from his perspective: “Government support. We are abandoned. We have to begin from the fact that the local government just mouths words and promises that never materialise into anything…They have to invest in the countryside…We have to create associative work enterprises in our communities, community industries, associational groups. A project is easily created. Get five women or men and get them to work on producing onions, tomatoes, etc. We need cooperatives and a farmers’ exchange.” This reveals how state presence and involvement is seen as necessary. Arguably, the reality in Colombia is that the social problems are so intense that only the state is capable of addressing them. The state is both part of the problem and the solution on this view. However, it can be asked whether historical patterns of dependence on the state and the deeply rooted “patrimonial” culture prevent local communities from taking the initiative themselves. Continuing to demand state presence and hoping that
the state will change and benevolently recognise its “responsibilities” is, on an anarchist view of social change, to remain trapped in a “politics of demand” that politically and psychologically blocks people from conceiving and implementing more radical, autonomous forms of social change (see Day 2005). The Assembly’s model of social change aims to circumnavigate the state by seeking external resources that are to be administered directly by the community, whilst also aiming to transform the state slowly from within by putting its own people within it. In this the Assembly project is closer to a MacIntyrean rather than an anarchist politics. It is also a concrete Utopian politics in that it is guided by Utopian standards but recognises the need to engage with existing structures.

Clearly, from Albeiro’s perspective the problem boils down to a failure to communicate across the class divide: “Last week there was a meeting of the executive of the Assembly and I said to them that they had dedicated themselves to working with the middle and upper classes, that they had abandoned the popular classes, which is where the potential lies.” But it is also a problem related to the very structure of the Assembly: “I said that four or five of them were going to continue having the say and deciding for all the Assembly members, and that’s not the way. They communicate with the people when everything has already been decided. For that reason I say there’s been a lack of communication.”

Land, poverty and development

I then asked Albeiro to talk about his views on development issues in Tarso.
“When they say that in seven years Tarso has seen greater development, I disagree. To me it’s the opposite. Here in Tarso there are two barrios in which the local government built houses for the people...they saw that the landowners were knocking houses down and that concerned them so they got some resources together to provide houses, but now those people are forgotten. They brought some to the urban area and now they have a house but still suffer hunger and now pollution. If you go back to those rural communities that’s where the poverty is. At the least they could plant some crops to subsist on, there was some work on the land but now there’s no work. That’s the problem.”

Albeiro immediately linked this to the issue of local clientelist politics: “When the mayor built the houses he didn’t do it thinking about the priorities; they were built without any prior study. What he looked at was how many votes he could get.”

Albeiro then pointed out the statistics on land concentration. According to him there is one landowner with seven farms totalling more than 5000 hectares. These farms are dedicated mainly to coffee and cattle. For Albeiro a better model would be to focus on smallholders producing for the local and internal markets. “We need an agrarian economy based on food security and when those needs are met we can think about producing for export.” There has been some attempt at diversification into citrus fruits which requires more labour, “but once production starts they will need less workers. They are also considering using machines to harvest the fruit, which is a gain for the owner but...” This again signals a shift from the “standpoint of civil society” that was also evident in Oralia’s position.
The problems in Tarso are also linked to the wider economic dynamics of the national level conflict, for example in relation to the illegal drugs economy. According to Albeiro, “Narco money is also coming to these large farms- capitalism; they’ve already started building tourist cabins. Today in Tarso in some areas a hectare of land costs 60 - 70 million pesos. The owner builds a beautiful farm with a swimming pool and that’s it. That’s all very good for him, and Tarso will look really pretty with all those enclosed developments, but we peasants will be in the same situation as before.” Albeiro is also worried he will be forced to sell the plot he has. According to him there is talk by one aspiring local politician about building another urban barrio for those economically displaced in his rural community. “That’s when I think ‘and what’s the Assembly for?’ We’ve got all this international support but let’s not keep lying to Europe and let’s stop lying to ourselves...There’s a son of a bitch in Tarso with 5000 hectares of land, Gustavo Adolfo, he’s young, the guerrillas killed his father. Why don’t the Assembly, the municipality and three or four people form an alliance to start a big project?” Albeiro suggested that land could be donated by those with large land holdings. The municipality or the departmental or national state could buy land to help address these problems. He pointed out that Gabriel Jaime leased 70 hectares for free for 6-10 years. “That’s the priority. Otherwise this place will be a paradise for the rich and we will disappear, we will be displaced to Medellin to live in the ‘comunas’.” The problems Albeiro highlights are directly embedded in his own daily life:

“I am currently working on a farm- in construction- building a swimming pool, digging and carrying, carting cement from 6.30am to 6.30pm for 25,000 pesos...I’ve only got work for two weeks and then I don’t know what I’ll do.
These rich folks only hire you when they need you to avoid paying insurance and health entitlements... Why do I have to do day labour when I have five hectares of land? Because I don’t have resources to make it work and the Assembly has not proposed to form a project with me... It prefers to maintain relations with Federico the owner of the flower company; he has nine of them.”55

I asked Albeiro whether he thought that the common good was being built in Tarso: “No. We are not building a common good here. Some individuals’ good is being constructed.” Albeiro then linked this to the notion of peace: “There is supposed to be an administration that talks about development and peace. No sirs, peace is more than a name, peace has many ingredients... here there are families dying of hunger, families with nowhere to live, without education, here there is tremendous domestic violence.”

Clearly, the political relationship between the local mayor and the Assembly remains a challenge in Albeiro’s view:

“This corrupt mayor that we have in Tarso promised in his campaign to build a road and a bridge, which will cost 15,000 million pesos. Today the Assembly is thinking of putting money towards that and I asked William if the Assembly was going to carry on paying for the political favours of others. Where are we going to get with that? The mayor promised the road and the bridge but because it’s not possible for the administration to do so on its own and it realizes the Assembly has money, the idea seems to be for the Assembly to

55 Unfortunately I was not able to get an interview with Federico. His would be an important perspective to capture in terms of his conceptions of justice, development and the Assembly process.
help out. Who will get all the plaudits? The mayor of course who in four years will come back to try to get voted in again. That’s it plain and simple.”

Albeiro points to clear economic problems and inequalities that on a MacIntyrean view must hinder the development of a genuine politics of the common good. The fairly clear implication coming through was that the Assembly is becoming another exclusionary political space in which the interests of those who run it have moved away from the common good to the external goods of money, influence and power. The internal clashes about the best way to achieve what is broadly referred to as the common good also reflect different assessments of the strategic possibilities for and nature of economic development. But these internal differences arguably reflect the fact that the municipality as a whole arguably does not have a shared conception of the common good. There remain deeply entrenched interests that mean the Assembly in its internal deliberations very likely has to take “pragmatic” decisions.

Perspectives from political power and landowners

I now turn to the perspectives of those with political power, the former and current Mayors of Tarso, Ignacio Castaños and Fredy Hurtado.

Fredy Hurtado Pérez is the current mayor of Tarso. He is from a large political family (14 brothers and sisters) that is traditionally Liberal. Fredy studied law in Medellín and went on to be the human rights ombudsman (personero) in neighbouring Pueblo Rico. Two of his brothers have also been mayors in Tarso including the first mayor to work with the Assembly, Oscar
Hurtado. We began by discussing the origins of the Assembly and the financial and administrative crisis that threatened to subsume Tarso into the municipality of neighbouring Jericó. In Fredy’s view this was not down to corruption or clientelism but “disorder”- a different explanation to that provided by Alirio, William and Oralia. Fredy then talked about the illegal armed groups in the region and began his narrative by highlighting the killing of three landowners by the ELN. “Because of them we suffered the deaths of whom we might say were the three wealthiest people in the municipality, very honourable farmers who generated a lot of employment; they were a tremendous loss to us.” Fredy then recounted the appearance of the paramilitaries: “And then the other group appears, the paramilitaries who did us a lot of harm with their selective killings...In Pueblo Rico 250 people were killed in three or 4 years, which left a big hole in our community...Here we suffered a lot as well.”

The armed groups generated problems for the community in different ways in terms of security, the economy and politics. Fredy described the Assembly process as establishing “a barrier against the armed groups. In terms of security and the socio-economic side of things the Assembly helped a lot and got people to support it.” Fredy then pointed out that the Assembly and the local government had to work together for both of them to achieve their goals. “If the Assembly didn’t work in tandem with the municipal administration it would not have the success it enjoys...The same goes for the administration, we need each other.” He told me how his position required him to “communicate with everyone”. Interestingly perhaps, Fredy described the initial meetings between the local administration and the Assembly as having established “a gentlemen’s agreement about the projects we would carry out
and how they had to be for the benefit of the whole community." In his view it
doesn’t matter who “contributes to the community” as long as it is a
contribution; “Their political views don’t matter”.

Fredy then put it to me that the common good was the central notion
guiding the joint process: “Thinking about the common good was the basis of
everything we did here. We had to detach ourselves from personal interests.”
He pointed out that despite the seriousness of Tarso’s financial and political
crisis, the mayor at the time could still “have done his own thing” because he
had the legal power to restructure the local administration. However, “he
recognised that he needed the support of everyone.”

I asked Fredy about how disagreements between the Assembly and the
local administration might be handled:

“If the day comes when differences arise between the Assembly and the
administration and our proposals are not in agreement, then with a lot of
respect and courtesy and through dialogue we will have to think hard about
what to do. I think the differences will be when we don’t think in terms of the
community, in the common good as we call it. When the proposals put to us
are not oriented to the common good the administration won’t support them.”

Fredy says things have advanced in terms of development in Tarso but
recognises that much still needs to be done. In particular he mentioned health
coverage and the need to make sure employers register their workers on the
national government system and pay their legal entitlements, etc. He said he
had spoken to the business community and that they were committed to
helping in this respect and wanted to work with the community and the administration.

Although Fredy recognises that land is in the hands of a few and says there is a need to help peasants to legalize their land, especially in the historic areas of land struggles, he argues that the landowners have provided work for people. He has a different perspective to Albeiro on the recreational farms that are being built:

“Now we see the phenomenon of the recreational farms that have greatly increased the value of land in the municipality, which is an essential part of the municipality’s income generation due to the land taxes. Here a hectare of land is worth ten times what it used to be ten years ago, it’s incredible. But I see advantages in that because at the end of the day it gives the municipality more status, people want to invest in Tarso.”

Fredy then tried to sum up the conflict in Tarso. In his view it is based on “a lack of a sense of belonging, intolerance, domestic violence. These are attitudes that don’t contribute to peace...We want to substitute these practices for principles of dignity, solidarity, and participation. We want to declare peace in that sense. We want all of us from Tarso to feel an inner peace, peace in the family and in the community." In Fredy’s view, “We are a model of citizen participation. This administration wants to support that and make sure it is realized and that it continues. We know that through the Constitution we have shifted from a representative model to a participatory model, we understand that very clearly.”
Whilst Fredy touched on some of the central themes of the process that my other interviewees also mentioned, which suggests that a more or less shared discursive framework has developed that can better enable conflict to be rationally addressed, there are clearly significant differences about what the common good implies in terms of economic development. For example, Fredy sees the issue of the increasing land prices and recreational farms very differently to how Albeiro and others see it, which is central to the common good. The depth of the apparent discursive consensus can only be evaluated in the future as the community faces up to the challenges that currently threaten to unravel the gains made. As we have seen, the process is fraying and the important issue is whether it has managed to develop the moral and cultural resources necessary to overcome differences in a rational way.

Ignacio Castaños was the second Mayor of Tarso under the aegis of the Assembly. He is a landowner himself and defined his political views as “uribista”\textsuperscript{56}. We began by talking about the causes of the conflict. Ignacio put it to me that the historic injustices in relation to land and the concentration of wealth had played a huge part and that “If private business does not help with this problem, there will never be peace here.”

Ignacio then linked the national scenario with the local context in Tarso: “Tarso has traditionally been a municipality of latifundios. 95\% of the land has been in the hands of 5\% of the population, in the hands of a few.” He told me about the land struggles: “There were social movements that wanted to take land by force, for example in La Linda, La Arboleda, Patio Bonito where there were confrontations with major landowners.” He then stated that the

\textsuperscript{56} I.e. a supporter of the former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez.
landowners made a mistake “when they shut themselves away and looked out only for themselves. They didn’t provide much employment, made themselves richer. There was a huge gulf between the rich and the poor.” He then narrated the story of the Assembly and how it emerged within this polarized context. “So what happened? Some guys turned up, who came from certain movements like William and Alirio, and ‘Tarso towards a new millenium’ was created. People said how could some ‘fanatics’, ‘lunatics’, ‘useful idiots’, ‘romantics’ as they were called, how could we change all of this? How could we save the municipality?” Ignacio at first withdrew from the process. “I withdrew from the process at the start because I thought it was just another political movement of the usual sort, but then I went back.” Oscar Hurtado was then elected as mayor as the ‘Assembly candidate’ and Ignacio followed in 2003 with the highest vote for a candidate in Tarso’s history (over 2500 votes). “In my first term as mayor I worked a lot with the communities. I was the first mayor to speak of revoking the mandate of mayors; according to article 40 of the Constitution the people can do that; there are four or five mechanisms of citizen participation through which this can be done if the mayor doesn’t serve you.” He added, “I always worked hand in hand with the Assembly. I never spoke in the name of the Castaños but in the name of the Assembly.” I asked Ignacio if there had been any clashes between the Assembly and the administration: “Here something curious happened because there was a ‘confrontation’ between the legal and the legitimate. There were seven councillors against the idea of the Assembly and one in favour (which was William in any case). They never participated or wanted anything to do with the Assembly. Nonetheless the Development Plan was unanimously approved.” This again highlights the serious political resistance that the Assembly faced
but also arguably signals the “curious fact” of the persuasive power of concerted, collective, participatory political action.

I then asked Ignacio about how the Assembly and his administration approached issues of justice and land distribution with the landowners in Tarso. The approach made appeal to historic practices rather than to abstract moral principles: “In my first term I wanted to try to bring them together. I met with several wealthy landowners and I said to them ‘look, in the past in Tarso the wealthy landowners used to give the workers a plot of land for them to grow food: corn, beans, chickens, they even used to give them a milk cow. As a result of the badly named agrarian reform of 1968-1970 the rich said ‘no more land.’ That’s when the differences began between the rich and the poor. We lost all of that…I said to them that what we needed was to return to the 1970s and give the poor what they were given then.” Some agreed yet some went as far as to threaten Ignacio. However, as Ignacio sees it the Assembly brought real changes in favour of a “social pact” between the rich and the poor, which Ignacio put down to a different social and political context. Nevertheless Ignacio pointed out that today “Land distribution remains the same. What has changed is the use of land.” The reasons for landowners changing their attitudes and agreeing to form a social pact were mixed, according to Ignacio - it was a combination of self-interest, fear and some kind of recognition that it was a requirement of justice. The fact that the Assembly was based on a rejection of all armed groups no doubt helped to persuade landowners that certain changes were necessary to maintain this. “The Assembly was a dissuasive factor, it made people realize that there was no space here for that radicalism.”
However, this is hardly a picture of moral persuasion based on determinate, shared criteria and reasoning in light of the common good. Nevertheless, it is what there is to build on. The problem for Tarso and the process is ultimately one of building a social consensus on the need for much more radical change in land distribution and use. This has to be a consensus across the whole community and institutional structure—between the Assembly and the local government. But how likely is this? The current mayor, as we have seen, sees the buying up of land by rich people from outside Tarso for the construction of recreational farms as positive, whilst Albeiro and other people in the countryside I spoke to, as well as other members of the Assembly, see it as extremely harmful to the community. There are clearly different interests and conceptions of interests and goods at play here. As another interviewee pointed out, from the perspective of the local administration the greater land taxes paid by the wealthy landowners in contrast to peasant smallholders are much more attractive and immediately useful. Their interest would therefore be to encourage these and to facilitate these “developments”. However, in the bigger picture and from the perspective of the common good, it has to be seriously called into question. The very fact of this perceptual difference might be taken as evidence against the view that Tarso is in fact engaged in a politics of the common good. However, given that there is also evidence to support the view that the Assembly process has to some extent been based on a politics of the common good, this particular issue emphasizes the difficulties faced by any politics of local community for achieving social transformation in such contexts.
Gabriel Jaime Gómez is one of the original landowners involved in the first Assembly meetings. I visited him at his farm where instead of a formal interview we had a lengthy informal conversation. Gabriel was extremely open but my lack of in depth knowledge about the process and the personal histories involved made it difficult for me to understand Gabriel’s position.

Gabriel was kidnapped by the ELN in 1991, which allegedly involved Alirio and William although this is based on unconfirmed, though widely known anecdotal information. Prior to the Assembly Gabriel told me he was involved in supporting local agricultural projects for local workers; he served as a guarantor to get loans for them and helped assess them on various aspects of the projects. He also donated land towards these. Gabriel did not elaborate on his reasons for deciding to do this (nor on his experience of being kidnapped) but made general remarks about the “need for things to change” in Tarso and to address its conflicts.

He was generally extremely critical about the process, but particularly about William and Alirio. He spoke about the initial projects that centred on local, smallholder agriculture and remarked that in this respect there had been very little done, despite the projects in Alirio’s rural neighbourhood. In his view this aspect suffered from distorted priorities:

“I think the resources went on the salaries of the directors...At the start it was a process with a high level of credibility and organisational impetus but now it doesn’t function...They talk about youth formation and the youth constituents but they’ve gone with the cheapest and easiest option. The project was initially supposed to support productive projects but now there are no small productive family plots.”
He told me how William and Alirio had effectively “erased the memory of social struggle in Tarso” through buying the defunct trade union offices. However, if there had been so much opposition to this why would the owners, who were mainly local peasant workers, have accepted their offer? It seemed to me that Gabriel was placing blame unfairly on just two individuals, William and Alirio, and exaggerating their “control” of the Assembly. In my view, if Gabriel’s version was correct I would have expected to find a much greater degree of resentment from other Assembly members and also to have heard much more about this episode from the peasant militants I spoke with.

Gabriel pointed to money as a corrupting influence on the process. “I was a collegiate president of the Constituent Assembly but that was as far as my accompaniment went because I didn’t perceive in them collective interests and I told them in no uncertain terms that they were more interested in the bank balance than in the social projects for which the money from abroad was for.” He then went on to criticise the lack of participation:

“There is no process of participation now. Back then people really participated, their instinct for participation was at the fore, people participated in the urban and rural areas. Proof of what I’m saying is the number of members that have dissociated themselves from the Assembly. Basically the only ones left from the beginning are Alirio and William because the rest of us left...What I see is a lot of envy and underhand work for particular interests. It worked well before we had the money. Then they went to Medellin and got consultants, accountants and secretaries and it became more of a façade than a representative entity.”
Again, despite the undoubted elements of truth, this account needs to be looked at with a critical eye as it is simply not the case that the “only ones left” are William and Alirio. In Gabriel’s view, important sectors of the population were lost to the process because they saw that it was just “more of the same.” He finished by speaking about how the Assembly had been used by local politicians: “Oscar Hurtado got involved in the Assembly because he saw how strong it had become. But even he was an enemy of the Assembly...The Assembly had its headquarters in the Casa de Cultura and Oscar sent a letter to the Assembly in which he told them to vacate the building.” For Gabriel, the current mayor Fredy Hurtado is “more of the same, with his own people and his exclusions.”

Clearly, Gabriel has a very critical take on the whole process and local politics, which borders on cynicism. However, perhaps Gabriel can afford to be so critical because, despite his espoused concern for rural development and politics, he is a well-off landowner. When I interviewed him he had just finished constructing a small hotel on his land for tourists from Medellín. His views on the corrupting influence of money within the Assembly process also strike an ironic note coming from someone who is relatively extremely well off and has enjoyed the fruits of economic exploitation for many years. I could not help thinking that perhaps Gabriel was projecting on to William and Alirio what plausibly might have been his own prior (and possibly current) rationalizations about his own position as a wealthy landowner who economically exploited his workforce. By insinuating that supposed radicals like William and Alirio have been corrupted by money, does this not serve as a way of implying that his own earlier prioritization of “external goods” like money and power is simply part of corrupt human nature, thereby exonerating himself? His personal
differences with William and Alirio also need to be placed in the context of their previously antagonistic relationship and sense of mutual victimization (the guerrillas felt landowners victimized the poor, the landowners felt victimized by the guerrillas).

Gabriel gave the impression of being content to criticize without getting involved to improve things. This points to the weakness of political and community solidarity caused by large material inequalities. In contrast to Gabriel, Albeiro and other peasant day labourers and farmers cannot afford to be passively critical. Earning 25,000 pesos a day for building a swimming pool on somebody's recreational farm is a stark contrast to Gabriel's position and can only lead to increasing social and class antagonism. As we shall see, this needs to be addressed to prevent the re-emergence of feelings that only violence can bring much needed social and economic change.

**Perspectives of the powerless: ambiguities of hope**

I then went to speak with a group of peasants in the rural community of La Linda. Elías Parra and Joaquín Jaramillo are peasant militants from the days of the land struggles in Tarso. Elías told me how he had originally viewed the Assembly process: “With the Assembly we saw the possibility for a better future; in organization, participation, administration. We saw a possibility that all of us in the municipality, including all social classes- youths, women, children- could construct a new future relating to land reform and working organizations and projects.” But as Joaquín pointed out, “No mayor has ever mentioned land reform...I have been a critic of all the administrations here but the one I have totally not supported is this one. All the candidates for the
council and the local government come around every four years to our rural communities to get votes but they have never spoken to us about land reform. That’s been a serious problem.” Elías commented that this was because of the shared interests of the administration and the landowning classes. As he put it, “they look out for each other, capital works with capital but we’re left aside by the administrations.” Elías and Joaquín then spoke about the need for organization amongst the peasants and workers and how this had been broken by the threats and violence against them:

“We in La Linda have been characterized by our unity and organization, for being militants in the struggle, but we have been intimidated by the security forces as well as by the landowners, which has held us back. We had a union called the Municipal Association of Agricultural Workers of Tarso but we received threats from the public administration. There have been mayors and councillors who have called us land thieves, so farmers have not wanted to give us work on that pretext, so that too has held us back.”

Despite this, Elías and Joaquín believe there is potential amongst them to achieve the changes they desire:

“I think we have great potential because we are a community with a lot of knowledge and we have a Constituent Assembly. In my view, the Assembly has to get involved in the countryside, the directors should be there working with us. We want to transform the vice of mendicity, we don’t want to live thinking everything will fall from the sky to us, that the mayor will solve all our problems. No, we want to be autonomous but to achieve that we need first to organize ourselves as a community. If we push the Assembly we can make
alliances with other organizations like the administration, the coffee cultivators’
committee, the Agrarian Bank, etc. That is what has been missing.”

I asked them how they could form alliances with landowners who ostensibly
have completely contrary interests to them:

“It’s been difficult because Tarso is in the hands of four or five landowners.
However, although we have suffered because of the war, they have also.
There was a time when there was a huge amount of discrimination, when we
went after the landowners and they refused to recognise us as well. But an
achievement of the Assembly was reconciliation. In that sense we have to
thank the Assembly as well as our own organization. There was a moment
when we and the landowners got together and they proposed to let us use
portions of their land. One landowner let us use 200 hectares of his 1000
hectare farm. Gabriél Jaime Gómez had a farm of 78 hectares and he let us
use it all. At that time we had a governor called Guillermo Gaviria who said he
would donate two months of his salary every year to the Assembly for
productive projects; but because the Assembly lost its way, because some of
the directors deviated from the philosophy, the opportunity was lost. The
landowners didn’t hear from the Assembly again and we didn’t continue with
the opportunity of uniting with them, of forming an alliance.”

The Assembly continued to operate although it gradually began to lose
influence. However, “Because of that history I think we have the possibility of
re-instigating this, because now thanks to the Assembly, the administration
and ourselves it is not as bad anymore. We have the possibility to reconcile, to
approach them and to start that joint work together.” This certainly suggests
that there is a more or less shared language and set of terms with which to approach the difficult issues of “constructing together” in the midst of radically different perspectives based on material inequalities and class antagonism. Through the practice of deliberation in the Assembly the community has, from the perspective of these peasant militants, made serious headway in bridging the social divide and trying to work together. Whilst under no illusions about the prospects for radical change, it is important that these individuals feel there is some common discursive, moral and cultural ground on which to build.

They spoke amongst themselves about creating an Assembly of the communal action committees arguing that they have the potential and the autonomy for creating and proposing projects. They pointed out that there is a culture of participation throughout Tarso and were sure that this augured well for such a proposal: “if we were to propose a union of communal action committees we would get a positive response because everyone in the municipality has that culture.”

I then got another perspective from a peasant farm worker and trade unionist called Jairo Flores. He began by enunciating a general ethical principle: “One mustn’t think about the individual but about other people, in the most needy because we know that those who already have do not need anything”, which strongly resonates with the liberationist language of the “preferential option” for the rights of the poor. This discourse is also shared by Albeiro, Elias and Joaquín although there are some important differences in view, as we shall see. Jairo outlined his perception of the Assembly’s function and purpose:
“We could say that the Assembly is there to carry out many activities and to deal with many issues, to solve problems that arise in the town; there are many economic necessities. As we all know, this is a wealthy municipality but it is in the power of three or four landowners that don’t want to do anything for the poor. Therefore, we the poor are the ones who have to rise up and claim our rights, to demand justice, which is what this country needs—justice for the poor, social justice.”

However, for Jairo this cannot be achieved through armed struggle:

“I don’t agree with any armed group. Why? Before there was an armed sector that stood up for the poor and claimed rights on their behalf but today it’s all a business. What rules today is the justice of money. All those armed groups only fight for their own economic interests, they don’t give a damn about the poor, the same as the president we have doesn’t give a damn. Why do I say this? Because he is privatizing companies…It is a tragedy that a country as rich in natural resources as ours lives in misery because the president wants to sell everything to the United States at the lowest price.”

I asked Jairo about his conception of a just community: “To have a just country in which we all work, in which we all contribute our little bit and where we look at each other like brothers, because my God didn’t give us a world divided by fences. We want partiality for everyone…let’s stop looking at each other as enemies.” He elaborated further his views on justice: “We know that here in Colombia there is no justice. There is justice but ‘para los de ruana’ [lit. “for those of the ruana”. A ruana is the typical shawl like garment worn by people in the countryside.] If we have laws and the president rules this country and it’s
supposed to be strictly complied with, why don’t they enforce the law about the minimum wage? That’s an injustice.” In Jairo’s view, “here in Tarso the rich abuse the poor a lot.”

He then spoke about his experiences as a trade unionist: “Many of us who have passed through the ranks of the unions have had the conception that what we have learned is not just for ourselves but has to be passed on to the people so that they form consciousness and demand their rights. We are in a country of free rights and we have to bring attention to all the abuses that the bourgeoisie commit against us.” I then asked Jairo whether the common good was being constructed here: “Yes, as long as we carry on as we are. We need to plan, we need a strategy, a rigorous plan of action that is consequential. We need full contact with the community.” Jairo expressed hope that the process could work through communication and dialogue with the mayor, who would have to listen to dissenting views. Speaking after the Assembly meeting for the Development Plan he pointed out, “If we see that in six months the results are not good, then again we will have to draw attention to it and meet with the mayor.”

Was there a feeling amongst these different sectors of a shared project, I wondered? Was there a genuine sense of community or was there something still lacking? “There is still much to do. For example, we have to stop thinking about our individual interests and to start thinking about the common good. It’s a long term work plan that depends on our continuity, on the attention we give to these initiatives that are really important, not just for oneself but for the most needy in the community.” Jairo, like Elías above, then pointed out the connection between the local government and the wealthy in Tarso in more concrete terms:
“The rich side with the local administrations and they ensure that they don’t have to pay the minimum wage. The rich are taking land away from the people with the connivance of the administrations, the mayor...Here they buy up farms and build fences around them that block off municipal paths and roads. The first thing they do is to put a sign at the entrance which says ‘Keep out. Private.’ That’s something the mayor should deal with, take back those municipal paths, recover them.”

However, despite Jairo’s cynicism about the mayor and the administration, he thinks the mayor is prepared to listen to the Assembly: “It’s serious participation because we accompany this administration and one of the best things we see is that the mayor takes the community into account when he does things. Because he doesn’t rule on his own, we rule the administration because we put him there.” This is a notably different view of the current mayor to that expressed by Albeiro from someone with a very similar radical perspective.

Despite Jairo’s burning sense of injustice, his realist class analysis, and his view that traditionally the political and economic elites (“capitalists”) have colluded in the oppression and abuse of the poor, the Assembly had clearly given Jairo some hope that serious social change could occur through dialogue, argument and working together as a community, despite.

From the academy to community

María Teresa Toros is a 53 year old single mother from the nearby municipality of Concordia. She is a secondary school teacher of Spanish and Literature and before moving to Tarso she taught at public universities in Medellín. As we
shall see, in this university context María Teresa has important experience as someone engaged with and affected by the conflict. Her decision to leave Medellín and move to Tarso is directly related to this experience.

María links a critique of the workings of university institutions in Colombia to the conflict and her hopes for the process in Tarso:

“I think Colombia is a country with much social exclusion where there are really big conflicts. One of the principal conflicts has to do with the structure of power, with corruption. Pointing that out is not looked upon well by the public universities. When I was working at a university in Medellín I realized I was looked on suspiciously so before things got out of hand, before I became more persecuted or things turned sinister with a disappearance or an assassination I decided to go into a kind of personal exile in the countryside to continue struggling in a different way and context. Besides, I always liked Tarso because it's more peaceful here. Here you can talk about democracy and participation and the Constitution and you don't have a boss on top of you saying no, that this is a country without conflict, where there are no exclusions, that teachers are called to teach and not make comments in relation to the conflict.”

Here María Teresa makes clear how the academy is inherently involved in the conflict. In her view, the university as a public institution cannot avoid taking a stance in relation to the conflict despite ideological pretensions to value neutrality. It says something important that in María Teresa’s view there is an opportunity to discuss social, political and moral issues in relation to the conflict in a small, local community like Tarso rather than in the supposedly liberal world of the modern, urban university.
María gave an example of the kind of ruling mentality in operation at the university level:

“The persecution against me took a nasty turn because at a state university where I was working we were discussing in a teachers’ meeting the issue of corruption and we were asked if we had any views. I raised my hand and said I thought it was a problem that in education in Colombia at the university level we basically limited ourselves to the purely academic side of things and almost never took a position in respect of the problematic in the country. I said that one of the most serious problems was administrative corruption. It was then that the Dean decided to try to get me out of the university because she thought my ideology was dangerous. I added that an educator should prepare young people for a difficult life, which is what it is in Colombia, so that when they left university they wouldn’t become victims trapped in the conflict and would have the morals and courage to deal with it.”

María points to the real dangers and ethical dilemmas of challenging dominant practices and ideologies in the Colombian context. “After she made the decision to remove me I told her I would go public with my concerns and urge an open debate about what we should be doing in terms of getting the university in touch with the truths about this country and how we could educate for a society in conflict and war.” María convoked a meeting of teachers and administrators and they organized a demonstration. Her boss called the police who took over the university, which María and her colleagues were completely against; they demanded an investigation into this criminalization. In her view, the aim was to suppress dissent and curtail free discussion on socially
important issues. As it turned out this backfired on her boss when it was discovered that she had been engaged in corruption.

This shows the real dangers and obstacles in trying to build an alternative ethical-political ethos in a country in which many people are locked into a defence of the status quo by their own direct or indirect involvement with corrupt and often authoritarian, exclusionary practices. To confront these issues even in a respectful, non-aggressive way can be risky. It also requires a strong ethical sense. As María put it, “Some of us have the courage to confront others and ask them to discuss things, to inquire into what is happening. It’s a country where we can all fit.”

Maria then talked about the challenges for education in the context of the conflict and told me how there are many young people who feel there is no alternative to armed struggle as a solution to the country’s social injustices. Processes like the one in Tarso need to address the material realities of inequality and poverty if they are to maintain credibility:

“Look, a society like Tarso has engaged in a lot of democratic debate, it’s got together with the community, it has placed a lot of importance on participation, in managing conflicts peacefully. But if you don’t add to that a way of helping people to subsist, if people don’t see an alternative possibility in the countryside for example, if we don’t integrate productive issues with it, if we don’t integrate production with democratic pedagogy then it is very complicated because people cannot be expected to participate if they are struggling economically, if they don’t have enough to feed themselves and their families. Students come up to me and say ‘teacher, we don’t have enough to eat well for more than half the week.’ I understand that, I really do. I know that’s the disconnect in Tarso. There’s a lot of poverty, believe me it’s
not about people feeling sorry for themselves, it’s about lack of opportunities...I’ve said to Alirio that the situation worries me, I am worried about the constituent process in Tarso because if people don’t find a way of getting out of this productive chaos I think they will love this process more outside than here itself.”

I asked María what lay at the root of the productive problems she highlighted: “There is a productive problem because the land is in the hands of very few people, very, very wealthy people. They give work to the people they need, but they are a mere handful. There is no just distribution of land; basically there is a serious agrarian problem here, though not just in Tarso but across the whole country.”

As María points out, people expect the Assembly to find a solution to their material needs. Open and participatory discussion ultimately lacks meaning without an integral material/economic dimension. As María put it, “If we don’t have land, if we don’t have jobs, if there is no way out, how can you sustain a debate?” In her view, “It always goes back to the same theme, a few rich people have land to do what they want with it. The state doesn’t get involved. The state is all talk; it won’t come here and instigate a land reform with three or four farms. It has never come here to do studies with the community about that possibility.”

Nevertheless, for María if the Assembly didn’t exist they would not have made the gains in terms of debate and social rapprochement that they have done in Tarso. “The businessmen, traders, landowners would not have got as close to this society to look at its needs; I think it would have been much more difficult and we would have waited another 10 to 15 years to even begin to
make that effort. I think that Tarso is consolidating a firm foundation; I have heard people speak in meetings and you get a sense of hope, that it is more than just discourse and words."

I asked María to sum up the ethical position of the Assembly: “It’s about unity; the position they take is one of reconciliation, an emphatic no to war, a no to exclusion; it is about giving people opportunities for them to regain their dignity. That’s how I would sum it up.”

“But then the ELN left and everything changed”: not bridging the class divide

Sandra Milena López is a 26 year old housewife and mother who was involved in the Assembly in its early days. She is the daughter of Albeiro López and has a radical left wing political orientation. She has since become very critical of the Assembly. Sandra began by telling me about her initial involvement with the process:

“They delegated the youth part of the Assembly to me. We formed a group of young people and we went into the rural communities to tell people about how good the Assembly was...But we came to realize that the Assembly was not about the people as they had led us to believe, but about five or six individuals. That’s when the Assembly started to fail...They only wanted us for the photographs to make it look good. People came from Spain and they’d get 150 delegates together, give them lunch, take a few photos and that was all there was to it. They paid attention to us only for that, to cover holes.”
According to Sandra, the rest of the delegates were no longer deemed necessary when the organizational structure of president and executive committee was formed. Secretaries were then employed and they earned a wage. There was little participation in terms of projects; people were merely informed about what had already been decided, what was working and what wasn’t.

For Sandra, the Assembly “is not anchored in reality” and needs to start from scratch. However, “Those who are running it and benefit from it don’t think the same.” In her view social justice and development have not improved: “I think it’s the same as before...For me it is like the local administration. I thought the Assembly was going to be transparent, about a shift in attitude, but it isn’t the case...If you speak to the director, he does well out of it. For me it’s still about who you know, ‘la rosca’...People are chosen not for ability or sincerity but because they are friends.”

We then spoke about Sandra’s perspective on rural issues: “The local politicians don’t show any interest in the rural population except the day of the elections. The people in the countryside tell them and show them their needs and they say ‘yes, yes, we’ll get it sorted, we’ll look at this and that’ but you never see any results. They look at peasants as if they were lesser, they don’t give them resources or help to better their situation so they can carry out projects...The peasant is really isolated.” In Sandra’s view there is an almost insurmountable divide between the business and landowning classes and the peasants “because they are not compatible ideas...They are not interested in paying a just wage for the poor; they always look to exploit them, to use them. I think the rich, the landowners look down on the poor.”
In Sandra’s view, the encounters between the landowners and the ex-guerrillas in the early moments of the Assembly process were merely pragmatic:

“In my opinion the negotiation between Gabriel Jaime...and Alirio was based on fear. It wasn’t because he wanted to unite with the Assembly but rather because he was scared, so he sought a spokesperson and that was my father. In order to get the people fully on side Alirio had to negotiate with Gabriel because he was the one who allegedly kidnapped him, so of course Gabriel looked on him with fear. Alirio needed to win Gabriel over.”

Sandra pointed to the problems of reconciliation in such a divided society: “The poor, we are never going to unite with a paramilitary. It’s like the rich and the poor. Supposedly the poor person is left wing and the rich person is on the right.” It was clear that for Sandra despite the Assembly those divisions still existed. “How are we going to be on the same side as a rich person, how can we tell them our needs and talk like I’m talking to you? Here, never. We’re never going to be in that position here. I think it’s impossible.” This pessimistic view emphasizes the reality and potential dangers of failing to overcome radical, historically entrenched social divisions, which can lead to the re-emergence of polarized positions that see no other way but the historically recurrent one of resorting to violence:

“If in Tarso we had the guerrillas who favour the poor; well, for me that’s what is needed because during the time the ELN were here and the FARC we didn’t feel as if we were poor...and I thought it was just. Then the rich were not so unjust and brazen towards the poor. They stuck to the normal working hours,
they paid the minimum wage, everything was normal. But then the ELN left and everything changed. The rich treat the poor how they want, they pay them what they want and if we don’t like it, tough. Some people out of sheer need work for as little as 8000 pesos a day."

Sandra then spoke about the differences she perceived between the guerrillas and the paramilitaries:

“In my view, the guerrillas, whether they are criminals and terrorists like they say...well in my experience the guerrillas didn’t do anything to suggest they were terrorists. I imagine that for the rich they are terrorists. For me the guerrillas are not terrorists, they are forced to do what they do...But paramilitarism is the main force of the rich, for those with power...Uribe unleashed them to combat the guerrillas, and fighting the guerrillas is to fight against the poor...For me the state is like an immense paramilitary.”

Sandra acknowledged that the guerrillas did things that were difficult to justify but she insisted on a strong distinction between them and the paramilitaries:

“The guerrillas do things that bother me and that I find troubling but in general the guerrillas have been the best...Maybe I’m deluded but...For me the guerrillas are not the same as the paramilitaries, although they kidnap and use landmines they haven’t got mass graves with 2000 or 3000 people in, there are paramilitary chiefs responsible for 2000-3000 deaths. The guerrillas will never be as bad as the paramilitaries...They have killed people with chainsaws.”
I asked Sandra what she thought was needed to bring peace to Colombia: “We need a government that isn’t on one side or the other. A government that cares about the countryside, that knows something about it and knows poverty. In order for the country to change we need a government that knows about poverty.” In Sandra’s view there is no peace in Tarso because those who invented the motto are “terrorists and politickers who cheat people and buy votes...Here one family controls Tarso and they will continue to do so. One family, because the people in Tarso do not have consciousness...We in Tarso are mendicants, masochists. They can make and break us in four years. Two or three days before the election they give people 20,000 pesos\(^57\) and that's enough for people to forget all that's gone before.” However, despite her pessimism Sandra suggested that there was hope “amongst the young” and through a radical reorganization of the Assembly so that it “takes the people into account.”

“What the government wants is to manage the masses”

Wilson Ríos is 45 years old and was born in Tarso. He started secondary school in Tarso and finished in Medellín before moving to the US for 8 years. He is an artist and runs the “Casa de Cultura” in Tarso that gives classes in various arts to local people, puts on exhibitions and runs workshops. For Wilson, as for others, there is a strong sense that any alternative political process has to have a strong moral dimension in terms of integrity- ideals and actual practice have to coincide. I asked Wilson about the concept of

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\(^{57}\) On current exchange rates this is roughly £7.
development that the national government had and how it fitted with Tarso’s aims:

“The government has an interest in not wanting people to be too intelligent or educated because it is more difficult to manipulate creative and intelligent people, so therefore the government in one way or another devises strategies to ensure that the rich get richer and the poor poorer. If we in the municipalities and communities do not form our own government we are not going to move forward. What the government wants is to manage the masses; it doesn’t want to talk about qualities, only quantities...The solution therefore lies in local participation. If a town like Tarso with 8300 people gets organized it is a lot easier to arrive at an agreement and a consensus about the direction we want to go in than if we link up to a whole nation.”

This is essentially a MacIntyrean position, demonstrating an acute awareness of the failings and limitations of the state and the practical necessity of small-scale, local politics.

We then moved on to talk about the way the Assembly was trying to transform the political and economic culture and structures in the municipality. Wilson appeared perplexed as to what was required. He acknowledged the long term aims of the Assembly in terms of its efforts to transform political-ethical subjectivities and through this the institutions and mode of politics, while at the same time critiquing this long term vision in light of the shortcomings perceived with immediate projects and issues.

“I know that the Assembly is aiming at the well-being of everyone and not just a few, but I ask myself why they are so interested in creating governors with a
better consciousness, which is a long term issue. What about now? Are we going to keep on doing projects in La Arboleda? Is it about going to other countries to seek resources for projects that don’t work? What about the community? Is it about having an office and thinking like a corporation and not an Assembly?”

Wilson then linked the problems in Tarso to “culture”:

“In Tarso there’s no culture of anything, there’s no culture of loving your neighbour, of giving a little of what I have, of sharing. There’s no culture of theatre, of education, of socialization, nothing. We have many things but in the shallowest way, there’s no depth. It makes me ask if we already have the ideals, what are we really doing with them? Is it really by continuing to cultivate sugar cane in La Arboleda that we are going to get people out of poverty in Tarso? With an Assembly of five employees, four of them in Medellín and only one in Tarso can we carry on telling people that what we are doing is enough?”

The public sphere

Wilson made an interesting connection between his view of culture and the concept of the public sphere:

“One of the errors we have committed here is not to have educated people about the public sphere. The streets are public but they have never taught me that they are also mine more than anyone’s or that the schools are mine before they are anyone else’s. One always looks at the public sphere as if it belonged only to others.”
Wilson links this failure of the public sphere to the social problems in Tarso: “Why are the people here in such difficult conditions? Precisely because we don’t have a culture of anything, because we don’t have a governor or leaders who can educate people in all areas, we are not educating our children in values...We don't have a concept of what is mine, yours and ours.”

However, there has been a positive element to the Assembly that has left its mark and which can serve to inspire people to transform things:

“I think that now people understand concepts that when I arrived from the US were new; concepts like socialization, participation, being more democratic, inclusiveness. These terms and concepts have remained with us thanks to the Assembly. When people hear these terms they know what they refer to and they can relate them to other situations. But unfortunately the heads of the process made some errors and from the perspective of many people on the street the process therefore failed...From listening to beautiful words and romantic notions people began to vulgarize them.”

Wilson also thought that the leaders of the Assembly got distracted by promoting the idea to other municipalities:

“I also asked them why they were promoting Assemblies elsewhere in other municipalities when the one here was still a long way from being complete. I thought it was irresponsible to try to give to others what we didn’t properly have here and I still think that way...I think the Assembly committed a big mistake when it wanted to get itself known around the world without having first grown sufficiently in Tarso because the results were not being felt still.
They were just full of ideals and the world has enough of those; what we need at this point are results."

This is another hazard that is exacerbated by modern political assumptions. The desire to become a “movement”, wanting to achieve social change “all at once”, espousing abstract ideals and so forth are based on the modern ethos and the “standpoint of civil society” (cf. Day 2005).

Finally, I spoke with the human rights ombudsman, Alex Ocampo, who summed up well the achievements of the process. One of the most important was undermining the logic of friend-enemy:

“It was about making it clear that one could go to the Assembly to speak and propose things. People understood that there was no need to fight and in any case, because of the difficult moment the town was going through when it was threatened with disappearing as its own municipality, people united around the idea of “we unite or we die together”. People asked themselves why they should carry on fighting in terms of their ideologies if it wasn’t leading to anything.”

Members of the Assembly continued to get involved in local politics but on different terms to the hegemonic sectarian model. In Alex’s view, the practice of the Assembly process has helped to shift subjectivities and to weaken the hold of sectarian political identities:

“Many of us have got involved in politics on our own political group’s platform but people now have the knowledge that they are going to act in conformity with the ideas that have emerged through this participatory space that is the
Assembly and not on the basis of the radical ideology of their party...Politics has changed here, not in its entirety, we aren’t perfect because Tarso has been quite complicated politically, but we have advanced a lot and left behind a lot of the conflicts we had and were able to elect a consensus mayor...The old way of engaging in political dirty tricks campaigning that often implied or led to violence has changed through the Assembly working on pacts of non-aggression and transparency...Things have also changed because we have some leaders who have the mentality of participation and who have managed to get into the political sphere.”

Conclusion

The perspectives I have presented reveal how Tarso’s Municipal Constituent Assembly has represented a serious attempt to address the issues of conflict, civil resistance, coexistence and social change. Certainly in the early days of the process there appeared to be great optimism about the potential for overcoming political clientelism, sectarianism, and the inertia of the status quo in respect of development and life opportunities. However, as the process has worn on, there is a feeling that it has failed to live up to its promises of inclusion and participation. In particular, the poorest sectors from the rural areas feel short-changed in terms of transforming their material situation. Despite the ostensible consensus on the worth and dignity of the peasantry, the facts of increasing land concentration and lack of economic opportunity speak for themselves. The deeply entrenched class divisions have not been overcome, in fact they have apparently worsened, revealing the limits to this kind of politics of local community, which despite some resonances is perhaps not very MacIntyrean. Perhaps the social and economic divisions are too wide,
which MacIntyre points out must necessarily compromise any attempt at constructing a politics of the common good (MacIntyre 2006f, p. 39). In the following and final chapter I take stock of these problems through an analysis of the fieldwork and present my conclusions to the overall thesis.
CHAPTER 7

Conclusions

I have attempted in this thesis to explore the moral dimensions of the Colombian conflict in terms of Alasdair MacIntyre’s complex philosophical account of morality, social science, and the nature of contemporary moral and political disagreements. I have argued that MacIntyre’s work illuminates particular aspects of the Colombian “moral crisis”, including the theoretical problem of conducting social scientific study and analysis of the conflict that also seeks to transform and bring about a “just, sustainable, and peaceful coexistence” (García Durán 2008, p. 359). MacIntyre’s emphasis on how morality is inextricably socially and institutionally embodied both illuminates better than liberal approaches the moral dimensions of conflict, resistance and coexistence in Colombia, as well as providing a more coherent account of ongoing social, moral and political conflict and how it might eventually be overcome. MacIntyre’s account of the links between morality and social science also throws important light on how investigation of the conflict has become another arena of conflict, which is entirely missing from moral philosophical analyses of the Colombian conflict.

Following MacIntyre’s argument that it can only be in relatively small local communities where rational discussion and debate can occur, and therefore where a morally rational political community can be constructed, I set out to study a particular embodiment of the politics of local community that MacIntyre endorses in terms of what I refer to as a “MacIntyrean moral ethnography”. Through in-depth interviews with members of a Municipal Constituent Assembly, I sought to understand the nature of a contemporary
social and political experiment at coexistence and resistance to dominant political practices and modes of social change associated with the armed struggle. I posited the relevance of MacIntyre’s philosophy and politics to the Colombian context despite the fact that at first appearance the minimal conditions for any form of MacIntyrean politics and resistance are lacking. In Tarso, I perceived that certain institutional and social aspects of the community and its Assembly process would either already implicitly embody MacIntyrean assumptions or that these would have been implicitly ‘discovered’ through the workings of community participation and deliberation.

What comes across strongly in the interviews is a consensus on the initial purpose and meaning of the Municipal Constituent Assembly process as well as a tension bordering on schism in relation to perceptions of the condition and adequacy of the process today. The narratives highlight what I consider to be a remarkable level of moral-political consciousness about the problematic nature of dominant modes of political practice in Tarso and Colombia generally. The Assembly appears to have provided both an initial language and framework for critiquing clientelism, corruption, and injustice, and also a space for the development of further, independently developed critiques. Of course, the Assembly also drew upon and gathered into one space the different moral-political experiences and discourses within Tarso. One of the strongest of these was the discourse of peasant militancy that had emerged through over two decades of conflictual political and social struggle with landowners. Other perspectives included those of ex-guerrillas, landowners, business people, and different ideological standpoints associated with the traditional political parties.
Given Tarso’s conflictual past and the sheer extent of social division and class conflict, the fact that the Assembly still exists is itself evidence of strong political and moral virtues amongst its principal protagonists as well as within the wider community. The narratives show how argument and deliberation within the smaller group of Assembly “collegiate members” is understood as a healthy process. It is clear from the fact that different ideological standpoints still coexist within the process that it has managed to constructively deal with internal conflict, which certainly substantiates participant claims that through participation Assembly members have discovered shared values, criteria, and virtues that transcend political sectarianism and polarizing moral-political discourses. Despite the different motivations for engaging in the Assembly, the interviews reveal a shared concern that Tarso would have ceased to exist as an independent municipality had things remained as they were. The term “community” is repeated throughout the narratives and it does seem to be the case that the possibility of losing municipal status aroused a certain sense of shared community identity that provided the impetus for the Assembly’s vibrancy in its early days.

There is a strong sense of shared implied self-critique about the sectarian nature of prevailing politics, which can possibly provide the basis for future critique and community mobilization. However, there is also a strong degree of disaffection with the process based on a perception that it has become what it originally aimed to combat- i.e. another political clique with its own “interests”. In MacIntyrean terms, there is a perception expressed in several of the narratives that concern for external goods has partly corrupted the process and the Assembly as an institution. However, this needs to be put into perspective as a distorted picture of the Assembly and its “leaders” risks
being propagated. My own observations of the principal Assembly members were that they were working extremely hard on often quite tedious work for what they saw as the good of the community. Long hours working on the finer details of the Development Plan in a dingy office in Medellín, and frequent four hour trips to Tarso for meetings, hardly evinces an image of self-serving individuals out for their own gain on the back of Assembly resources. Despite undoubted human failings, I suggest that the fact that the Assembly persists and that it elicits hostility from traditional political quarters is strong testimony to its radical nature and its ongoing potential. However, it must also be recalled that some of the strongest criticisms have come from peasants that have been closely involved in the process.

The narratives provide evidence of a deeply ingrained sense of an alternative, ethical practice of politics. There is a strong sense of what politics should be like and what it needs to avoid. This in itself suggests that the kind of participatory practice no doubt imperfectly embodied in the Assembly has played a significant role in generating a common understanding of good political practice, which goes beyond the bureaucratic banalities of neoliberal “good governance” (see Petras and Veltmeyer 2005, p.3 and p. 246).

In terms of the kind of criticisms levelled at the process and in particular against its “leaders”, we need to take into account the socio-cultural nature of small rural communities in Colombia in which rumour and gossip are rife, magnifying and distorting when not outright fabricating things. Entrenched attitudes connected to the nature of clientelist politics, and the atomizing tendencies and social distrust this has created, remain a deep cultural and moral-political problem that will take years to transform. As Eucaris and Wilson both remarked, there is a culturally rooted tendency to perceive others as
“enemies” that can stem from mere personal differences, which are then exacerbated by failure to communicate and the propagation of rumour. One community committee leader I spoke with, not recorded in the narratives presented, evinced a rancorous attitude against the Assembly that was based heavily on *ad hominem* attacks, amongst more rational criticisms relating to specific problems in her neighbourhood. This individual, however, admitted that she had not raised her complaints directly with the Assembly and was instead working with a local councillor to implement an alternative political proposal that would circumvent the Assembly, which highlighted the way conflictual dynamics can simmer and eventually find expression through the traditional channels of instrumental clientelism. This suggests there are profound challenges for constructing alternative identities and moral-political culture in small rural municipalities like Tarso in which for decades political identities and moral attitudes have been structured by the sectarian influence of the traditional parties.

The Assembly process has to be viewed in this light. Tarso’s efforts at building a public political culture are arguably revolutionary in the Colombian context. As Wilson Rios observed, the public sphere is often conceived as belonging only to others. This neatly encapsulates the problem of the public sphere in Colombia as a whole, which has been privatized by capitalism, symbolically subsumed within the political parties, controlled by armed actors, and ultimately led to a perception that there is no common public realm independent of those who claim it for themselves by the threat or actual use of violence. This has its analogue in the emotivist nature of moral and political discourses in which exclusionary rhetorics reinforce sectarian political identities (see Biesecker-Mast 1997). As I have argued, this has been
exacerbated by the philosophically problematic nature of modern moral discourse in which human rights have been instrumentalised and the Weberian ethics of conviction and responsibility have represented the polarized dichotomies of moral expression in Colombian politics (Giraldo 2003; Uribe and López 2006). Convinced of their rival conceptions of justice, both the paramilitaries and the guerrillas have acted on the so-called ethics of conviction whereby the perceived goodness of the ends sought has justified their violent and frequently brutal means. Conversely, those who have called for an ethics of responsibility, that is, for an eschewal of violence given its consequences for the civilian population, have equally failed to rationally ground their position and to convince the different armed actors or those who see the armed struggle as part of a “just war” (cf. Tovar 2002). Whilst the Assembly in Tarso has not directly confronted these particular moral questions, it has indirectly addressed them as well as others. There is a general consensus that political violence as a mode of seeking social change is not acceptable, as well as a generally shared view that the question of land injustice is one of the main roots of conflict. The emphasis on dialogue also implies the recognition of the minimal standards of objectivity and unconditional respect for the lives of others that MacIntyre (2006a) argues are central to any shared enquiry and community practice.

Despite its undoubted limitations, the Assembly process has emphasized the importance and facilitated the emergence of human agency in political affairs and social change. In a context in which political and moral agency have been impeded or overridden by prevailing social structures, political practices and institutions, and by the impositions of various armed actors, the Assembly process took a revolutionary leap into the unknown by
attempting to construct an alternative form of participatory political practice and a rival institution that encouraged agency. The Assembly process has been Tarso’s first conscious attempt as a community to reflect on the basic presuppositions of social and political coexistence, which has meant having to address the inherent moral dimensions of politics and social change. It has provided a space for reflection on, and the formation of, moral identity, which in the Colombian political context has historically been subsumed within the sectarian identities of the Liberal and Conservative parties.

Again despite its limitations, the Assembly has arguably embodied the notion of politics as a practice in the MacIntyrean sense as opposed to its being an instrument for the mere furtherance of sectarian and sectoral interests (based on the priority of external over internal goods) through the dominant institutional political forms. It is arguably this, no doubt partial, understanding of politics as a practice that has enabled the formation of the virtues necessary to sustain the process. As MacIntyre has written, “the essential function of the virtues is clear. Without them, without justice, courage and truthfulness, practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions” (MacIntyre 1985a, p. 194). The process in Tarso does not embody a complete harmony of interests or the existence of a shared moral identity, but it does embody the attempt to move towards such harmony and identity by “cultivating the process of agreeing” (Cox 1986, p. 12). From being a community only in name in which sedimented sectoral, class, and political interests were predominant and where “traditional” conceptions of order veiled these interests through an ideological appeal to “community” (Vélez 2003), Tarso has slowly moved towards the construction of a more plural and critical understanding of
community that evades, or at least attempts to evade, the abstractions of modern citizenship and the corruptions of state normativity.

However, what the process has not evaded is conflict. Rather, it has attempted to channel it rationally through engagement and encounter in social and political practices that have provided criteria and generated virtues for addressing conflict by other means. As Kelvin Knight points out, the virtues that are exemplified in cooperative resistance to institutional power MacIntytre calls “goods of conflict” (Knight 2007, p. 186). MacIntyre writes, “To be good...is to be engaged in struggle and a perfected life is one perfected in key part in and through conflicts” such as, on the one hand:

those engaged in by members of some rank and file trade union movements, of some tenants’ associations, of the disability movement, of a variety of farming, fishing, and trading cooperatives, and by some feminist groups, and on the other by those who are at work within schools, hospitals, a variety of industrial and financial workplaces, laboratories, theaters, and universities in order to make of these, so far as possible, scenes of resistance to the dominant ideology and the dominant social order. (Cited in Knight 2007, pp. 186-187)

The Assembly is currently at an important crossroads in which it risks capitulating to the dominant ideology through the pressures of external political institutions- the local council and departmental government- as well as possibly succumbing internally to the influence of external over internal goods, which is the hallmark of dominant institutionality. It remains to be seen how the community faces up to these particular threats and challenges.
In terms of cultivating agreement and addressing radical disagreement, the Assembly has apparently led to a recognition that land distribution in the municipality is unjust, which arguably has come about as a result of closer community interaction and engagement. The small scale of the community and the closer contact between people has possibly forced people into a more empathic engagement with the views of others, in particular with peasants. However, the inertia of land injustice remains and the fact of an apparent consensus within the Assembly that also extends into the local state has done nothing to actually lead to social change in this respect. There remains implicit radical disagreement between important sectors of the community - the landowning classes and the increasingly impoverished rural population. Ultimately this boils down to the kind of class conflict highlighted by Camilo Torres (1964), although the participatory space of the Assembly and the closer engagement amongst the community has arguably helped to bridge a little the linguistic, conceptual and cultural divides that Torres diagnosed.

The moral idiom of the Assembly makes reference to rights, responsibilities and the notion of the common good. Within the Assembly there is a dialectic of informing people about their rights based on the Constitution, encouraging people to make demands for things they are entitled to, but also getting people to understand that rights only make sense in the reciprocal form of social and political responsibility. Without this, claims to rights often take on an emotivist form, clashing with other moral claims with no standard by which to evaluate and weigh up rival claims. For example, rights to housing and employment have been claimed by those who expect the Assembly to provide these, which clashes with the more Aristotelian conception of contributing collectively to have these needs and rights eventually met. The practice of
deliberation and contribution to shared projects arguably serves to mitigate the incommensurable modern, liberal appeals to rights and utility, which are instrumentalised by those who remain tied to clientelist practices. The conflict brewing in relation to the local state’s access to Assembly financial resources might also be framed in terms of an appeal to rights or utility by those within the state, but the Assembly’s alternative form of practice can hopefully provide rationally justifiable criteria for subverting such abstract claims and cementing a shared conviction that the state must be resisted in this case. The concept of responsibility within the overarching framework and practice of the Assembly arguably helps to generate some notion of shared criteria with which to help guide and resolve conflicts when they arise, to help people put their own interests (often couched in terms of rights) into a wider social perspective by encouraging self-reflection and concern for others in terms of the common good. The insistence by many of the Assembly core members that a change in attitude is required is in essence a call to take an ethical approach to politics, one based on what many referred to as a sense of the common good and an understanding that one’s own good is ultimately tied to the overall good of the community.

What the narratives also show is an important awareness of the long-term nature of the process in terms of its attempts to construct a new political culture. As William made clear, he viewed the process in Tarso as completely at odds with what he perceived the guerrillas’ notion of social change to be, which was seen as coming “all at once” with the taking of state power. This is the classic view of social change based on hegemony that Richard Day (2005) so cogently critiques. William adds to this an ethical concern, which was also Marx’s insight: those who seek to educate and transform the “masses” and to
eventually take power need to educate themselves. The ideology of bureaucratic authority tries to evade this but can only lead to arbitrary impositions. William clearly espoused MacIntyrean notions of the importance of building new political subjectivities with the required kinds of character through political practice, which is a complete break with the notion of politics as a domain for professionals and experts.

However, there is a concern that the actual development of alternative political subjects with the required kind of integral character is hindered by the structure of the Assembly. Ten years down the line it remains the case that Alirio and William are still “in charge” (although it must be pointed out that they are voted in to their posts). The awareness that the Assembly process would “lose its essence” if it were to become an NGO, in MacIntyrean terms another compartmentalized institution characteristic of liberal politics, is important, but there is evidence of its increasing resemblance to an NGO. Those who had strong criticisms implicitly pointed out how the Assembly has tended to lapse into the logic of an NGO where it becomes a vector of resources outside the state apparatus, but which is increasingly seen to employ participation as a technique of mere “socialization” of what has already been decided. Further, there were criticisms to the effect that empowering positions (and paid positions- an important source of resentment and misunderstanding) were monopolized by a few and not offered on the basis of merit but according to friendship and favours.

Nearly everybody agreed that there had been a regression in terms of community participation and involvement in the elaboration of the most recent Development Plan. This is concerning and points to the kinds of challenges that the community will inevitably face. Tarso as a community has taken some
important steps in generating a more or less shared moral-political language and framework that can hopefully provide the moral resources for preventing too deep lapses into old ways and practices. But this can only be known through a follow up study of the community.

Arguably a more clear limitation to the kind of participation and politics of the Assembly in Tarso is indeed its focus on the Development Plans, which are elaborated entirely within the parameters set by the national level ideological framework. The initial discussions in relation to the Plan were based on the assumption of compartmentalized knowledge; the Assembly was divided up into different working groups who had particular “expertise” in the areas of “rural development”, “housing”, “democracy”, “budgeting” and so forth, which reflects the fragmentation of knowledge and assumes the pre-given aims in terms of which, for example, “development” is understood within a neoliberal, capitalist framework. However, an essential difference to dominant modes of politics was the way priorities for social spending within the terms of the Development Plan were established with the active participation of community members. Although resources for development were allocated by the departmental and central governments, which meant, for example, that the community could not shift resources aimed at health to other areas it deemed more needy, there is no doubt that participatory involvement had provided, through its transparency and democracy, a greater sense of legitimacy and empowerment. It is not implausible to suggest that community work on different projects aimed at local development, despite inevitable weaknesses and problems, has contributed to the emergence of virtues and shared criteria that challenge the dominant political ethos and subvert the individualistic postures and attitudes that have often prevailed (Marulanda 2004).
What was also clear in the narratives was a consciousness of the problems with the neoliberal conception of “development”. This was evident in the numerous references about the need to develop a local agrarian economy and in the unanimous recognition of the injustice of land concentration. In this respect, I suggest that the process embodies a radical conception of development that goes against what MacIntyre refers to as the standpoint of civil society. The focus on local agricultural production in the context of an exclusionary national agro-export economy (Moncayo et al. 2008) goes against what are perceived to be the requisites of modern development and the good.

The inherent connection between participation-deliberation and the need for a solid economic base was highlighted in several of the narratives. María Toros forcefully made the point that unless people had their basic material needs met “how could you sustain a debate?” This resonates exactly with Enrique Dussel’s critique of Apelian and Habermasian discourse ethics (Dussel 1999). But this point also raises questions about the relevance of MacIntyre’s politics, which are arguably open to the charge of a certain circularity: rationally justifiable, morally grounded politics require and presuppose a more or less just economic order in terms of the distribution of wealth and power (MacIntyre 2006f, p. 39; 2001, p. 144). Yet neoliberalism has had devastating effects on societies like Colombia, aggravating social and economic inequalities. Therefore, it might be asked how a genuinely MacIntyrean politics can get off the ground outside of the somewhat idealized spaces of “fishing crews”, “Mayan towns”, “farming co-operatives”, etc. that MacIntyre highlights? However, my research suggests that it is possible for at least the outlines of such a politics to get off the ground in a real life, imperfect
and highly conflictual social context. In the Assembly’s early days the issue of economic and material inequalities was addressed (making progress in relative not absolute terms), which is surely what contributed to its success and the general optimism around it. Failure to maintain this impetus appears to be causing fractures, as MacIntyre says must be the case if large inequalities are allowed to persist (MacIntyre 2006f, p. 39).

Despite ten years of an alternative local community politics in Tarso, the fact remains that massive inequalities in land and wealth distribution militate against the possibility of any serious politics of the common good developing. However, according to the narratives there is an important sense in which the politics of local community in Tarso is to some extent a politics of the common good, however imperfect. Those involved in the process have had to subordinate some of their individual interests to the collective interest of the Assembly and wider community. Even if only rhetorically (although in my view it is more than this), there is a recognition of the need to address the predominance of “particular interests” over common interests, something highlighted by both the current mayor and the militant peasant workers in the village. In the historical Colombian context of acute political and social polarization in which individual interests have imposed themselves, the recognition of this as a shared problem is not insignificant, even if prevailing social and economic structures tend to conceal the prevalence of powerful individual interests. MacIntyre cautions us to bear in mind that “institutionalized networks of giving and receiving are also always structures of unequal distributions of power, structures well-designed both to mask and to protect those same distributions. So there are always possibilities and often actualities of victimization and exploitation bound up with participation in such networks. If
we are not adequately aware of this, our practical judgments and reasoning will go badly astray” (MacIntyre 1999, p. 102). This is one of the biggest threats and challenges to the ongoing viability of Tarso as a community and social-political process of coexistence and change. Arguably, a limitation of the politics of local community is the risk that these power relations remain obscured precisely by the focus on the micro level at the expense of the macro. Such a critique resonates with the Marxist view I critiqued in chapter four: that the macro relations of power and exploitation at the national level are what drive local, micro relations of unequal power and exploitation, therefore what is required is a national project of emancipation such as that embodied, according to some, in the armed struggle of the FARC. However, I have already highlighted the ethical problems with this view and practice. As I argue below, the response is not an “either-or” in respect of local vs. macro or “local development versus social movements” (Petras and Veltmeyer 2005, p. 221), which boils down to the “reform or revolution” dichotomy, but lies rather in mediating the kind of necessary national-level politics through the participatory politics of local community. Without such mediation the macro politics as embodied in various Marxist insurgent movements ultimately degenerates into manipulative power over those they claim to fight for. The insights provided by both the former insurgents I interviewed and some of those who witnessed first hand the modus operandi of the guerrilla movements attest to this degeneration and the way such action impedes the rational self-determination of individuals and communities.

The Assembly has attempted to encourage such rational self-determination. The experience of participation in the Assembly has provided criteria for internal and wider political evaluation, and there is no doubt that the
degree of “social reconciliation” achieved thus far, despite its limitations, has been facilitated by the participatory politics of the Assembly. However, the danger is that the gains achieved will unravel because of the structural risks to any form of participatory community created by large material inequalities. In the Colombian context this has potentially serious implications for sustainable peace. We saw how Sandra López expressed her exasperation with the failure to address the agrarian question and implicitly suggested that she could be persuaded to support possibly violent modalities of social change should things remain the same. Given the history of Colombia’s polarized political landscape and the combination of material need and the search for dignity, this is a potentially explosive combination. If young people from the countryside like Sandra are to feel that they have a future, that they are valued by society, then something drastic will need to happen in terms of land distribution so that viable life opportunities become available. In Sandra’s case she felt that the divide between rich and poor was as great as ever, if not worse, both in terms of social and material inequalities but also culturally, both of which are surely central to sustainable, peaceful coexistence. Sandra recounted how when the guerrillas operated in Tarso things were not so bad. However, when they left “everything changed” and the injustices and indignities returned. Is it really the case that those with the most power and privilege, the landowners and their political allies, can only be persuaded to enact a modicum of social justice by the threat of violence and the use of force?

The land issue reinforces class antagonism, which is the antithesis of a politics of the common good. Sandra represents the pessimistic view, Jairo, Elías and Albeiro (despite his scathing criticisms) the more optimistic outlook. Despite the discouraging realities of entrenched class division, Elías and
others think that the Assembly has managed to achieve an important degree of social reconciliation, which was most evident to them through the land donations of certain landowners. They were also positive about the impact the Assembly had had on the wider political-ethical culture. The fact that the huge chasm between the rich and poor is recognised in all the narratives is arguably significant as it points to a consensus and can possibly provide the basis for making inroads into this huge obstacle to social transformation.

However, the fact that land concentration has worsened in Tarso over the last ten years shows the urgency of linking up to or building a national movement for land reform that bypasses clientelist networks and avoids the armed option, which has not led to any improvements in land justice for the mass of the rural population. Whilst the guerrillas’ discourse is consistent on land reform, their militaristic approach has only achieved a hardening of attitudes in the ruling class, while severely debilitating independent civil society and social movements’ ability to shift the polarized discursive formations in the country and develop their own programmes capable of addressing land injustice. Guerrilla presence in many rural areas is not necessarily the cause of repression of social movements - this would undoubtedly occur anyway - but they serve to muddy the waters and to inadvertently (but perhaps also purposefully and instrumentally) draw independent movements into the hyper-politicized, dualistic discursive and ideological polarities that serve to criminalize social movements and any form of dissent.

Despite the consensus on the injustice of land distribution and use, and a recognition of the central dimension of material and economic structures to the sustainability of participatory politics and debate in Tarso, there were few clear analyses or proposals as to how to address this beyond “more dialogue”.
The peasants I spoke to did have a more political conception of what needed to be done, but it ultimately centred on the notion of developing “alliances” with landowners who could be persuaded to give a little bit of their land for “productive projects”. Of course, the possibility is open that the more militantly oriented peasants and those who express a progressive attitude to the agrarian question and peasant cultures and economies can agree on a more militant strategy of seeking political alliances with wider social movements on this issue. The downside to the kind of patient, dialogic approach embodied in the politics of the Assembly is the fact that the militant peasant generation is getting older, memories of previous struggles are fading, and the inexorable logic of neoliberal, agro-export economics is rapidly eroding the social base of resistance. It is hard not to sympathize with Chris Harman (2009) and Peter Hallward (2005) who both point to the importance in such a barbarous context of urgent, principled but militant political action that does not emphasize dialogue or consensus, but mobilization, strategy, and correlations of forces based on class struggle to force political and social change. Interestingly, none of the peasants I interviewed suggested the possibility of returning to the militant strategy of land invasions, which might well be due to the sheer difficulty and danger that such a strategy entails. But this could also be put down to the dampening of militant and revolutionary sentiment by the conditioning and hegemony of the consensus approach to politics and social change embodied in the Assembly. Perhaps following Peter Hallward’s politics of prescription “we” might say that because the cause or, rather, the “axiom” of just land distribution is valid, we can prescribe “the organization of a force” to undo injustice and redistribute land.
However, the question would still remain: whose principles and whose militant action? My research highlights the emotivist ethical dimension of guerrilla organizations that has led to an arrogant, self-righteous approach to radical social transformation. Despite the Communist and Liberal party-linked guerrillas’ emergence in the context of flagrant social and land injustice and their close relationship to the agrarian social movements, along with their tendency to negotiate and combine political and armed strategies (Romero and Varela 2007), they were eventually to shift from a peasant-based self-defence army to a militaristic, authoritarian organization that often imposed itself on those it claimed to fight for. Of course, a militant politics of prescription does not necessarily imply armed struggle; but the trajectory of militant politics towards armed struggle in Colombia reveals the need for a strong ethical dimension to movements for social and political change. The danger in not taking seriously the moral dimension to radical politics is the tendency to the kinds of absolutist claims that embody an emotivist self-certainty and arrogance.

In contrast to this kind of politics, what the local community politics exemplified in Tarso arguably represents is the realization and injection of moral uncertainty into social struggles for justice and peace. The public sphere and public discourse have arguably been “unmoralized” by the practice of participation, and at least some minimal recognition of shared community interests has emerged as a basis for ongoing moral-political enquiry and struggle. Conflict can thus possibly be more rationally dealt with and therefore generative of progress and community self-realization instead of violence.

A rationally grounded moral rejection of the strategy of armed struggle based on the common struggles of resistance to capitalism and its
representative liberal democratic politics in communities like Tarso can hopefully provide the basis for developing a national movement to address the egregious injustice of land distribution and use from which stem countless other injustices and abuses. Based on the discovery of a stratum of shared values by the minimal form of practice embodied in local Constituent Assemblies in respect of armed struggle, clientelism, the modern state, representative politics, and authoritarianism, perhaps Colombia's working and peasant classes, ideally in alliance with elements of the middle classes, can develop an alternative kind of militant, moral politics based on a consensus about land and economic justice. What needs to be explored is how the multiple constituent assembly processes can and do link up with wider, nationally oriented movements whilst still maintaining a circumspect distance from the state. This suggests a useful line of further research.

Whilst Tarso has consolidated a local peace, the narratives indicate that peace is much more than the absence of overt violence. As Romero and Varela (2007) point out, peace means different things to different people- it depends on the individual subject who formulates a conception of peace (ibid., p. 281). “For a capitalist business person, for example, who interprets reality in relation to the desire to make profit, peace consists in the absence of conflicts between him and his workers...For the latifundista...peace is associated with the state recognizing their land as legitimate, irrespective of how it was acquired” (ibid., p. 281). This is essentially what has happened with the current counter-agrarian reform under the Uribe administration. Peace becomes mere cessation of hostilities- the “security” provided by the monopoly of state force and effective justification of illegitimately gained land and resources, rather than serious efforts at challenging the currently even more illegitimate land
structure of Colombia. However, in Tarso there is an awareness that peace has “many ingredients”, which include addressing the problem of land distribution and generating dignified economic opportunities. This is recognized across all the interviews, which suggests that the fact of participation in a small local community has forged a consensus- such an important and obvious problem cannot simply be ignored as it can be in larger, non-participatory spaces like the dominant institutions of representative democracy. However, sooner or later the Assembly and Tarso as a wider community, including those who do not participate in the Assembly, are going to have to face serious moral and political questions in relation to how to achieve the more radical transformations required in respect of land distribution and use.

Whilst there is evidence that the politics of local community in Tarso through the Assembly has engendered a more or less shared discursive, moral-political framework for talking about and practising politics, it might be argued in light of my empirical data that the politics of local community as a site for working out the morally objective thing to do in such cases actually serves to muddy the waters rather than to engender a determinate set of criteria to rationally guide the struggles of the community. For the bulk of poor, vulnerable and under-educated peasant workers in local communities like Tarso perhaps the nature of intense, (limited) face-to-face participation within the bounds of a small community still based on “patrimonial” and highly stratified social relations inhibits the development of an independent moral standpoint that might be possible in conjunction with a more ideologically and theoretically informed social movement with a national projection. It might even be argued that contrary to the individual positions that implied otherwise, the
Assembly process as a whole has in fact been too based on the “standpoint of civil society”, which has ultimately eroded the importance of working class and peasant political militancy and social struggle as essential sites for the development of a coherent and consequential moral framework and discourse.

The fact is that despite evidence that to some extent the participatory politics of the Assembly has some of the characteristics of a practice, Tarso, as William Rios implicitly pointed out in his critique of the lack of culture in Tarso, is arguably not a practice-based community and, therefore, despite the limited form of political practice in the Assembly, on MacIntyre’s perspective individuals must lack the ability to develop independent, rationally grounded moral criteria and therefore to morally resist becoming instruments of mere capital formation. It is arguably rather the case that militant, class-based politics modelled on previous forms of direct action and solidaritous networks of affinity is what can provide adequate moral resources for critique and resistance. The tradition of local, rural neighbourhood democracy in the communal action committees was what the peasants I spoke to in Tarso referred to in terms of overcoming the political limitations of the Assembly process, as well as referring to the history of their previous struggles.

However, there are possible spaces of MacIntyrean practice in the hospital and school, which can serve as sites for the development of moral-political virtues and resistance. One important limitation of my study is that I was not able to access these spaces in a systematic way in order to conduct MacIntyrean enquiry, something that hopefully future research on the community can explore and clarify.

What those involved appear to have gained from the process is the sense that a “civilist” approach to social change is an achievement that is
preferable to the polarities of class politics and the vicious circle of violent change associated with the guerrillas and their ambiguous and often instrumental involvement with autonomous grassroots political organizations. Moreover, militant class-centred politics can also tend to romanticize the working and peasant classes. Individualism and the culture of paternalism within the peasant and working classes are powerful obstacles to rational political agency and collective solidarity and therefore to any ethically rational politics. Where cultural conditions are not adequate to a revolutionary politics, attempts to force the issue through coercion or ideological discourses and moral exhortations, on MacIntyre’s view, can only fail- both in terms of achieving their goals and also in terms of rational justification. Furthermore, militant, class-based political movements arguably tend to become dogmatic and blinded by their own militant certainty, whereas the kind of politics of the common good outlined by MacIntyre and imperfectly practised in Tarso with its emphasis on an alternative, dialogic dynamic is arguably more attuned to the importance and the challenges of rational self-determination.

I suggest that perhaps what is required is a political approach that combines militant class politics and the dialogical politics of the common good. The Assembly can be pushed to keep it focused on the core problems of land and economic justice by concerted peasant militancy that links up with national social movements, whilst this kind of national militancy centred on what is inevitably a class issue can be checked in terms of emotivist overreach by the participatory space of the Assembly. MacIntyre states that any local community will have to hook up from time to time with national movements involved in the politics of the nation state to defeat large-scale evils such as National Socialism or Stalinism (MacIntyre 1998c, p. 252). I contend that
neoliberalism underpinned by US imperialism is similarly a large-scale evil, which therefore requires communities like Tarso to link up with broader movements whose focus is the nation state and even the taking of state power.

I agree with Paul Blackledge (2008) that, contrary to MacIntyre’s assertion, proletarianization does not necessarily lead to a lack of moral resources for resistance. As Blackledge argues, one of MacIntyre’s own examples of virtuous community resistance—Welsh mining communities—were partly enabled and held together by trade union activity, which on MacIntyre’s view should have lacked the resources for adequate moral resistance (Blackledge 2008). The peasant militants I spoke to had been influenced and formed within the trade union movement, which had arguably provided them with the necessary predispositions and virtues required for community participation in the Assembly. I suggest that MacIntyre has it half right in pointing to the potential moral weaknesses of the kind of radical political militancy embodied in trade unionism and other forms of resistance, which if too divorced from concrete communities and their struggles can become abstract and emotivist and/or pulled into the ethos of modernity without the critical mediation and anchoring of the politics of local community. But likewise, the politics of local community could become too insular and accommodated to wider structural injustices without the kinds of more militant political subjectivity and character often found in more ideologically informed and nationally focused social movements. The kind of political space and practice embodied in the Constituent Assembly in Tarso is arguably an example of the kind required for mediating national, state-centred politics and movements.

In terms of constructing political community, the Assembly process combines elements of Aristotelianism and liberalism. The appeal to the
Constitution places it within the bounds of liberal democratic state politics, but its attempted embodiment in actual practice reveals how, effectively, the Constitution goes beyond liberalism and requires a more participatory, direct form of democracy that has Aristotelian/MacIntyrean resonances. Alirio’s critique of the municipal council as superfluous in light of the Assembly’s role reveals how the process at the level of theory as well as of practice goes beyond liberal representative politics with its compartmentalization and its often hypocritical adhesion to legal principles. The emphasis on legitimacy over legality is politically revolutionary in the Colombian context.

Conflict and social science

My argument has also highlighted how MacIntyre’s philosophical critique of modern morality and the modern social sciences has radical implications for academic enquiry generally, but especially it seems for those disciplines that seek to develop “expert” knowledge in relation to politics and social change that can be put to use by states, corporations or other institutions. I argued that in Colombia the social and political sciences are embroiled in the conflict and that this is further complicated by MacIntyre’s diagnosis, which affects the authoritative status and rational justification of these sciences. Thus social scientific analysis and subsequent policy prescriptions in relation to addressing the moral-political crisis and other areas of the conflict are based on problematic modern philosophical-normative and epistemological-assumptions, which means they are effectively arbitrary. I suggested that if the social and political sciences are to play a rational role in both understanding and helping to transform conflict, then they had to become “moral sciences”.
Despite my own uncertainty about this, I proposed that it could only be through a radical approach based on committed social practice in particular communities that rationally justifiable analyses and prescriptions could be generated.

This has affinities with the radical pedagogic philosophy of Paulo Freire, who addressed the question of adequate, ethically committed pedagogical and social theories, and the issue of contributing to social change. As I read Freire, these two issues are combined in the same way I suggest analysis and transformation of conflict is a joint operation. This would mean researchers, theorists and analysts—especially those concerned to interpret and to change the world—must link their theories to practice. As Freire comments, “Even theoretical discourse itself, necessary as it is to critical reflection, must be concrete enough to be clearly identifiable with practice. Its epistemological ‘distance’ from practice as an object of analysis ought to be compensated for by an even greater proximity to the object of analysis in terms of lived experience” (Freire 2001, p. 44). Certain types of conflict analysis based on statistics alone, for example, which issue in generalizations and subsequent policy prescriptions have no grounding in concrete reality and simply serve as a mask for ideological agendas whilst also contributing to emotivist discursive formations that perpetuate conflict (for example, in relation to the need for “more state” as the answer to conflict, or for continued emphasis on a military “solution” and the importance of securing “investor confidence” and economic growth as answers to conflict). In contrast, conflict analysis rooted in the conceptual worlds of actual communities, which would take seriously and begin with agents’ own self-understandings, can begin to address the
normative problematic highlighted by MacIntyre and Freire, and to construct theory with tentative aims at making rationally grounded policy prescriptions.

This kind of alternative praxis is arguably already imperfectly embodied in the community I studied. In the process of public participation and deliberation, implicit theories of social change, development, politics, and ethics are, in effect, being elaborated. This did not happen out of the blue; as I pointed out, the whole “package” of a Constituent Assembly process came with a more or less complete moral-political lexicon and conceptual framework elaborated within sectors of the peace movement and wider civil society. But the process in Tarso, as surely elsewhere, has developed further theoretical and conceptual resources in connection with its own specific social and cultural context. For example, the emphasis on political rights drawn from the Constitution has been supplemented by an awareness of social and economic rights. “Participation” is understood to be meaningful and morally valid only if it is integrally linked to the satisfaction of material needs. Dominant conceptions of political legitimacy have also been challenged, as have prevailing notions of power.

In line with a MacIntyrean and Freirean approach we might propose that social scientists work (pace MacIntyrean and Freirean critique) to help-dialogically of course!- draw out the theoretical and philosophical assumptions of such communities, generating rationally justifiable forms of knowledge and policy prescriptions or, rather, social prescriptions. Such knowledge could then be more fruitfully put to debate with rival knowledges, theories and prescriptions. In terms of specifically moral theory and the debate about an appropriate “ethics for better times” in Colombia, such praxis would contribute
a rooted theoretical perspective that would present a concrete challenge to abstract, free-floating theories.

Finally, the narratives also provide insights into the way moral-political language, concepts and arguments are, in line with MacIntyre’s philosophical argument, intricately related to social and institutional contexts. By eliciting people’s narrative accounts of their involvement in the process I hope to have illuminated to some extent how moral-political language, judgements and perceptions relate to a concrete and complex social context. I hope this in conjunction with my participant observation gives a sense of how this one local community has both fared well and failed at different times, and how the community’s moral resources have been shaped by individual and collective experiences in social and institutional contexts, how they have been adapted and might continue to be adapted to the challenges the community has faced and will continue to face.

This thesis has attempted both to employ the philosophical framework of Alasdair MacIntyre’s Thomistic Aristotelianism as an explanatory framework for understanding and interpreting the moral dimensions of conflict, resistance and coexistence in Colombia- thereby hopefully demonstrating the contemporary relevance of MacIntyre’s philosophy- and to subject MacIntyre’s politics, which are integrally related to his philosophy, to critical exploration. I argue that despite the sheer scale of contemporary social and political irrationality, which has pulled us into an abyss of global suffering and injustice in the face of which the politics of local community defended by MacIntyre might sound utopian and naïve, the form of such politics studied in this thesis, which I argue is implicitly based on many MacIntyrean assumptions, demonstrates its validity and potential. The politics of local community as
practised in Tarso is based on the recognition of the importance of individual transformation and the development of ethical subjects, whilst not losing from view the centrality of socio-structural change and its dialectical relationship both to such individual transformation and wider social-political change.

I argue that the philosophical and moral assumptions of MacIntyrean politics are extremely relevant to radically divided, conflictual societies such as Colombia. In terms of conflict analysis and resolution, MacIntyre’s philosophy and politics are relevant to the under theorized problem of radical political and moral disagreement that underlies many large-scale conflicts. I hope to have demonstrated this relevance by way of a critique of prevailing philosophical and theoretical assumptions and resources in the Colombian discussion, which remains incoherent and sociologically and politically problematic. Moreover, rescuing MacIntyre’s philosophy and politics from liberal and communitarian misreadings as well as radicals’ misconstruals of MacIntyre as a non-revolutionary, conservative philosopher is an important task in the face of a lack of adequate philosophical and moral resources for theorizing and practising social resistance and transformation. In terms of the field of peace studies, what John Paul Lederach (2005) calls the “moral imagination” of peacebuilding can be powerfully supplemented by the richness, depth and practical relevance of MacIntyre’s philosophy.

I have hopefully indicated a possible path for further study using MacIntyre’s framework in the fields of peace studies, conflict resolution/conflict analysis, and the applications of the political and social sciences within these. Building up a set of comparative studies of different kinds of communities with diverse political processes in the context of conflicts in Colombia and elsewhere could yield important insights into the neglected moral dimensions
of conflict, resistance and the construction of social and political coexistence. My own work on Tarso has not aimed to provide any policy prescription or “expert” recommendation in respect of such issues, but rather represents a first attempt to undertake the kind of work a MacIntyrean approach calls for; namely, an attempt to get inside the conceptual world of social actors who are themselves seeking micro and macro forms of social and political change through concrete local community contexts. By attempting to work closely with such actors, the aim is to get beyond abstract generalizations in relation to the requirements and possibilities of social change, which frequently risk making false absolutist claims and adopt moral positions that amount to merely another form of incommensurable discourse.

However, it is difficult not to see MacIntyre’s thesis as far more radical and difficult than this. If MacIntyre’s diagnosis of the incoherent and fragmented state of theoretical enquiry in ethics, politics, philosophy and sociology is correct, then is it not the case that before any of us embark on social scientific study of the world we need first to adequately organize the rival traditions into rival universities? Otherwise, is it not also the case that the theoretical and conceptual status of such research is uncertain or at best philosophically incoherent, which has to call into question its validity and intellectual worth? I happily leave this question to one side for now, but in my view this is an issue that requires further philosophical research.
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