

**International  
Institute of  
Social Studies**

The logo for the International Institute of Social Studies, featuring the word "Erasmus" in a stylized, cursive script.

## **RESEARCH PAPER**

**MAKING A LIVING IN UNCERTAIN CITIZENSHIP: COCALERO PEASANTS'  
LABOUR AGENCY.**

by:

**Juliana Cubides Sánchez**

Colombia

MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Agrarian, Food, and Environmental Studies**

Supervisor:

Lee Pegler

Second Reader:

Jun Borras

The Hague, The Netherlands

2021

## **Disclaimer**

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Science. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

### **Inquiries:**

Institute of Social Studies  
P. O. Box 29776  
2502 LT The Hague  
The Netherlands

t: +31 70 426 0460

e: [info@iss.nl](mailto:info@iss.nl)

w: [www.iss.nl](http://www.iss.nl)

fb: <http://www.facebook.com/iss.nl>

twitter: @issnl

Fax: +31 70 426 0799

### **Location:**

Kortenaerkade 12  
2518 AX The Hague  
The Netherlands

## **Abstract**

This research paper shows how peasants' themselves craft possibilities of living through their engagement in the cocaine global value chain. Adopting a politics of production perspective with the addition of a citizenship focus, this research provides a relational understanding of capitalist development, state power and labour agency. It does this by analysing the strategic calculations of cocalero peasants in Bellavista (Colombia) within two different political and economic conjunctures (1991-2002 and 2002-2012) that jeopardised, to different extents, peasants' citizenship. In one period they fought for and found improved well-being (albeit temporary) whereas, in the other, uncertainty, risk and bare life dominated more profoundly. Overall, using a unique and composite analytic, the paper shows that cocalero peasants' chances of making a living depend on very fragile conjunctures and their own strategic choices. This augmented politics of production focus appears useful if applied to other perspectives and situations of labour precarity.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

This Research Paper de-centres the illegality and criminalisation of coca production to understand the possibilities for livelihoods that coca has opened for communities that have been denied the right to live by the State. As such, this research provides fertile ground for humanising cocalero peasants, fighting for their recognition as subjects of differentiated rights and exploring the challenges of the processes of productive transition towards some sort of legal status. Overall, it shows how the value of life, in times of globalisation, is increasingly varied, fragmented, contingent, and ambiguous (Ong, 2006) and how—in circumstances where 'being' is at stake—work is central to defending life.

## **Keywords**

Labour agency, Illegal crops, Citizenship, Politics of Production, Strategic Calculations, Bare life

## Acknowledgements

Like any process of knowledge production and learning, this RP has been a collective effort. I feel very grateful to everyone who has contributed so that today others can read this document and get to know another side of illicit crops in Colombia.

First, I would like to thank the community of Bellavista. Gracias a todos y cada uno/a de ustedes que desde el 2017 han estado dispuestos/as a conversar, compartir sus historias, su sueño y sus miedos. Gracias por permitirme conocer a través de sus voces las luchas de las y los campesinas/os cocaleros. Gracias a Eliza y Angie por recibirnos de nuevo. Las dos son mujeres a las que admiro profundamente y de las que espero seguir aprendiendo<sup>1</sup>.

To the Cesyeme and to all my *compas* in this network of affection and knowledge who supported me to be here and inspired me to continue weaving on the work done. To Lucho, Dani, Daniel, Sandra, Vale and Lau for their contributions, their friendship, and their support. Special thanks to Laura Valencia who generously shared her reflections and materials so that this research could be what it is today. And to Lucho who travelled with me to Bellavista in July and helped me carry out the fieldwork.

I am deeply grateful to Lee Pegler. Thank you for your close and heartfelt accompaniment. For our enriching conversations, your trust in my work, and your commitment to the development of this RP.

To my colleagues at the ISS with whom we shared this process of writing, cooking, crying, and laughing. To Sergio M., Fahmid, Sergio C. Ita, Juli, Natha and Nico for the enriching conversations that helped me ‘put my shit on the paper’<sup>2</sup>.

To my family. To my mum, dad, sister, and Emma, who encourage me and supported me through this whole journey.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to every one of you who since 2017 has been willing to share your stories, your dream and your fears. Thank you for allowing me to know through your voices the struggles of cocalero peasants. Thank you, Eliza and Angie, for welcoming us back. You are both women whom I admire and from whom I hope to continue learning.

<sup>2</sup> As Gloria Anzaldúa says in her letter to 3<sup>rd</sup> World Women Writers (2009) “Write with your eyes like painters, with your ears like musicians, with your feet like dancers. You are the truthsayer with quill and torch. Write with your tongues of fire. Don’t let the pen banish you from yourself. Don’t let the ink coagulate in your pens. Don’t let the censor snuff out the spark, nor the gags muffle your voice. Put your shit on the paper. We are not reconciled to the oppressors who whet their howl” (p.165)

# Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
Research objectives and questions .....	5
Chapters Overview .....	6
Chapter 2. Analytical framework and research methodology.....	7
Chapter 3. When coca met Bellavista .....	16
The Beginning — Hope amidst precarity?.....	16
Hidden underlying illegality .....	20
Chapter 4. ‘Bienestar’ and coca in borrowed time (1991-2002).....	21
A fleeting living space .....	21
Assessing an Interlude of Well-Being.....	28
Chapter 5. Bare lives exposed (2002-2012).....	30
The process of stripping lives bare .....	30
No more borrowed time.....	38
Conclusion. Wavering uncertainly between life and death .....	40
References.....	42
Annexes.....	48

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Citizenship's range of shades.....	10
Figure 2. Summary of analytical framework.....	11
Figure 3. Periodisation of politics of coca production in Bellavista (1981-2021).....	12
Figure 4. Triangle for the operationalisation of the conjunctures.....	14
Figure 5. Triangle Risk-Needs-Opportunities in the 1981.....	20
Figure 6. Triangle Risk-Needs-Opportunities in the 1991-2002.....	24
Figure 7. Graphic of Coca crops vs eradications in Colombia (1994-2004) .....	33
Figure 8. Triangle Risk-Needs-Opportunities between 2002-2012.....	37

## List of Maps

Map 1. Geographic location of Meta department and Bellavista .....	4
Map 2. Map of the Demilitarized Zone (1999-2002) .....	31
Map 3. Map of Colombia.....	50
Map 4. Meta Department, main western rivers, and Bellavista .....	51

### List of Acronyms

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Spanish</b>
FARC-EP	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- Peoples' Army	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo
NNP	National Natural Park	Parque Nacional Natural
JAC	Community Action Councils	Junta de Acción Comunal
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone	Zona de Despeje
Ascatragua	Association of Peasants and Workers of the Guayabero	Asociación de Campesinos y Trabajadores del Guayabero

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

Cocalero peasants<sup>3</sup> must be acknowledged not as the exception to Colombia's rural development and state<sup>4</sup> sovereignty but as an integral part of these processes. Recent academic studies (Espinosa, 2006; Torres, 2011; Ciro Rodríguez, 2019; Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019; Gutierrez, 2020; Gutiérrez D., 2021) have emphasised that coca production<sup>5</sup> has been an *alternative development strategy* that has guaranteed the reproduction of the smallholders' peasant economy in remote territories. Peasants, who have been displaced by the internal armed conflict and marginalised by the agro-industrial model of rural development<sup>6</sup>, have found in these territories and in coca cultivation, an economic and political activity which helps them secure their livelihoods (Ramirez and García, 2005; Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019; Gutierrez, 2020). Thus, amid 'tough tradeoffs' (Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2021), coca cultivation has opened up a space to make a living for peasants that have been excluded from the political and economic community of Colombia.

The academic literature —as opposed to some fractions in public debate— seems to have moved beyond the simplistic characterisation of coca as a “war crop” and coca growers as people “in search of easy money” (Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019, p. 74). Different authors (Jaramillo, Mora and Cubides, 1989; Gootenberg, 2008, 2018; Salgado, 2010; Ramírez, 2011; Torres, 2011, 2018; Ciro Rodríguez, 2019; Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019; Gutierrez, 2020; Vera, Valencia and Cubides, 2020) have shown how coca growers “are the historical result of the unresolved legacy of the rural tensions that have unfolded between the 1950s and the late 1980s” (Torres, 2018, p. 135) and how cultivating coca has been a coping strategy for dispossessed peasants.

The literature consistently argues that the rise of illegal crops in Colombia is closely related to the highly unequal land tenure structure and an exclusionary rural development model (Molano, 1989;

---

<sup>3</sup> The term 'cocalero peasants' in this document refers to peasants —women and men— who establish labour relationships with coca cultivation and the transformation of coca leaf into coca paste. It includes coca growers, coca pickers, owners of the fields, "quimiqueros" (those who know the process of transformation of the leaf), those who cook for the workers (usually women) and other peasants who have a relationship with this chain of production.

<sup>4</sup> In the development of the text the word state is deliberately used with a lower case 's' insofar as I consider it to represent a theoretical stance on the heterogeneous ensemble of powers that the state is —institutions, discourses, officials and policies— (Valencia, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Here I refer specifically to coca base paste production. Coca sulphate or coca paste, also called *basuko*, is the result of a first processing of coca leaf with chemicals and toxic substances, but it is not cocaine. It is made in the immediate vicinity of the plantation, mainly because it does not displace large quantities of coca leaf, since about 125 kilos of leaf are needed to obtain one kilo of paste (Infodrogas, 2021)

<sup>6</sup> Colombian governments have adopted the agro-industrial production model as the only mode of production that can meet the requirements of the global market, while resisting to acknowledge the skills of small producers (Berry, 2017 and Santacoloma-Varón, 2015 in Cubides, 2018). This has led to technological changes and policy allocations that favor land accumulation while accelerating the “reproductive squeeze” of small producers in terms of access to land, credit and inputs (Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2021).

Ramírez, 2001; Gootenberg, 2008; González, 2012; Torres, 2018; Vera, Valencia and Cubides, 2020). Both processes accelerated and deepened due to neoliberal trends in the global economy and national armed conflicts. On one hand, the increase in the demand for raw materials for industrialisation that sought spatialisation in resource-rich countries —such as Colombia—, has been characterized as important factors of land grabbing and thus, as an important factor of displacement of peasants from central to peripheral areas (Salgado, 2012; Vera, Valencia and Cubides, 2020) On the other hand, the civil war known as the period of *La Violencia* (1948-1958) and the resulting Agrarian Reform of 1961<sup>7</sup> has been pointed out as another important driver (Molano, 1987; Torres, 2018).

These “forced colonisations” (Salgado, 2012) and “distance directed colonisations”<sup>8</sup> (Molano, 1987), as some authors have named them respectively, led peasants to occupy areas that have been marginalised from the benefits of the economic, social and institutional national development project (Ramírez and García, 2005; Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019). Recently colonised areas with weak institutional presence, high indexes of poverty, and a lack of access to public services and local markets, have been considered the central element that led Colombia to become an ideal location for the illegal enclave economy of coca since the 1970s (Ramírez and García, 2005; Gootenberg, 2008).

Furthermore, recent research has started to illustrate more deeply the fundamental role of coca production in the regional context in which it has been inserted (Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019, p. 74). Some have reflected on how coca seems to have attracted state presence (Torres, 2011), how local and regional economies have been significantly dynamized by it, and how women have gained economic autonomy due to this crop (see ‘Publications’ Drugs and (Dis)order project, 2021). These recent studies focus more on the specific journey of coca growers and how they have experienced economic and social transformations due to coca (Ciro Rodríguez, 2019; Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019; Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2021; Gutiérrez D., 2021). This study builds on these developments in important ways in terms of labour agency.

In particular, this research analyses the political and ideological context of a concrete space looking at how its changes have brought about a variable insertion of peasants in the illegal market.

---

<sup>7</sup> This rural reform was backed by the modernization development policies of the United States, specially the Alliance for Progress Program (AFP), an hemispheric policy of the USA adopted in Kennedy’s administration that aimed to boost modernization during the Cold War in order to prevent the advance of communism (Torres, 2018, p. 134). As such it decreed that the “Colonization of public domains in the nation’s lower land periphery was [...] the first and foremost priority to solve “the agrarian problem” (Torres, 2018, p. 144).

<sup>8</sup> This refers to colonisations that were directed by non-distributive agrarian policies that, instead of redistributing land within the agrarian frontier, decided to displace peasants to peripheral areas.



From a strategic relational approach (Jessop, 2007) I argue that the insertion in the cocaine market does not occur at once, neither does it happen in a linear and consistent manner. Relations, perceptions, and outcomes of coca-growing are quite volatile. People have paradoxical and changing feelings between seeing coca as a “grateful bush” or as a “cursed bush” —or even both. Thus, peasants’ needs, and fears change according to certain economic and political scenarios, which at the same time frame their strategic calculation and the mechanisms at hand.

Consequently, this research paper seeks to consider the relations that shape how coca production is organized, acknowledging the material as well as the political and ideological dimensions of production (Burawoy, 1985; Bernstein, 2010). To that aim, I depart from the analytical framework proposed by Michael Burawoy’s (1985) *politics of production* in order to look at the relationship between the *relations of production* (political and ideological frames that regulate production) and *relations in production* (the labour processes where nature is transformed within a set of social relations) (Burawoy, 1985). This allows me to address, in a relational way, the structural constraints, along with the conjunctural opportunities within which coca *labour processes* take place, together with the objective and subjective dimensions of these processes (Jessop, 2007).

More specifically, I decided to centre my analysis in the tensions around cocalero peasants’ *citizenship*. Thus, as Ong (2000, p. 62) argues, differential treatment of this population by the state (different *relations of production*) mirrors itself in their specific insertion in global capitalism (different *relations in production*). In a context of “0” protection and the uncertainty that comes with it, the articulation to an illegal global market emerged as an alternative to raise specific claims and negotiate peasants’ collective fate (Ong, 2005, p. 699) —even if this insertion compromises their security to some extent.

This research uses a Case-Study to empirically elaborate these inquires. Here, Bellavista is the socio-spatial configuration to which I refer (*Annex A. Case selection strategy*)<sup>9</sup>. Bellavista is a small settlement —of approximately 50 families and 138 people in 2017<sup>10</sup>— located in the South-East corner of the Serranía de la Macarena National Natural Park -NNP, a place where communities have depended on coca cultivation for the last 40 years (see *Map 1*). It is part of the region located in the

---

<sup>9</sup> The description of Bellavista that follows was extracted with little or no alterations from an essay I wrote in 2020 for the Political Economy course and another one wrote in 2021 for the course Politics of Agrarian transformation at the International Institute of Social Studies.

<sup>10</sup> The population varies significantly over the years because of the dynamics that will be discussed in this paper.

south of Meta department<sup>11</sup> (see *Annex B. Map of Colombia*), between the rivers Duda, Guayabero and Ariari which became a hotspot of coca leaf cultivation and base paste production for the illegal global cocaine market in the 1980s (Torres, 2018).



Map 1. Geographic location of Meta department and Bella Vista  
Source: (Cesycme, 2018)

Located at the edge of the agrarian frontier, the south of Meta is seen as being geographically and politically isolated from the national development project. It has been considered by the state as ‘marginal, under-utilized and empty’ (Margulis, Mckeon and Borrás, 2013, p. 5), thus, becoming an object of late colonisation boosted by (non-coincidental) economic and political processes, as well as conservationist/ environmental policies.

While a marginalised area, it was been a refugee for displaced peasants and has become the “ideal” setting for the development of enclave economies (Vera, Valencia and Cubides, 2020, p. 8). Its configuration coincides with the dynamics of violence and accumulation in the Andean, Inter-

<sup>11</sup> ‘Department’ in Colombia corresponds to a territorial entity that enjoys autonomy for the administration and planning of sectional affairs. They are an intermediary figure between the Nation and the municipalities. Is similar to what in other countries are known as the states.

Andean and the Pacific Coast, as well as with economic booms of different products such as furs, rubber, wood, marijuana and coca, and the migration waves that these have entailed.

Additionally, this region has been subject to different environmental regulations and a strong *guerrilla*<sup>12</sup> presence. On one side, the region became the second National Natural Reserve of the country in 1948 and has been covered by conservation regulations since then. On the other side, this area started being consolidated as a zone of strong guerrilla presence around the 1980s. Since the period of *La Violence*, the south of Meta and Guaviare became areas of refuge for insurgent groups (see *armed colonisation* in Molano, 1987), and specially, after the first coca leaf production crisis in 1983<sup>13</sup>, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC-EP<sup>14</sup> started to play a strong regulatory role in the area (Molano, 1987; Espinosa, 2006; Mosquera, 2018).

These three features —coca cultivation, environmental legislation, and subversive regulation— have pushed<sup>15</sup> cocalero peasants to the margins of citizenship, turning them into illegal and almost rightless subjects. From a politics of production, labour agency and citizenship perspective, this research delves much more deeply into how peasants, who were initially “rendered rightless by displacement” (Sanford, 2004), continue to be permanently relegated from their status as citizens through the (re)articulation of discourses about their illegal status and how this reproduces (albeit in a differentiated way) their insertion into the illegal coca market (Ong, 1999, 2006).

## Research objectives and questions

### Objective:

To understand the varied strategies and outcomes of labour agency of cocalero peasants in Bellavista (PNN Serranía de la Macarena, Meta) within two different political and economic conjunctures.

### Research question:

---

<sup>12</sup> Left-wing Illegal armed actors.

<sup>13</sup> The price of coca paste fell in 1983 mainly due to overproduction (Uribe and Franco García, 2005; Salgado, 2017). Peasants mention price went down to 70.000 pesos de kilo, Archila et al. (2002) mention it may have declined to 55.000.

<sup>14</sup> The FARC was one of the most important illegal armed groups in the history of Colombia's armed conflict. It was formed in 1964 and had a left-wing ideology oriented by the principles of Marxism-Leninism. They are known as a guerrilla group insofar as they had a military background and were fighting for political reasons. Until 2017 they formally existed as *guerrillas* as they demobilised following the signing of a peace agreement with the government. Some fronts of this former guerrilla are still operating, one of which is Front 1, which has a presence in southern Meta-Guaviare. Hereinafter referred to as FARC.

<sup>15</sup> Without factual spatial movement.

How does the variation in the political and economic conjunctures compromise the citizenship of cocalero peasants and, how does this alter the strategic calculations they make?

**Sub-questions:**

1. How does the variation in the political and economic conjunctures alter the ensemble that constitutes cocalero peasants' citizenship?
2. How does a particular ensemble of cocalero peasants' citizenship alter the strategic calculations they make?

**Chapters Overview**

The paper is structured into six chapters, including introduction and the conclusion. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the analytical and methodological framework that guides the study. It briefly presents the *politics of production* (Burawoy, 1985) framework as the main entry point; it discusses how this is combined with critical theories of citizenship (Ong, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2006; Ong and Collier, 2004) and it outlines how this is operationalised. Chapter 3 provides a historical background and a general overview of how coca-growing started in Bellavista (Meta, Colombia), so as to better situate the following analyses and discussion. Chapters 4 and 5 represent the core of the research paper analysing two different conjunctural configurations and their implications. Chapter 4 addresses a period characterised by relatively favourable conditions for coca production and community/ local welfare. On the contrary, chapter 5 deals with a period of tough constraints on coca-growing, less space for manoeuvring and more precarity. The paper's concluding remarks (Chapter 6) centre on a discussion of how the movement through those specific conjunctures helps us understand how and why coca production (i.e., via labour agency/production politics) keeps reproducing itself and the value of the composite analytic used.

(Citations that have been translated from Spanish will be henceforth marked in the text with an asterisk).

## Chapter 2.

# Analytical framework and research methodology

This research is framed within a critical discussion of agrarian politics. More specifically, it deals with how the dynamics of combined and uneven capitalist development, together with contingent political processes, generate particular configurations of labour and life (Ong, 1999, 2006). As such, it seeks to understand the socio-spatial configuration of capital-labour relations, recognising the varied paths and forms that capitalism adopts in different geographies and temporalities. Thus, from a relational approach (Jessop, 2017), this research paper seeks to consider the situated relations that shape how coca production in a particular area is organized, acknowledging the material as well as the political and ideological dimensions of capitalist labour processes (Burawoy, 1985; Bernstein, 2010).

As mentioned, I draw my general analytical framework from the *politics of production* proposed by Michael Burawoy (1985) and the strategic relational approach of Bob Jessop (Jessop, 2007). Both approaches allow me to address how contingent and situated politics interact with the social relations and the experience of the labour processes (Pegler, 2015). This allows me to focus on two central dimensions of production: *relations of production* and *relations in production*. On one hand, *relations of production* refer to the political and ideological frames that regulate production and help to reproduce the labour-capital relation. In the capitalist mode of production, they entail the modes of regulation that enable market forces to operate (Jessop, 2007, p. 24); the relations that help organize valued added expropriation (exploitation). These *relations of production* are mediated by, what Burawoy (1985) calls the *political apparatuses of production*, the regulating institutions (in the broadest sense) that reproduce relations of domination and enable production processes to ‘pump out the surplus’ through consent or coercion. Here the role of the state is fundamental.

On the other hand, *relations in production* allude to the material dimension of labour processes, where nature is transformed within a set of social relations (Burawoy, 1985). This takes into consideration the technical division of labour where concrete tasks are carried out and the embodied experience shapes their (subjective) interpretation of the labour process. This is also where the struggles and interests of social groups take form, while value is produced. I place in this dimension the *labour agency* of people through which they “turn things to their advantage and make the best of the options available to them” in their work and associated social relations (Carswell and De Neve, 2013, p. 67). This entails the premise that “agents are reflexive, capable of reformulating within limits

their own identities and interests, and able to engage in strategic calculation about their current situation” (Jessop, 2007, p. 41). This leads to an understanding of *labour agency* as the capacity to strategically navigate the ‘structural constraints’<sup>16</sup> and conjunctural opportunities that emerge from the interaction of specific social and economic forces through labour<sup>17</sup>. Then, agency, and so strategies, need to be assessed in relation to a wider context, hence understood in a specific spatio-temporal conjuncture (Jessop, 2007). Looking at these strategies will enable this research to understand how an agent (or set of agents) modify the impact of the social structural constraints and opportunities in a given context (Jessop, 2007, p. 42). How cocalero peasants manage to make a living amid the brunt of an illegal market and a negligent state.

Consequently, this research paper provides an opportunity to examine this ‘labour process perspective’ using the example of the changes in the productive circumstances and strategic responses’ of cocalero peasants in Bellavista (Colombia). Bellavista is a socio-spatial configuration that is a product, as well as medium, for the interaction of multiple social, economic, and political forces operating at different scales (local, national, global) (Gramsci in Ballvé, 2012, p. 604). As such, this study will allow to understand the different paths involved in the reproduction of coca-growing over the years. More simply, to show how coca’s existence and its persistence is not a coincidence.

In order to make some (simplifying) sense of this complex context, I chose to focus my analysis on the *uncertain citizenship* of cocalero peasants. I am aware that adopting this starting point may generate different “blind spots” and I acknowledge what is at stake with this decision (paraphrasing Jessop, 2017). With this choice I am focusing on the conflictive relationship of peasants with the state, overlooking the conflictive side of other relationships that surround them. This omits the violence of other actors against cocalero peasant, focuses the analysis on public policies and their effects, and limits the ability to delve into gender, class, race, and ethnic axes that cross this issue. However, I opt for it since, during my fieldwork, it became evident that the decision to grow coca bears significantly on the feeling of marginalisation and the necessities and urgency that arise from peasants’ exclusion from the political community. It is also because coca is seen as a choice that leads to confrontation with the state and to disputes over their recognition as subjects with rights (Ramírez, 2001; Salgado, 2017, p. 5).

---

<sup>16</sup> “Structural constraints comprise those elements in a situation that cannot be altered by agent(s) in a given time period” (Jessop, 2007, p. 44)

<sup>17</sup> As Marx (1852) asserted it “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past”.

This critical perspective had me move beyond the a “binary opposition between citizenship and statelessness” (Ong, 2005, p. 697). That implies taking distance from three common assumptions: firstly, the myth of congruent sovereignty with a specific nation (Agnew, 1994, 2009 in Holden, 2017); secondly, any unified model of citizenship (Ong, 2006), and, thirdly, neoliberal definitions of citizenship as access to markets (Dagnino, 2003)<sup>18</sup>. Following Aihwa Ong (1999, 2000, 2005, 2006) and her anthropological understanding of citizenship, I look at citizenship as a non-singular matter, as a “shifting and flexible ensemble of heterogeneous calculations, choices, and exceptions that constitute security, life and ethics” (Ong, 2006, p. 10). Here, the elements of citizenship — rights, entitlements, political enfranchisement, territoriality, and nation— are analysed as being dis- and re-articulated in relation to globalizing forces and situated elements (Ong, 2005, p. 678).

From this specific angle, the *relations of production* can be seen as the result of the intersection of different axes of capital, politics and ethics<sup>19</sup> which set a contingent assemble of institutions that administer spaces, labour and life (Ong, 2006, p. 21). As Ong (2000, p. 62) argues, the differential treatment of a population by the state mirrors in diverse insertion in global capitalism as well as in situated forms of moral reasoning (Collier and Lakoff, 2004, p. 22). Hence, understanding peasants’ articulation with the cocaine market and their moral arguments for doing so, is a matter of understanding how they are treated by the state. In other words, state treatment over a population is mirrored in different *relations in production*. Thus, to understand how peasants of Bellavista connect to the global illegal economy and experience it, is fundamental to acknowledge their marginal location in the political community.

In the context of illegality in which this study takes place, talking about citizenship implies bringing the discussion of politics and policy into the realm of life that is, insofar as, the life of people are called into question through illegalization (Das and Poole, 2004, p. 12). Agamben (1998) refers to this when he argues that “law produces certain bodies as “killable” because they are positioned by the law itself as prior to the institution of law” ( in Das and Poole, 2008, p. 14); what he called *bare life*. Understood in this way, this approach situates the analysis in the grey area between normalized citizenship and *bare life* (see *figure 1*). By having their life tied to a condition of illegality, coca growers

---

<sup>18</sup> Here I refer to the definition of neoliberal citizenship as “individual integration into the market as consumers and as producers” (Dagnino, 2003, p. 216)

<sup>19</sup> This referring to the question of “How should one live?” (Collier and Lakoff, 2004)

have a citizenship condition that is always dependant on their conjuctural situation; it itself being uncertain.

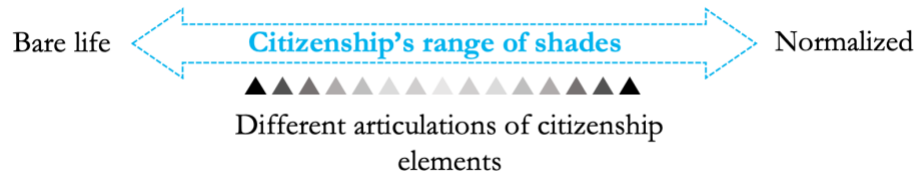


Figure 1. *Citizenship's range of shades*  
Source: Author's elaboration

Since for them no protection can be taken for granted, every single right has to be fought for. Thus, uncertainty results from the fact that it is tied to contingent situations and to peasants' ability to strategically manoeuvre within the constraints of circumstantial capacities. It is therefore very susceptible to changes in power relations. For these reasons, in this research paper I use the adjective *uncertain* to characterize the citizenship of Bellavista inhabitants. This allows me to perceive and emphasise not only the nuances and fragmentation of Bellavista peasants' citizenship but also its volatility over time.

Additionally, as Collier and Lakoff (2004, p. 29) note, “the clash between an inclusive national ideology and the actual facts of exclusion [...] lead these marginal subjects to craft a distinctive strategy for making claims on the state” (Collier and Lakoff, 2004, p. 29). Thus, in the context of limited protection and wide uncertainty that circumscribe these people, their territory and their livelihoods (Ong, 2000, p. 62) particular *relations in production* arise. “[T]he linking up with global markets [...] creates spaces for the politically excluded to mobilize and articulate specific claims in terms of their collective fate” (Ong, 2005, p. 699). Furthermore, when it comes to situations where “life has been rendered problematic”, situated forms of moral reasoning emerge and the illegalized can be experienced as legitimate (Scott, 1977; Collier and Lakoff, 2004, p. 22; Griffith, 2009).



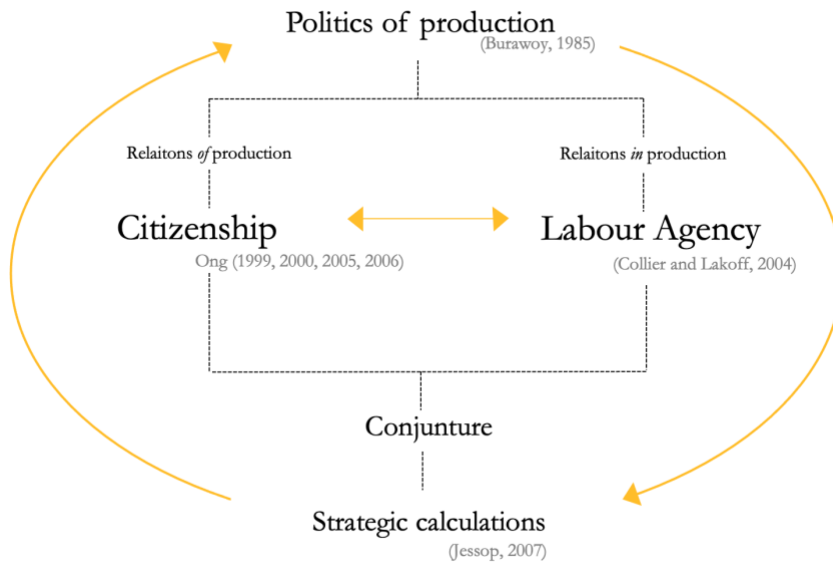


Figure 2. Summary of analytical framework  
Source: Author's elaboration

To summarise, the aim in this paper is to look at the *politics production* of coca, considering Bellavista as the socio-spatial formation of my analysis. To this end, the *relations of production* are analysed from the cocalero peasants' *citizenship* perspective. *Relations in production* are addressed in the broader sense of peasants' *agency*, deployed by their labour and the situated relation in and around them. Considering both I understand a specific *conjuncture* and appreciate peasants' *strategic calculations* (see *Figure 2*). Through this framework I look beyond a determined and univocal way of understanding the insertion of coca growers into the global illegal market of cocaine, whilst delving into the specific strategies that emerge in a given space and time.

To methodologically operationalise this case, I have divided the historical development of coca production in the region into five shifting scenarios (see *Figure 3*). Based on a literature review and the analysis of interviews of people from the region, I argue that in each of the five periods the political context varies and so do peasants' strategic calculation and their outcomes. This periodization discusses the contributions of authors, such as Henry Salgado (2012) and Sergio Uribe(2019) to achieve a more situated understanding of the coca production in the region. This understanding includes the evolution of peasant relations with the crop (Salgado, 2017), while at the same time making visible the context in which they occurred (Uribe, 2019).

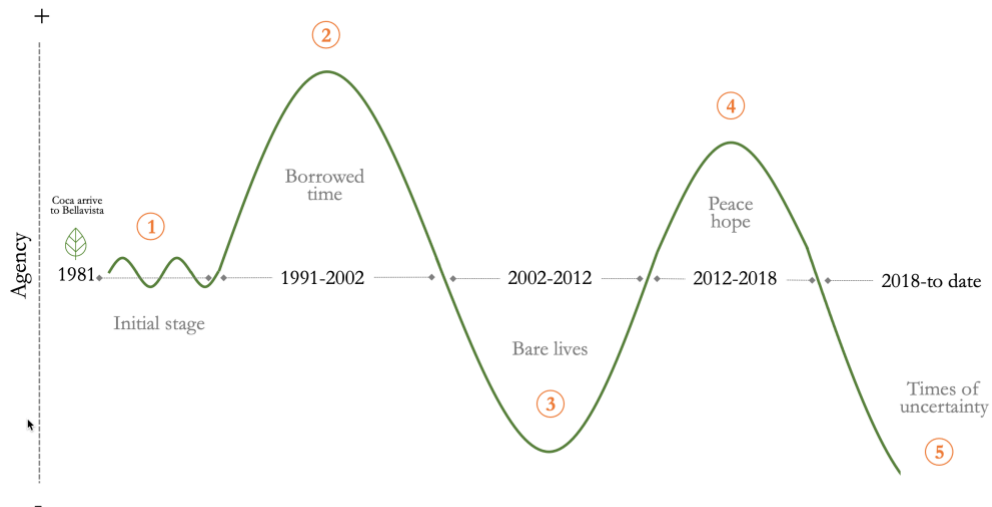


Figure 3. Periodisation of politics of coca production in Bellavista (1981-2021)  
 Source: Author's elaboration

Specifically, this research looks in-depth at two of these periods: 1991-2002, a period of relative optimism and broader space to manoeuvre, and 2002-2012, a very constrained and difficult period. The reason for choosing these two periods is based on theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic criteria. First, in the fieldwork and the dialogues with peasants about their socio-biographical journeys, the relevance of these decades was evident. In their narratives, it is possible to identify that the events that took place during these years had significant impacts on their relationship with coca and their perception of the state. Secondly, both periods show significantly different conjunctural arrangements, which allows us to contrast and identify the variation in peasant strategies over time (see *Annex D. Intensity of the armed conflict Map*). How peasants experience their citizenship and thus, the possibilities they had to manoeuvre are notorious different for both periods. Thirdly, these two periods account for a dynamic that is representative of what is happening with coca cultivation in the region between the larger period of 1981-2021. In a substantive way, these periods help explain strategies that can be extrapolated to the following times. Fourthly, the silences and uncertainties that still surround the two most recent periods make difficult to understand them, thus obstructing the accuracy of the analysis. As these are more recent times that encompasses ongoing events, more extensive fieldwork would be required to gather all the required information first-hand.

Moreover, periods 2 and 4 on the one hand, and 3 and 5 on the other<sup>20</sup>, can be characterised as similar in terms of the general balance between needs, opportunities, and risks, and therefore have comparable strategies. The periods from 1991 to 2002 (Period 2) and from 2012 to 2018 (Period 4) are both times when peasants enjoy the welfare and security provided by coca, and where the local institutions of governance played an active role in resource management and established dialogues with the government. The period from 2002 to 2012 (Period 3), on the contrary, is a time of exacerbated violence, a tremendous humanitarian crisis and reactive forms of action. The latter is very similar to what is happening now (Period 5).

In view of these constraints and limits, I have prioritised the analysis of periods 2 and 3. I am convinced that their detailed analysis allows a substantive perspective on the moments of well-being and precariousness that perpetuate coca production. Understanding them is not only relevant in itself, but it also because it speaks to the general variations that are experienced in coca cultivation. They shed the light over elements that are useful to understand the current situation of cocalero peasants.

Continuing with the methodological aspects, to carry on this research, each of these two key periods is addressed as a specific conjuncture. As shown in *figure 4* (below), I look at the interplay between market forces and policies and how they translate in a specific balance between risks, opportunities and needs. To narrow my scope, the *risks* are understood as concrete threats to the citizenship of coca-growers, stemming from the enforcement of anti-drug, conservation, and counter-insurgency policies. *Opportunities* are approached as conjunctural possibilities of action that are often object of strategical calculations by the peasants. Such opportunities include material access to resources and social relations that can catalyse or enhance local capacities. *Needs*, on the other hand, are often material conditions that mediate interests.

---

<sup>20</sup> The first period is seen as an initial stage and will be address in *Chapter 3* to situate historically the case.

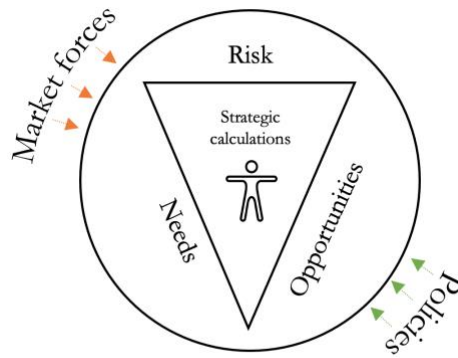


Figure 4. Triangle for the operationalisation of the conjunctures  
 Source: Author's elaboration

The comparison between the two conjunctures allows the study to unpack the politics of coca production (Li, 2014), as noted by Estefania Ciro (2019, p. 18\*), “considering the place of coca, [...makes it] possible to study the persistence of coca cultivation and the way in which it is reproduced”.

What must also be noted is that the lived experience of the peasants represents the central focus of this study. Fieldwork notes and interviews guided this research exercise. A socio-biographic approach was used for the interviews insofar as it enabled an articulation of the subjects with their historical contexts, and to perceive how micro, meso and macro processes are interlinked (Ciro Rodríguez, 2019). The interviews delved into (1) the events and motivations that led to peasant’s involvement in coca production, (2) the perceptions they have of coca cultivation and its role in their lives, (3) the ways in which they experience the relation with the State and the law, (4) the actors, institutions and strategies that mediate communitarian or personal changes, and (5) their desired future —see *Annex E*. for the complete guideline of the interviews (Ciro Rodríguez, 2019).

Fieldwork was carried out for 10 days in Bellavista in July 2021. During those days a collective meeting was held with the peasants to discuss their relationship with the state and with coca. In addition, 7 interviews were conducted to explore the above-mentioned issues<sup>21</sup>. These interviews were complemented with 21 more —12 done by Laura Valencia<sup>22</sup> in 2018 and 9 by different members of

---

<sup>21</sup> These interviews are quoted henceforth as (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*)

<sup>22</sup> Sociologist who completed her undergraduate thesis at Bellavista in 2018 entitled "Socio-environmental conflicts and conservation with local communities in National Natural Parks: the case of the Bellavista in the NNP Sierra de La Macarena". These interviews are quoted henceforth as (Compilation of communications from Laura Valencia with peasants of the region, September 2018\*)

the Cesycme<sup>23</sup> in 2017 of which I was an active part (see *Annex F* and *G*. for information about these interviews). All of them were analysed using open and axial codification in Atlas ti. This information is complemented by a review of secondary (thematic and contextual) sources.

Due to the methods, context and the limitations of the research itself, certain reflections of such a complex issue will remain unaddressed. In addition to the time constraints for the development of this work—which undoubtedly limited its scope— there were the added contextual difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the country's political scenario<sup>24</sup>, and local conflict dynamics<sup>25</sup>. While the field visit in July was crucial, conversations with the inhabitants of Bellavista were limited by a constant sense *zozobra*, a feeling of anxiety and frustration about the current political context. Yet, noticing that, the integration of these past interviews with new discussions and other sources helps to consolidate a theoretically and empirically original and relevant paper that not only reflects the spoken word, but also learns and reflects from the silences which were witnessed.

---

<sup>23</sup> Corporation of Social and Cultural Studies of Memory (<http://cesycme.org/>), a collective of researchers —of which I am part of since 2016— that has been working in the region since 2017 around territorial dilemmas and memory processes in order to contribute to the construction of desirable futures. These interviews are quoted henceforth as (Compilation of Cesycme communications with peasants in the Bellavista, 2017\*).

<sup>24</sup> Colombia in April 2021 began to experience a series of protests that were heavily repressed by the state. This unleashed a strong social uprising at the national level, which disrupted the country for at least 3 months. For more information read the articles in <https://iissblog.nl/category/region/latin-america-caribbean/colombia/>

<sup>25</sup> In Bellavista, the 1st Front of the FARC, today known as "The Dissidence", continues to be present. It is one of the few FARC fronts that did not accept the peace agreement. This has implied the escalation of the conflict in the region and the reluctance to address certain issues.

## Chapter 3.

### When coca met Bellavista<sup>26</sup>

This chapter situates coca production in Bellavista in historical terms. It outlines the political, social, and economic context that led the cocaine market to find, in Bellavista, a space and a population in with which to satisfy its demand for coca leaf cultivation and coca paste production. The chapter begins by setting out the social context that delineates the needs of the inhabitants. It continues with a presentation of the conjunctural opportunities that arise in the cocaine market in relation to the global dynamics and the situated moral reasoning that emerged from them. Then, it addresses the specific scenario of risks. It concludes by looking at how the commencement of coca cultivation was a strategic choice that cannot be considered as an isolated decision, but rather a result of an accumulation of (dis)advantages that fluctuated over time (Jessop, 2007; Ciro Rodríguez, 2019).

#### **The Beginning — Hope amidst precarity?**

The first inhabitants that arrived to Bellavista in 1972 were people looking for land and work. The high concentration of land in Colombia<sup>27</sup>, together with precarious cadastral registration, *pushed* peasants to remote areas outside the agricultural frontier (Vera, Valencia and Cubides, 2020). Since Spanish colonisation, much of the Andean and inter-Andean region has been shaped by a latifundial order, later reinforced by models of large-scale land appropriation and dispossession. In the second half of the 20th century, these dynamics of agrarian change accelerated due to the strong integration of Colombia into the global market and the civil war known as the period of *La Violencia* (1948-1953) (see Torres, 2018; Vera, Valencia and Cubides, 2020). The combination of these factors resulted in the concentration of property, thus, in the scarcity of land and work for the peasants within the agrarian frontier and their consequent displacement to marginal territories (Fals Borda, 1994; Torres, 2018). Indeed, this was part of the neo-liberalisation process which aimed to maximise the returns of doing what is profitable whilst marginalizing what is seen as unprofitable (Castels, 1991, p.294 in Ong, 2000, p. 58).

Furthermore, several of the territories where these peasants arrived—including Bellavista—had been subject to conservation policies years before. For instance, the area of the Duda, Guayabero,

---

<sup>26</sup> Part of this chapter, more specifically the second and third paragraphs, are extracted with little or no alterations from an essay I wrote in 2021 for the Politics of Agrarian Transformation course at the International Institute of Social Studies.

<sup>27</sup> The most recent statistics about land concentration show that “1% of the largest farms manage 80% of the land” (OXFAM, 2017)

Ariari and Güejar rivers (see *Annex C. Rivers' Map*) became the second National Natural Reserve of the country in 1948 via the declaration of Law 52 of 1948; it was later constituted as an Amazon Forest Reserve Zone by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of 1959 (Cesycme, 2018), and then declared a National Natural Park-NNP in 1971. In these areas, the structures of use and tenure of land did not allow for peasants to be part of the productive processes with socio-political rights (Vera, Valencia and Cubides, 2020). Therefore, using Victoria Sanford's (2004) terms, these dynamics of agrarian change were the start of processes of 'rendering peasants rightless by displacement'; hence, moving peasants further away from enjoying normalised citizenship, towards the condition of *bare life*.

Displaced peasants arrived in a region that back then was only jungle; there were no roads or towns or anything else (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021). They started to make a living out of hunting, fishing, and agriculture together with some revenues from the timber and furs booms. However, "in the second half of the 1970s, the survival of the peasant population in the region was at risk" (Salgado, 2017, p. 4\*). Due to the acidity of the Amazonian ground<sup>28</sup> (Ciro Rodríguez, 2019, p. 37) and the indebtedness of some of the peasants in the region who unsuccessfully tried to link up with the marijuana market<sup>29</sup>, people began to experience a very precarious situation, which in many cases manifested itself in a lack of food for their families<sup>30</sup>.

Amid this precariousness, in 1981, the people from Bellavista started to hear about the production of coca. Because of political changes in Latin America and the economic boom of cocaine (see Gootenberg, 2008; Torres, 2018)<sup>31</sup>, the cocaine market had to make way for a new socio-spatial configuration to supply the demand for coca base paste. Since this capital is—in effect—illegal, its location was rendered possible deep in the forest beyond the reach of state regulatory institutions (Vera, Valencia and Cubides, 2020, p. 6). Areas beyond the agrarian frontier, of recent colonization where peasants were struggling to make a living, became propitious places for cocaine inputs territorialisation. Paraphrasing Ong (2006), the spatial concentration of political, economic and social conditions un Bellavista, corresponded with the demands of the global capital of the cocaine.

---

<sup>28</sup> This makes difficult to cultivate the way people do it in the Andean area since productivity drops after the third harvest.

<sup>29</sup> In the 1970s the marijuana arrived to Bellavista, and many peasants went into debt to grow it and at the end they were unable to sell it (Ortiz, 2016, p. 39).

<sup>30</sup> "Here we have suffered, I suffered at the beginning. Because at the beginning I was bored. All I did was catch fish and a banana and that was it, rice without butter, and just drinking water [...] I suffered here. We had a lot of needs with the children, food and everything" (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

<sup>31</sup> The wave of right-wing military regimes in South America, especially the dictatorship of Chile, closed several smuggling routes (Gootenberg, 2008, p. 301). This entailed the migration of the *capital space* of this illegal market to another *place*. In addition, the criminalisation of marijuana use and the perception of cocaine as a gourmet and non-dangerous drug during Nixon's administration, significantly increased the demand for cocaine till a tipping point where the existing market was unable to satisfy demand (Gootenberg, 2008, p. 307).

Bellavista became involved in coca cultivation during the coca boom when “prices per kilo of coca base oscillated between 800,000 pesos and \$1,200,000 pesos [...] while the maximum cost of production was \$100,000 per kilo”<sup>32</sup> (Uribe and Franco García, 2005, p. 10\*). To get a sense of what this meant in practical sense, the minimum wage at that time was \$5,700 pesos (i.e., \$800,000 was approximately 140 minimum wages), and with 10.000 pesos you could buy nine cows, a mare and a male horse (Ortiz, 2016, p. 42).

So, it is no exaggeration to say that at that time a peasant could receive more money from the sale of a kilo of coca paste than he would receive during his entire life working legally with licit crops (Molano, 1987, p.61 in Ortiz, 2016, p. 42\*).

Nevertheless, the participation of the peasants in the coca market was not automatically determined but rather, gradual. “The crops were not widespread [at the beginning], there were only a few, and little by little they grew. One by one people began to have hope in this crop” (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*). Initially, there was moral resistance to the cultivation of this crop; they knew its illegality carried high risk and was stigmatised (Salgado, 2017; Torres, 2018). Yet, what made peasants decide to cultivate coca was the lack of alternatives.

Coca production looked very probable in this context. First, the absence of road infrastructure fitted with the ease of transporting coca base paste<sup>33</sup>. Second, the narrow —sometimes non-existent<sup>34</sup>— profit of margin of agricultural crops contrasted with the profitability of coca. And, third, the lack of guarantees by the state of their life and livelihoods, limited even more the options within legality (Salgado, 2017; Vera, Valencia and Cubides, 2020). In this scenario, peasants had to actively forge new ethical orientations towards their work (Collier and Lakoff, 2004, p. 30). As they argue in their own terms “We cultivate coca not because we like it, but because we have to” (Compilation of communications from Cesycme with peasants of the region, 2017\*).

---

<sup>32</sup> To 800.000 pesos COP are approximately 180 euros today's change.

<sup>33</sup> “You carry a kilo of coca in your pocket, but if you plant a hectare of yuca (cassava), that's 100 loads more or less, how do you do it if we don't have access roads for cars, how do we get it out?” (Compilation of communications from Cesycme with peasants in the Bellavista, 2017\*).

<sup>34</sup> A peasant of the region narrates that when trying to sell maize, what is worth 200 thousand pesos is paid at 30-40 thousand pesos. Thus, if someone cultivates maize “he ends up owing the boat or car driver. He has to come and do another job and sow rice or corn to finish paying him off. And he arrives home to his wife and children with his pockets turned inside out and you ask him about the remittance... no, there is nothing left” (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021)



we are forced to grow coca without wanting to [...] Without wanting to, everyone, where there is coca cultivation, is forced [to cultivate coca] to support their children, their wives and even to support a friend who is close by” (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*)

Under this argument, coca became embedded in the local economy of this region, leading to significant population growth and, in just three years, coca became the dominant livelihood strategy for this marginalised population (Cesycme, 2018).

Moreover, it is important to note that at the beginning of the 80s the risk of engaging with coca seemed manageable. Although the “war against drugs” started in 1971<sup>35</sup>, it prioritized marijuana, LSD and heroin targeting especially the north of the country (Gaviria, 2016). Cocaine has still a low priority problem since it was perceived as a “harmless ‘soft’ or gourmet drug” (Gootenberg, 2008, p. 308). While the war on drugs intensified from 1978, the fight was being displaced mainly in the cities and focused on seizures, the destruction of laboratories, the capture of drug traffickers and the implementation of the Extradition Treaty (Uribe and Franco García, 2005, p. 12). Until the mid-80s the risk of state repression and persecution was not so evident in the region.

Paradoxically, while this was seen back then as a positive thing, it also added to the conditions for future repressions. Since attention was placed on the urban areas and the cartels, the FARC-EP got stronger in these regions. Since the 1950s the south of Meta and Guaviare have been a refuge for insurgent groups (see *armed colonisation* in Molano, 1987). But, it was not until 1970s and 1980s that the Fronts 1 and 7 of the FARC<sup>36</sup> gained more political and military control in the region of the Guayabero river<sup>37</sup>. Consequently, in this time, regional dynamics began to be related to illegal armed orders.

---

<sup>35</sup> The former US President Richard Nixon stated the US commitment to provide military aid to drug producing and exporting countries.

<sup>36</sup> “At this point it is worth noting that the Farc cannot be considered as external agents in [the region] because their bases are the peasant self-defence groups of the armed colonisation of Guayabero that arrived in the 1960s as a result of state violence” (Ortiz, 2016, p. 46)

<sup>37</sup> It also matches with the government of Belisario Betancur (1982-1986), when peace talks began between the government and the FARC in La Uribe and “it was recognised that there were “objective conditions” of poverty and absence of the state in the country’s rural margins that had to be eliminated in order to achieve national peace” (Mosquera, 2018, p. 23\*)

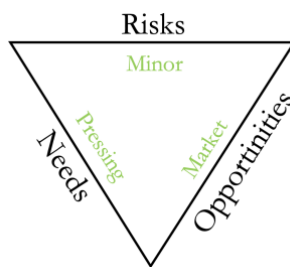


Figure 5. Triangle Risk-Needs-Opportunities in the 1981  
 Source: Author's elaboration

As this seems the case at this time, it is possible to argue that the initial decision to get involved in coca cultivation was framed in a context of pressing *needs*, clear *market* opportunities, and low *risks* (see figure 5). It was a period full of dreams, of new projects and new ambition where people began to believe that, even in their *uncertain citizenship*, it was possible to live outside of poverty and beyond surviving. As one peasant said, “one has dreams, in part man [and woman] live on dreams.” (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021).

### Hidden underlying illegality

However, it is important to be aware that the conjuncture in which Bellavista became subject to the cocaine market was a very particular one. At that time the conditions seemed to be conducive to the interests of the peasants. However, all the risks and structural situations that underpinned this setting remained a threaten to their citizenship. The peasants inhabited a protected area which is illegal to inhabit; they were getting involved in an illegal activity that was highly criminalized and repressed, and the illegal armed control of the territory was feeding the counter-insurgent stigma over the Guayabero region and its people. All these underlying threats made this conjuncture very fragile and the short-term outcomes very uncertain.

What began to be experienced from this insertion onwards, were fluctuating conditions surrounding coca production. Periods of increased agential capacity were followed by more restrictive ones. The policies and market opportunities contoured citizenship for cocalero peasants in different ways; in other words, shaped and (re)shaped *relation of production*. Thus, the balance of *risks*, *needs* and *opportunities* shifted and the strategic calculations —which correspond with *relation in production*— too.

To illustrate this, the following two chapters focus on two specific periods that contrast sharply with each other in respect to the *politics of production*, *labour agency* and the experience of *citizenship*.

## Chapter 4. 'Bienestar'<sup>38</sup> and coca in borrowed time (1991-2002)

The period between 1990 and 2002 in Bellavista is remembered by the cocalero peasants as a 'good time'. It was characterised by the consolidation of coca in the regional economy and, particularly in Bellavista, a time where economic wealth resulted in social wealth. This chapter presents and analyses the conjunctural aspects that circumscribe what happened in this period, while delving into the strategic choices that enable such an outcome. What this shows is the *labour agency* of peasants and how they “themselves actively make space and shape the economic geography of capitalism in ways not dictated by capital” (Herod, 2001, p. 31 in Carswell and De Neve, 2013, p. 63).

### A fleeting living space

Since the 1980s, but specially during the 1990s, Bellavista experienced significant demographic growth. As cultivating and processing coca demanded a lot of labour, the constant rise in prices from the second-half of the 80's resulted in massive migration (Uribe and Franco García, 2005, p. 44). The precarity of the peasantry at the national level continued to nourish the ranks of coca workers, many of whom arrived “in search of a better future, to work and buy a little house” (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021).

The increase in population in this region was supported by networks of relatives or friends who were telling that there was work for men picking coca leaves —being *raspachines*— and for women cooking —being *guisas*—. People narrate that all the way to *Cauca*<sup>39</sup> and *Magdalena Medio*<sup>40</sup>, invitations arrived saying “Let's go to work, I have a job for you there”, and as people stated—

You know that work in this country is often complicated, and one will go wherever it is possible to find money. Even if sometimes it does not work, one takes the chance [...] At that time —in 1985— there was the fame and the noise of drug trafficking and the gossip that there was very good work in this area [...] A lot of people arrived, people from different *departments*, all looking for work” (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

Something important to mention here is that “in those days [whoever entered] wasn't whoever wanted to, but whoever could, that is whoever had acquaintances” (Compilation of communications

---

<sup>38</sup> I use this word to refer to a state in which basic needs are met, life is enjoyed, and a sense of well-being and peace of mind are present.

<sup>39</sup> *Department* of Colombia located in the Pacific coast of the country at the opposite side of Meta (see. Annex B.)

<sup>40</sup> Region in the centre-north of the country that is composed by municipalities around the Magdalena River.

from Laura Valencia with peasants of the region, September 2018\*). The FARC already positioned in the region with military control and growing social legitimacy, closely controlled mobility. Without denying the restrictive and violent implications of this principle<sup>41</sup>, it also allowed Bellavista to be structured around networks of familiarity and closeness which facilitated the organisational processes.

During the early 1990s, people in Bellavista said they did not feel the risk associated with the illegality of coca-growing and processing (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021). This corresponds mainly with two facts. First, the government's attention was focused more on countering poppy production, while little effort being placed on eradicating coca (Tokatlian, 1998, p. 60). Second, the peasants used to sell and —based on quality<sup>42</sup>— negotiate the price of coca base paste with the *chichipatos*<sup>43</sup> (small-scale dealers who work buying and selling coca paste) not engaging directly with the FARC in this transaction. The Farc-EP were involved in the coca production chain by regulating certain aspects of its production and charging a tax —called “gramaje”— to the *chichipatos* (Uribe and Ferro, 2002; Salgado, 2012; Ortiz, 2016). However, they were still marginal to the business and more oriented towards processes of political formation and military control.

The latter implied that peasants had more capacity to intervene in the value chain and there was less political connotation associated with this business; thus, more agency, less criminalisation<sup>44</sup>. Hence, the FARC's counter-insurgent political project and the drug business were still conceived as different issues. As people from the region mentioned at that time, they feel that “there was less persecution because it was purchased by the *chichipatos* and not by the Farc-EP” (personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

The display of risks changed during the administration of President Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) and the implementation of the *Comején* and *Resplandor* Military Operations<sup>45</sup>. Forced eradication and aerial fumigation were reinforced all over the country during these years. It was the beginning of the advancement of the ‘north-americanisation’<sup>46</sup> of the fight against drugs. From this point onwards,

---

<sup>41</sup> See Espinosa (2003, 2009, 2010) to delved in to this everyday violence.

<sup>42</sup> To test the quality of the paste it had to have the powdery consistency of chalk and when heated in a spoon it had to turn into a non-lumpy liquid.

<sup>43</sup> “Chichipato: Dealers who work buying and selling cocaine paste on a small scale, a chichipato does not qualify as a drug trafficker” (Ortiz, 2016, p. 115)

<sup>44</sup> As people from the region mentioned at that time, they feel that “there was less persecution because it was purchased by the *chichipatos* and not by the Farc-EP” (personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*)

<sup>45</sup> A military operation launched at the beginning of 1995 that aimed to eradicate all illicit crops in the country within two years (Uribe and Franco García, 2005, p. 17)

<sup>46</sup> See Tokatlian, J.G. (1998) ‘US drug policy and illicit crop cultivation in Colombia: The disastrous routinisation of a misguided strategy’\*, *Análisis Político*, 35, pp. 47–69.

military forces, strongly punitive measures and forced eradication (manual or chemical) became central to anti-drugs policy. The issue of drugs assumed a strict prohibitionist approach in which the countries—more specifically certain areas—of production, processing and trafficking of narcotics carried the greatest costs in environmental, social and economic terms (Tokatlian, 1998, p. 63).

However, according to Vargas Meza (1994 in Mosquera, 2018), only a minor percentage<sup>47</sup> of the actions of these operations took place in Meta (also see *Annex D*). Not many Bellavista residents experienced repression directly, and for the few who did, recovery took a short time. “Initially, they only fumigated once a year, so you left coca bushes there and the reaction of the poison went off and they began to sprout leaves again” (Compilation of communications of Laura Valencia with peasants of the region, September 2018\*). Fumigations often affected only one harvest (not the entire crop) and by working for a few months as *raspachines* in neighbouring crops, they could recover.

A peasant from Bellavista explained that—

At the end of 1994 [I saw] the first helicopter flying low. [And my mother—who had experienced the first repressions in the 1980s told me] “*Mija*, it’s time to save everything we can from the *cambullón*”<sup>48</sup>. Because they come to burn them”. I helped her to get things out. There was smoke in the distance. [...] That’s when I got a bit nervous. I had never seen that before (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021).

Thus, even when these operations affected the population of Bellavista, they did not destabilise the local economy. Nonetheless, they strengthened the basis of a profoundly harmful anti-drug policy that further stripped the cocalero peasant from their citizenship.

Although at that time the state did not directly and forcefully threaten the lives of peasants, it did not guarantee them their rights either. However, the political, economic and social conjuncture allowed the market—mediated by individual and collective strategies—to give them rights, to some extent. While not all people were involved in the same way with coca cultivation, they agree that everyone in the region lived from the coca economy. Using different strategies but based on the possibility of work that the coca economy provided, almost all peasants in the region, directly or indirectly, could guarantee a minimum (or more) level of security. This particularly by securing their

---

<sup>47</sup> These operations began in the *departments* of Meta and Guaviare. Guaviare “concentrated 82.14% of the fumigation, while in Meta - especially towards the south - it was 17.85% in 1994” (Mosquera, 2018, p. 59\*)

<sup>48</sup> The place were peasants transform the coca leaf into base paste.

own land<sup>49</sup> because “with land you can grow your own food, your own banana plantation, your own animals” (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*). Beyond breaking the cycle of hunger, in this period coca began to play a role in the construction of a space in which they felt they could make a more certain living.

Figure 6 summarises this and the following discussion by showing that this period was appropriate for peasants to improve their living conditions. Facing manageable risks, experiencing the emergence of collective needs, and enjoying the opportunities associated with a high and relatively stable coca price and a fertile ground for strengthening organisational processes, peasants were able to build and manage a living space.

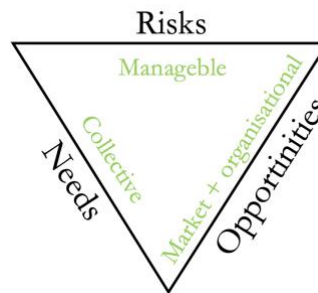


Figure 6. Triangle Risk-Needs-Opportunities in the 1991-2002  
Source: Author's elaboration

At this time, coca started to redefine the place from which the peasants linked themselves to the systems of governance and market, giving some vindication of their living conditions (Ong, 2005). As a new element in peasants' lives, coca leveraged different ways of disputing their citizenship or guaranteeing their security through other mechanisms. Family networks that drove the settlement, together with the local institutions that had been consolidating since the 1970s<sup>50</sup>, and the armed orders that sought to build a political base, allowed the consolidation of this space beyond the logic of the

---

<sup>49</sup> While possession of land is not possible within NNP there were local mechanisms to adjudicate it. “A document - usually issued by the JAC - certifies that these farms have an owner or that they have paid for them; 41% of people with their own land claim to have this certification. These forms of regulation have created an illusion of formal ownership that feeds the hope that these forms of tenure will be recognised over time. This conception of land tenure and ownership is directly related to the idea that their permanence in the territory will guarantee their forms of ownership” (Cesyeme, 2018, p. 44\*)

<sup>50</sup> Since the 1970s the local community institutions had started to emerge, in these years they gained relevance beyond actions of solidarity and daily necessity.

economic enclave. It was not only a place of extraction, nor just a place to pass through for work, it was a place for family life and communal projects.

With an increase in the population, and having basic needs resolved, what was perceived as necessary varied. Education, infrastructure, conservation, provisioning, and, in general, mechanisms of local management started to arise and be crucial. Strengthened local institutions became urgent both to regulate and manage potential conflicts between people and to provide solutions to collective needs.

After coca entered there was a time when there was good money, so people took their money, some drank, others bought cattle, others raised their children [...] Well, the school was built with the help of the community and the roads were opened [...] All these roads and all the school have been made out of the strength of the community and the people who live here (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

In this process, the most relevant local institution was the *Junta de Acción Comunal- JAC*<sup>51</sup> (Community Action Councils).

The JAC was created to make things move forward and to make things stronger. Organisation is unity. [The JAC helped] to raise more funds and to join efforts to get things done (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021).

One of the crucial aspects of the nature of the JAC was that it was not only an organic result of solidarity and the need for collaboration between neighbours, but a legal civic structure. The latter implies that it is legally regulated and entitled to intervene in local processes of control and supervision of certain public services (Law 19/1958). As a platform with local legitimacy and legal recognition it was fundamental for two main strategic opportunities for peasants; one related to the local leaderships in articulation with armed actors, and another in relation to institutional communication with the state. Through both mechanisms peasants strategically fought for their citizenship.

On the one hand, the JAC allowed the consolidation of local orders 'autonomous' from the state yet articulated with armed orders. As Jaramillo *et al.* (2018, p. 22\*) mention, "these community

---

<sup>51</sup> "The community action council is a civic, social and community organisation of social management, non-profit, of a solidary nature, with legal status and its own assets, voluntarily made up of the residents of a place who join forces and resources to procure an integral, sustainable and sustainable development based on the exercise of participatory democracy" (Law 743/2002)

institutions were often entangled with the armed insurgent social orders of the FARC, with whom they shared certain notions of justice and authority”. A leader of the community mentioned

At that time there were rules of coexistence that were followed because of [the FARC...] Since before there were no people trained to lead, it was up to [the FARC] to take the reins. That’s how I feel. But gradually the task of regulation was delegated to the organisation and the leaderships that emerged. [...] They created norms, but everything was approved by the assembly and that’s how we started [...] They [the Farc] are central to the process of leadership, organisation and consultation. They contributed a lot (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

They strengthened local institutions by coordinating local norms with the JAC and supporting collective work to make a better living in these areas. For instance, they had an active role in opening roads<sup>52</sup>, creating and enforcing environmental regulation<sup>53</sup>, prohibiting drug consumption, and making compulsory food cultivation.

On the other hand, the JAC of Bellavista with its legal status granted in 1985, opened institutional pathways to fight for peasants’ rights. In general terms the legal status granted to Bellavista’s JAC was —and still is— seen by the community as a form of state recognition of their settlement in the area, as a legitimization of it. It is thus used in public debates as a tool for claiming their rights to inhabit that territory.

Additionally, the JAC has operated as *de facto* channel for state presence. The increase in the population in the region led local politicians to turn their attention to the people there. Due to the possibility of winning votes, politicians approached the region at election time and made local commitments (mainly about infrastructure) in exchange for votes. As the peasants saw it—

We are illegal in one sense, but when the elections come, we are legal. Then we are legal because if we were illegal, they wouldn’t come in here to do political campaigning. That’s the thing. We are illegal when we need the government (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021).

In the particular ‘(re)articulation of citizenship elements’ (Ong, 2005) in Bellavista, they still held the entitlement to vote. With it they negotiated a series of interventions.

---

<sup>52</sup> See Peñaranda Currie, Otero-Bahamon and Uribe (2021) for a detail explanation of road construction.

<sup>53</sup> For instance— *Fishing*: (1) Fish only for consumption —do not fish to throw away or sell, (2) Do not fish during the spawning season, which is normally the winter months of May, June, and July. *Hunting*: (3) It is forbidden to hunt tapir, deer or mico - fine of 2.000.000 or community work, (4) Hunting restricted to consumption due to tendency to extinction of wildlife, (5)The house must be shared with neighbours. *Cut down trees*: (6) Do not cut down virgin mountains. (7) Only stubble logging is allowed, (8) It must be done 100 meters<sup>2</sup> away of the rivers. *Waste*: (9) Waste should be must be buried in specific places, (10) Neighbours should be notified for burning. (Cesyeme, 2018, p. 67)



However, in this context this was not a simple clientelist transaction like any other. Since Bellavista is located within a National Natural Park, the government cannot invest or carry out just any intervention. The overlapping of their settlement with the conservation area also procedurally limits the guarantee of rights in this region. In this paradoxical context, the JAC became the mechanism through which these transactions took place. For instance, the government does not directly improve a road by hiring the tractor and sending it—as it would do in another context—but gives the money to the JAC and it is the JAC that hires and manages the service.

O'Donnell (1993) refers to this arguing that, due to high territorial and functional heterogeneity of the Colombian state<sup>54</sup>, the state power coexists with territorial base powers (public and *de facto*) between which power circuits are established. The issue with this is that this dialogue with the state does not take place within the formal and normative mechanisms for guaranteeing citizens' rights, but through personal relationships. It is still a strategy to manoeuvre within the available opportunities and as such is fragile and can tend towards a violent or personalistic ways of ruling (O'Donnell, 1993). Peasants are aware that this is just a strategic action they are taking to obtain benefits from the state that they would otherwise lack. They recognise that this is not the (whole) solution and that it does not replace state responsibility to guarantee their rights. In their words—

The [so called] “social investments” that the state have made here in roads and schools is because the mayor has collaborated, without any project. The mayor tells the community “I give you 10 million pesos or 5 million pesos”. But this is not the work the mayor has to do. We have been working in this way, yet that is not a clear solution. (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

Within the opportunities provided by the context and through the strategic collective actions described above, the inhabitants of Bellavista managed to make the 1990s ‘the best’ years of the settlement. They had everything they needed, there were several local businesses for selling beer and dancing, small but well-stocked shops for buying groceries and the school was getting bigger every day. They even managed to build a health facility. A woman that arrived around the 1999 said—

When I arrived, this was a very good place, this was the main centre, everyone had to pass through here [...] At that time there were a lot of people around (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

---

<sup>54</sup> Which means that “the effectiveness of the law extends very irregularly [...] across the territory and the functional relations” (O'Donnell, 1993)

The entrance of people and money to the region together with mechanisms of local governance enabled the economic boom to be translated into *'bienestar'*. As people from the region said, “We know that coca is illegal, yet it has been the livelihood of the whole region along the Guayabero river” (Compilation of communications of Laura Valencia with peasants of the region, September 2018\*).

Coca acted as a real *rearguard economy* and an economic resource that the Colombian state was unable to satisfy (Tovar, 1993, p. 26). As a leader of the community mentioned “coca has represented health, education, and infrastructure. All that we have in our communities and in our homes has been because of coca” (Cesycme, 2019\*)<sup>55</sup>.

### **Assessing an Interlude of Well-Being**

From the above, it can be seen how coca opened livelihood possibilities for peasants that the state and the legal market had denied them. The name of this chapter *'Bienestar' and coca in borrowed time (1991-2002)* alludes to the optimal but fleeting enjoyment that cocalero peasant experienced in those years. Between 1991 and 2002 the intersection of the coca economy, with a context of political neglect (rather than repression) and the re-signification of “the illegal”, allowed the emergence of local governance orders which acted as catalysts for *bienestar*. However, the chapter also shows how the foundations for future (severe) repression and violence were being consolidated.

A similar period of wellbeing was experienced again between 2012 and 2018, during the government of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014 and 2014-2018). In this period, the dynamics of the fight against drugs shifted<sup>56</sup>. The forced eradication and aerial fumigation were significantly reduced to the point of suspending aerial spraying in 2015. In 2016, drug policy in Colombia —at least in terms of its initial formulation— started to move beyond eradication, criminalisation, and militarisation policies to align itself with development and peacebuilding objectives (Goodhand et al., 2021). With the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia —FARC-EP (2016) “finally the connection between illicit drugs and rural development was unequivocally made” (Gutiérrez D., 2021). As María Clemencia Ramírez (2017) states, the discourses

---

<sup>55</sup> This resonates with a statement of a cocalero peasant in Argelia (South-Western Colombia) —referenced by Gutiérrez D. (2021, p. 4)— who said “whatever dignity we have in our conditions of life, we owe it to the sense of discipline given to us by the FARC and to coca”.

<sup>56</sup> In 2012 “President Santos publicly declared himself at the Summit of the Americas in favor of a new policy approach in the face of the failure of strategies that had been implemented for more than two decades, and that included the adoption of the rhetoric of harm reduction and non-violation of human rights (El Colombiano 2012; CRS, 2017 in Acero and Machuca, 2021, p. 4)

of truth, reparation and reconciliation that framed this treaty opened up the possibility for institutional recognition of coca growers as victims and subjects of differentiated rights.

This, again, provided more space to manoeuvre for the cocalero peasant —local institutions were strengthened and disputes over rights took place in new spaces in the public arena. However, its effective implementation was minimal. The *de facto* peasants' citizenship continued to be hindered by the prohibitionist inertia, which was not easy to alter.

As representative of a relatively good period, this chapter has also shown how specific and fragile *relations of production* facilitated the capacity of local powers to make claims in relation to living conditions, through paths different from those of legal and normative citizenship (Ong, 2005). It demonstrates that the *relation in production* enhanced the capacity to rework and re-signify —without structurally changing— existing forms of regulation, governance, and ethical understanding. Thus, the capacity to strategically navigate *risks, needs* and *opportunities*. As the next chapter shows, these possibilities for action and welfare were, however, fleeting. The balance of power of the times quickly shifted, and within a few years and a change of president, the scenario became completely different.

## Chapter 5.

### *Bare lives exposed (2002-2012)*

This earlier period of economic growth and manageable risks was followed by a period of increasing persecution and repression. By 2002 the situation changed significantly for the cocalero peasants of Bellavista. In addition to their increasing criminalisation as cocalero peasants, they began to feel the burden of their condition as inhabitants of the National Natural Park (NNP) and their stigmatisation as *guerrilleros*<sup>57</sup>. All the latent risks became manifest. This chapter delves into the conjunctural elements that converged to turn the peasants' illegal status from a constraint to a life-threatening risk. It shows how state discourses framed the understanding of the region and its inhabitants in order to legitimise violent actions. Here the peasants experienced the complete stripping of their citizenship. Their strategies for making a living had to change.

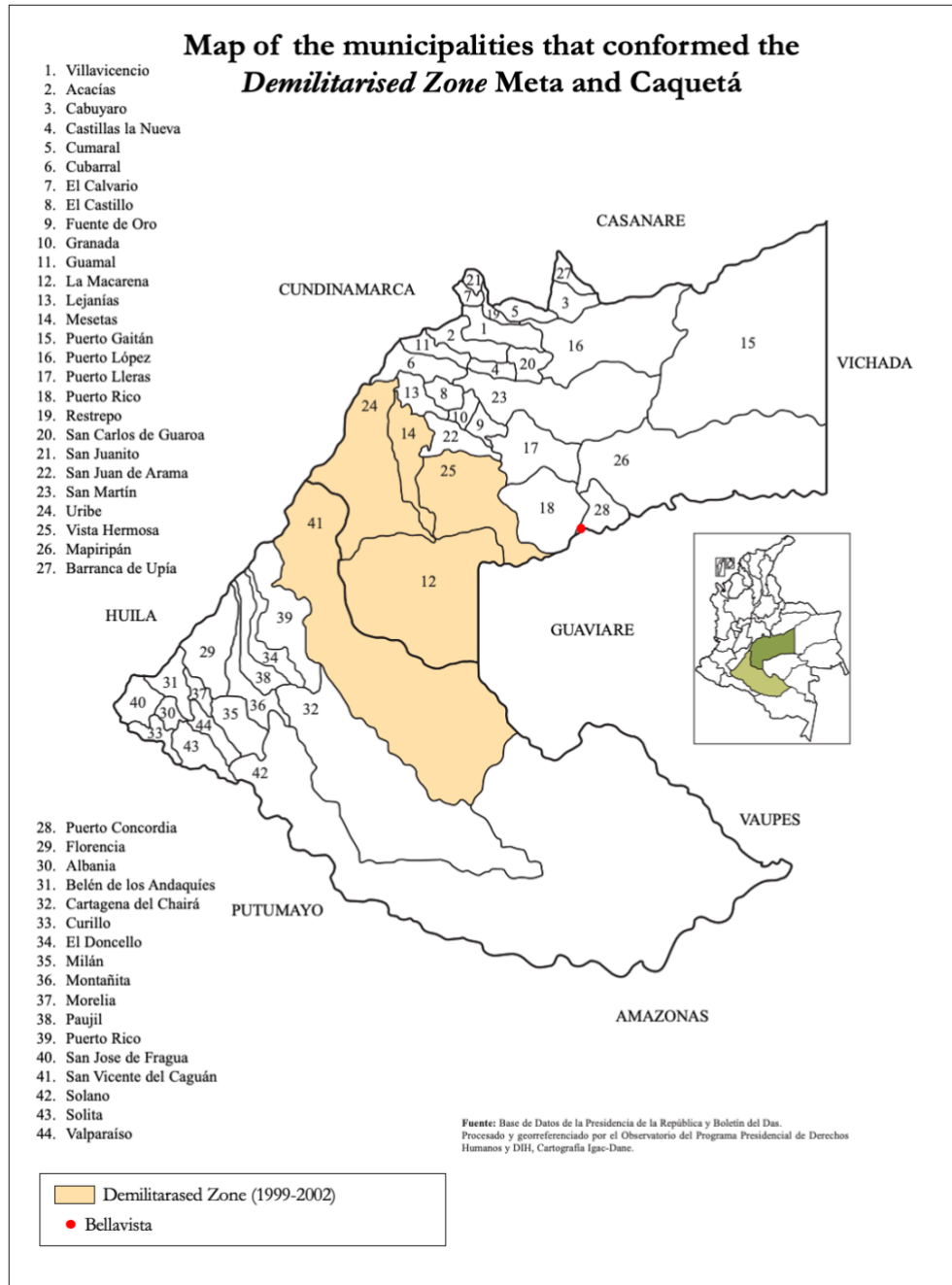
#### **The process of stripping lives bare**

At the end of the 1990s the FARC gained more regional power. During the government of Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002), in order to move towards a peace agreement with the FARC, he decided to create a “Demilitarised Zone- DMZ”<sup>58</sup>. This involved withdrawing all military presence from five municipalities in Caquetá and Meta *departments* to allow the FARC to establish itself there (see. Map 2). As is shown in the map below, Bellavista was not within the municipalities of this cleared zone. However, being a neighbouring area with a strong guerrilla presence, it experienced the strengthening of FARC control during the years of the clearance and the strong state repression that followed.

---

<sup>57</sup> Guerrilleros is a word use to refer to the people that are part of left-wing illegal armed groups. Bellavista peasants' stigmatization as guerrilleros was due to their closeness —spatially and sometimes politically— with the FARC.

<sup>58</sup> The national government of Colombia by means of Resolution number 85 of 14 October 1998 declares the initiation of a peace process with the FARC-EP, the recognition of the political character of this armed organisation and a demilitarised zone in the municipalities of Mesetas, La Uribe, La Macarena, Vista Hermosa (municipalities of the department of Meta) and San Vicente del Caguán (department of Caquetá) (Resolution n° 85 of 1998)



Map 2. Map of the Demilitarized Zone (1999-2002)

Source: Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario, 2003\*. Modify by the author.

From 1999 to 2002—the years in which this DMZ operated—Caquetá and Meta became a central point for guerrilla operations as well as a hotspot for illegal crops. One of the most significant changes in the region for cocalero peasants was that during this period the FARC decided to get more involved in the coca business. They stopped charging the “gramaje” to the *chichipatos* and started buying coca base paste directly from the peasants. People narrate that—

In 2000 the FARC began to buy coca directly, and we stopped selling it to the *chichipatos*. By then the kilogram was paid up to \$1,900,000, and they started to buy it at \$2,300,000. They increased a lot the price and that made us very happy (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

Although this change in market dynamics increased the price of coca base paste by 26%, it had other less positive effects. On the one hand, it limited the ability of peasants to negotiate the price according to the quality of their paste—as they used to do before with *chichipatos* (mentioned in chapter 3). On the other hand, having a single buyer allowed that buyer to arbitrarily set prices without considering the variation of market prices—neither upstream nor downstream. Over time, this resulted in a “stickiness” of the price, which meant that peasants had to assume growing production costs while their profits were squeezed constantly. Lastly, the new relation of the FARC with the cocaine production chain increased the persecution and stigmatization of cocalero peasants. A vision of peasants as “*narco-guerrilleros*” started then to gain more credence in institutional and social fields.

The DMZ and its surroundings became the FARC’s “*political and economic rearguard*” (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2011). Thus, after its dissolution in 2002, the region turned out to be a focal point for counter-insurgency and counter-narcotics efforts. In the states’ need to refund “its modes of order and lawmaking” (Das and Poole, 2004, p. 8), violent actions were justified. Under the discourses of the need for state intervention to “guarantee security for the population, build legitimacy and state presence in the area and to finally dismantle the legitimacy of the guerrillas” (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2011, p. 15\*), cocalero peasants ‘lives’ were put in question (Paraphrasing Das and Poole, 2004, p. 10).

This was supported by the government of United States through the financialization of the *Plan Colombia* (1999-2015), “a full-scale counter-narcotics-cum-counter-insurgency strategy” (Gutiérrez D., 2021, p. 1). In the framework of this plan based on the ‘north-american’ vision on drugs, the problem of coca cultivation was understood as a military problem and one of control. Ignoring any comprehension of the underlying agrarian problem, fumigation and forced eradication were the

main (if not the only<sup>59</sup>) strategies of this governmental plan of action<sup>60</sup>. As shown in the graphic below (Figure 7), fumigations increased significantly from 2000, reaching their highest peak in 2002.

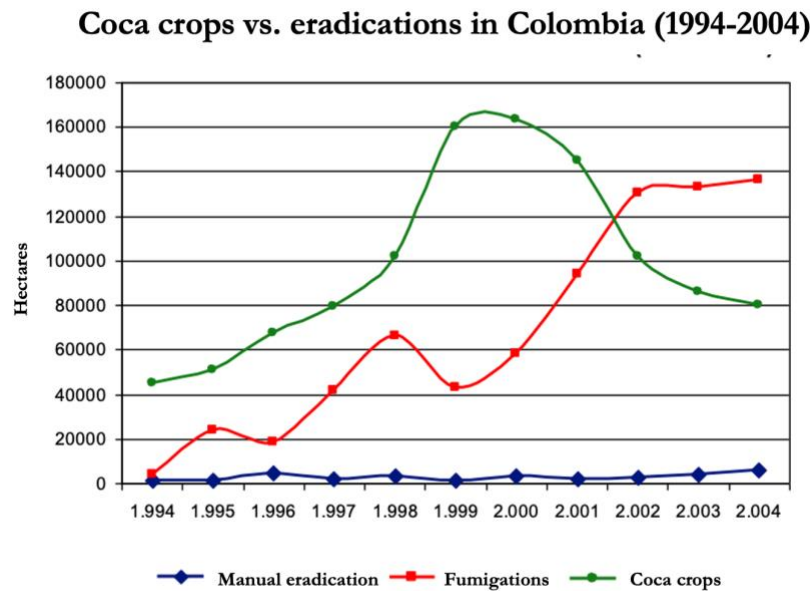


Figure 7. Graphic of Coca crops vs eradications in Colombia (1994-2004)  
Source: Uribe and Franco García, 2005, p. 21 Graphic 4\*

The struggle to regain the ceded territory went beyond recovering military control. The objective was to “dissolve the FARC’s social base in La Macarena, breaking the coca economy that linked the inhabitants of the Natural Park to the guerrillas” (Ruiz, 2006, p. 19\*). It was aimed at eliminating all social structures in the area, politically and economically. Consequently, coca growers became the military objective and perhaps the easiest target. The division between the guerrillas and coca growers, and between illegal armed orders and local institutions, was deliberately blurred. By this arbitrary redrawing of boundaries, cocalero peasants’ lives were stripped of every right and pushed completely out of their citizenship. Hence, anyone could kill them without committing homicide (Agamben, 1998, p. 52).

<sup>59</sup> “Between 2000 and 2006, the two departments [Meta and Guaviare] accounted for 5.4% of the total investment in alternative development projects [..However, at] the national level, alternative development programmes have had a low impact on coca production” (Tobón and Restrepo, 2009, p. 122)

<sup>60</sup> “The importance of the military component in the resources allocated to combat drug trafficking implied a considerable increase in fumigations, which went from 94,152 ha in 2001 to 136,551 ha in 2004”(Uribe and Franco García, 2005, p. 20)

In 2005, fumigation began to take place in the Serranía de la Macarena National Park. The government argued that “the collateral damage left by the FARC [was] greater than the fumigation itself” (Redacción de Justicia, 2006 in Tobón and Restrepo, 2009, p. 119\*). People remember that

During Uribe’s two administrations<sup>61</sup> the government did not lower the presence of the army in this area. That was when I started to think: the government blames us because one cut down a tree, yet during Uribe’s mandate there was so much glyphosate<sup>62</sup> in this whole area. (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

However, after a series of aerial spraying of glyphosate over the forests of the Natural Park, in 2006 environmental authorities denounced the serious implications of those actions<sup>63</sup>. Many sectors of public opinion, and particular, some European governments<sup>64</sup>, underlined the high environmental cost of spraying a biological heritage area (Ruiz, 2006; Tobón and Restrepo, 2009).

Therefore, in order to distance itself from these controversial criticisms, so as not to lose the popularity that comes with an interest in conservation, and to reinforce the legitimacy of its actions, the government of Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) launched Operation *Colombia Verde* —Green Colombia (Ruiz, 2006; Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2011). This plan aimed, instead, to manually eradicate 5,000 hectares of coca<sup>65</sup> (Ruiz, 2006, p. 1) to recover the forest from the *guerrillas* and the drug business.

The *Plan Colombia* and its counterpart in the region *Colombia Verde* meant the deployment of tremendous violence against peasant communities in the South-East of Colombia. As a result of it, entire villages were razed, and thousands of people were displaced (Gutiérrez D., 2021, p. 1). More than 100 families from Bellavista and the nearby settlements were displaced by the military forces during this operation (Tobón and Restrepo, 2009, p. 130) and 341 in the Meta *department* overall (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2011, p. 15). As Tobón y Restrepo argued (2009, p. 130\*) “The arrival

---

<sup>61</sup> Alvaro Uribe was president of Colombia during two consecutive periods 2002-2006 and 2006- 2010 and the implementation on the Plan Colombia took place during his administration.

<sup>62</sup> In Colombia, aerial spraying is said to be done with glyphosate, a commonly used herbicide that has various effects on health and the environment. However, since 1999 “A modified formula based on Roundup has been applied”. Roundup is “a commercial formula registered by the Monsanto Company, [that] contains a surfactant called polyoxyethylamine (POEA), which is much more toxic than glyphosate [...] In various countries, Roundup is classified among the first pesticides to cause poisoning in humans [...] is known is that glyphosate has contaminated ground and surface waters in various countries [...]Glyphosate is toxic for some beneficial organisms such as parasitic wasps and other arthropod predators, and soil arthropods that are important for soil aeration and humus formation”(The *Aerial Eradication of Illicit Crops*, 2005).

<sup>63</sup> “In August 2006, the Natural Parks Unit of the Ministry of the Environment initiated a sanctioning process against the National Narcotics Directorate and the Anti-Narcotics Police, due to the fact that the fumigations in La Macarena presumably did not comply with Colombian environmental regulations, especially Resolution 0015 of August 2005 of the National Narcotics Council” (González-Plazas, 2007, p. 23)

<sup>64</sup> The fumigation of a NNP implied the violation internal decreets (the Natural Resources Code, the 1977 decree law, law 99 of 1993) and international agreements established with the Dutch embassy, the ILO, Unesco and the 1992 Rio Summit (Tobón and Restrepo, 2009)

<sup>65</sup> It is worth noting that in 2005 the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2006, p. 47) recorded only 3,354 hectares of coca in the NNP of the Serranía de la Macarena. Then, the fact that they were inflating the numbers —mor the 1.600 hectares, exemplify the manipulation of discourse by the authorities to justify the violence that took place in that region.



of 930 eradicators and 1,350 police and army personnel not only meant the end of the illicit economy, but also implied food and logistical demands that put the peasants at risk”. A peasant from the region said—

when they fumigate, they finish everything: coca, food, whatever there is. It is hard. But when they come to eradicate, we also suffer because there are many abuses. So, it’s hard for us either way (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*).

At this moment the conservation, counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency discourses converged to justify abuses commitment against people in the region. In this regard, a peasant from Bellavista mentioned—

I realised that I was in the National Natural Park from 2006 onwards. So, I was here in 2006 when there was the eradication and when the army said to us that Uribe was taking us out of here. Uribe’s goal was to finish with the guerrillas, to finish with coca and to get us out of the park. And that was serious for him (Compilation of Cesycme communications with peasants in the Bellavista, 2017\*).

Many people who had been living in Bellavista for years and had never heard that they were living in a national park, found out about it in those years. The entity of territorial planning, which had not made itself felt in a significant way in the lives of peasants since 1971 when it was created, became crucial at this juncture to legitimate violence in this territory and its population. Using Das and Poole (2004, p. 13) terms, conservation was part of the complex arrangement of public discussions and legal decisions that made peasants’ lives bare and made their bodies killable.

Therefore, the discourses of conservation allowed not only direct actions towards coca crop eradication but also push further the line for the “legitimate” (rather merely legal) use of violence. It was no longer a matter of ending coca cultivation, but of emptying a territory and regaining a monopoly over certain strategic resources. A peasant’s description of what happened shows how respect for the lives of these peasants was practically non-existent. She mentioned that in 2006 when the force eradication process started —

That’s when the hardest part started [...] That was a terrible episode. Hearing bullets here, bombs there, a helicopter there, a helicopter there, your house full of disrespectful soldiers, bathing completely naked in the river, and me and my daughter there —she was 6 years old at the time. They burnt down our house, they stole our televisions, they stole money, they damaged our freezer, they ate our chickens, our crops, and apart from that they threatened us saying: “you leave or we won’t be responsible of

whatever happens here because we are going to bomb all of this”<sup>66</sup> (Compilation of communications from Cesycme with peasants of the region, 2017).

In the face of this situation, the possibilities for action of the cocalero peasants were very limited. Most of them had no choice but to migrate. They migrated to their places of origin, to San José del Guaviare (the nearest *departmental* capital) or to another area where they could settle. In this migration, the last earnings or savings they were able to collect, both from coca and from the complementary activities, were fundamental. They sold what beer was left in the store, slaughtered the pigs and chickens that they had, harvested the final food crops, picked up some unpaid bills and left the region with what they could with no certainty of where they would end up.

Peasants in the region were forcibly displaced by state actions. The state, which is supposed to guarantee the security and well-being of its citizens, was the same state that was and is threatening the lives of the coca growers. Their lives were “reconstituted through special laws as populations on whom new forms of regulation can be exercised” (Das and Poole, 2004, p. 12). Therefore, when these peasants came forward to denounce their displacement due to forced eradications, the state did not recognise them as victims. “There were complaints to the ombudsman's office, to the mayor’s office, but no one ever answered” (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021\*). Although more than 300 people were demanding attention and reparation for human rights violations that occurred during the eradications, there was no space for considering their damages. As a result of an action carried out and justified within “legal margins”, forced eradication was not recognised as a victimising event and the army could not be singled out as the victimiser.

As *figure 8* shows, conditions at this juncture changed significantly from the previous period. *Risks* went from being manageable to being extremely high. Basic *needs* were once again unmet due to displacement and raids. This was exacerbated by the lack of mechanisms or instances of protection for individual and collective life. The only *opportunity* that seemed available to respond to these needs in this context was the possibility of re-engaging in the illegal market.

---

<sup>66</sup> For instance, in February of 2006 “President Alvaro Uribe announced that areas of the highlands [of the Serranía de la Macarena] will be bombed, after the evacuation of civilians and before the eradicators enter” (El Tiempo, 2006)



Figure 8. Triangle Risk-Needs-Opportunities between 2002-2012  
 Source: Author's elaboration

State policies, as a political instrument of production and domination, contribute to the creation of the political and ideological conditions for coca production and re-production. The precariousness and exclusion that result from eradication, translated into material realities that lead to the re-involvement of peasants in coca cultivation. The cocalero peasants, once again left completely unprotected, decided, to return to the region and start from scratch. With families, no land elsewhere to settle, no money to travel, and no reparation by the state, many peasants returned to whatever had been left for them in Bellavista. This time, even with the fear of eradication, they did not have other option, and in the midst of so many unsatisfied needs, coca once again became their means of survival.

The military operations in the region “didn’t get rid of the coca, nor could they get rid of the guerrillas”, as one of the peasants said, but they did contribute to restarting the cycle of precariousness that had initially led the peasants to cultivate coca. Gradually, the people of the region began to recover and to plant coca again. At this point the risk did not disappear. For several years they continued to experience irregular captures and sporadic eradications. Violations of rights continued to occur on a daily basis. As Jessop (2007, p. 30) argues, agents face dilemmas of interests in certain situations because their interests are not monolithic. Thus, a situation/decision that undermines one condition of existence in some respects, can be the same that enhance other in another respects. On this occasion, peasants had to compromise their interests in security and cope with their exposure to state violence, in exchange for being able to recover lost resources and continue building their personal, family and community projects, which, in this context, required the coca economy. Coca did not occupy the same place or allow the same scope for peasants’ livelihood strategies as in the previous period. Nevertheless, it remained crucial for navigating the structural constraints.

Furthermore, in order to reduce the security compromised by coca cultivation, community organisations to self-manage the security of the peasants were created. Unlike the relationships and

organisations in the past period, these new community structures were more reactive. One of the most prominent organisations in the region created in 2010 as a result of these long process of rebuilding life in the region was the Association of Peasants and Workers of the Guayabero (*Ascatragua* by its acronym in Spanish). People say —

*Ascatragua* taught us the rights that we have as peasants, that we have to claim them, here or wherever we go, because we are human beings and we have rights, to a dignified life, to the respect for territory. I always said *Ascatragua* has always been the mother of the Guayabero peasants (Compilation of communications from Cesyeme with peasants of the region, 2017).

Without the “paternalistic” protection of the state, regional organisations became the “maternalistic” refuge. With *Ascatragua* and the Human rights’ committees that emerge from its work

We learned that this is our territory, that we have to respect it and fight for it, that we are not foreigners, we are also Colombians and we have the right to a dignified life. Sometimes one had already forgotten all these things, or if one knew them one was not able to say them, one swallowed them... This was damaging and allowing the abuse. “As he/she doesn’t say anything then I burn his/her house, I take him/her away and nothing happens” (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021).

While the condition of illegality had to some extent permeated even their own ways of conceiving themselves, the reflexive possibility of their condition allowed them to recognise the arbitrariness of the law and their constitutional status as citizens and ontological status as humans.

## **No more borrowed time**

In this scenario of exacerbated conflict, the elements of citizenship were (re)articulated in such a way as to remove the few remaining securities cocalero peasants had as citizens (Das and Poole, 2004; Ong, 2005). The space for peasants’ action shrunk due to power relations and legal procedures. Anti-drug, anti-insurgent and conservationist discourses converged at this juncture to produce — legally and thus “rationally”— bare lives. This shows how sovereignty is exercised not just over territories, but over life.

However, as *Bare lives* themselves have their own moral legitimacy, they intentionally trace their relationship to ethics and to labour in order for them to safeguard their rights beyond the state (Ong, 2006). Coca growing is then the strategic choice of these exposed bodies and will remain so until there is a different possibility that can provide security. The same strategies that the state adopts to combat

the “drug problem” are those that perpetuate its existence; in other words, the policies created to eradicate coca are the ones that keep reproducing the *relation of production* that render possible its production.

Today, a scenario very similar to the one described above is being experienced. After a period of hope marked by the peace agreement, in 2018 with the coming to power of Ivan Duque (2018-2022), the politics of the Uribe’s years are returning. The meeting of a failed substitution program, the increase in the number of hectares with coca, United States pressure to reduce the coca production, and the current concern over the accelerated deforestation that is occurring, is leading to a repetition of patterns similar to those of the period analysed in this chapter. This encounter of repressive policies together with the low profitability of coca at the moment in the region<sup>67</sup>, is again displacing people.

Today in Bellavista more than a third of the population has left; some have migrated deeper into the jungle to areas where “The Dissidence” of the FARC<sup>68</sup> does not control the “business” and where the price of coca is better, and others have migrated to nearby cities (Puerto Concordia or San José del Guaviare) in search of opportunities. Coca production is not disappearing, it is just finding another space where the balance of *risk-needs-opportunities* is prone to pull people to cultivate coca.

The cycle of state violence seems to be reactivating, but this time, the market does not seem to provide an alternative.

---

<sup>67</sup> “In 2000, when the coca was released by the *chichipatos* and taken by the FARC, coca went from 1.9 billion to 2.3 billion, today it is 2.4 billion and everything is more expensive, and it is no longer enough. That's barely enough to sustain oneself“(Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021).

<sup>68</sup>In Bellavista, the 1st Front of the FARC, today known as "The Dissidence", continues to be present. It is one of the few FARC fronts that did not accept the peace agreement.

## Conclusion.

### Wavering uncertainly between life and death

Based on the analysis of two political and economic conjunctures that compromise peasant citizenship to different degrees, this analysis has explained how peasants' themselves craft possibilities of living through their engagement in the cocaine global value chain. Adopting a *politics of production* perspective allowed this research to delve into the analysis of coca production and reproduction in a region — reaching an understanding of the mutual configuration of capitalist development, state power and subjects' agency. The study employed a relational understanding, combining the political and ideological (*relation of production*) with the material (*relations in production*) conditions surrounding the labour process. This helped the research find substantive explanations that contribute to an unpacking of complex realities and their variations over time.

As shown in this paper, cocalero peasants' chances of making a living depend on very fragile conjunctures and their own abilities to craft possibilities of living within their limited options. Moreover, their limited possibilities are subject —to an important extent— to the state's effort to unmake and remake its sovereignty in marginal areas (Goodhand, 2021); in other words, to redefine peoples citizenship. Through cycles of intervention (by repression) and neglect, the state produces peasant bare lives, thus generating the *relations of production* that give rise to coca. As a consequence, cocalero peasants constantly find themselves “wavering uncertainly between life and death” (Agamben, 1998, p.93).

This study moves the debate from the labour processes into the realm of politics, and politics into the sphere of life, thus allowing for an ethical consideration of labour. As such, it shows how the value of life in the time of globalization is increasingly varied, fragmented, contingent, and ambiguous (Ong, 2006) and how —in circumstances where 'being' is at stake— labour is central to defending life. In this way, the transformative potentialities and emancipatory power of labour that Marx referred to a couple of hundreds years ago, are brought to the fore. Labour becomes central to an understanding of how people deploy their energy, creativity, and ingenuity to ensure their reproduction and satisfy their interests (as far as possible).

Many questions remain open. Due to the limitations of this research paper (mentioned in Chapter 2), some other interesting issues were not addressed. For instance, a more detailed study of how this *uncertain citizenship* affects the population differently according to class, gender, age, race, or

ethnicity would enrich the present work. As Ong (1999, p. 19) expresses it, “Our challenge is to consider the reciprocal construction of practice, gender, ethnicity, race, class, and nation in processes of capital accumulation”. Also, extending—in time and/or space—the analysis can contribute to a further understanding of the variegated nuances of this complex issue.

To close this RP, I would like to leave the reader with a few words that give personal meaning to this exercise of research. Eliza Mancilla—a leader in the region and a woman I admire—sitting in a café, on the last day of my fieldwork, said to me:

We are coca growers, but that doesn't make us illegal, it is a way of making a living [...] We are not outsiders, we are also Colombians, and we have the right to a dignified life (Personal communication with peasants from the region, July 2021).

Eliza, I hope that this research endeavour contributes a bit to your struggles for a dignified life.

## References

- Acero, C. and Machuca, D. (2021) 'The substitution program on trial: progress and setbacks of the peace agreement in the policy against illicit crops in Colombia', *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 89, p. 103158. doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2021.103158.
- Agamben, G. (1998) *Homo Sacer: El poder soberano y la nuda vida*. Translated by A.G. Cuspiner. Valencia.
- Arcila, O. et al. (2002) *Caquetá, Construcción de un territorio amazónico en el siglo XX*. Instituto Amazónico de Investigaciones Científicas 'SINCHI'.
- Ballvé, T. (2012) 'Everyday State Formation: Territory, Decentralization, and the Narco Landgrab in Colombia', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 30(4), pp. 603–622. doi:10.1068/d4611.
- Bernstein, H. (2010) *Class Dynamics of Agrarian Change*. Halifax, N.S. : Sterling, VA: A Kumarian Press Book.
- Burawoy, M. (1985) *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes Under Capitalism and Socialism*. London : New York, N.Y.
- Carswell, G. and De Neve, G. (2013) 'Labouring for global markets: Conceptualising labour agency in global production networks', *Geoforum*, 44, pp. 62–70. doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.06.008.
- Cesycme (2018) *Dilemas territoriales de los Campesinos en Parques Nacionales Naturales: el caso de la vereda de Bellavista en el municipio de Puerto Concordia - Sur del Meta*. Informe técnico. Bogotá, Colombia: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.
- Cesycme (2019) *BELLAVISTA. Campesinos, coca y conservación en los PNN*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJ2ZU5LeWv4&t=1202s> (Accessed: 27 June 2021).
- Ciro Rodríguez, E. (2019) *Levantados de la selva: Vidas y legitimidades en los territorios cocaleros del Caquetá*. Ediciones Uniandes-Universidad de los Andes.
- Collier, S.J. and Lakoff, A. (eds) (2004) 'On Regimes of Living', in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*. Malden, MA.
- Cubides, J. (2018) *Distintas maneras de ser campesino: la heterogeneidad de las formas campesinas de producción en tres fincas de Villabermosa, Tolima*. Trabajo de grado Requisito para optar por el título de Socióloga. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. Available at: <https://eds-a-ebcohost-com.ezproxy.javeriana.edu.co/eds/detail/detail?vid=1&sid=c96de1cd-af9d-47ba-9e79-b07e49db22d8%40sessionmgr4008&bdata=Jmxhbm9ZXMmc2l0ZT1lZHMtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=pujbc.927724&db=cat01040a>.
- Dagnino, E. (2003) 'Citizenship in Latin America: An Introduction', *Latin American Perspectives*, 30(2), pp. 211–225. doi:10.1177/0094582X02250624.
- Das, V. and Poole, D. (2004) 'State and Its Margins: Comparative Ethnographies', in *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*. Santa Fe, N.M. : Oxford England, pp. 3–34.
- Das, V. and Poole, D. (2008) 'El estado y sus márgenes. Etnografías comparadas', *Revista Académica de Relaciones internacionales*, 8.



- Espinosa, N. (2003) *"A la otra orilla del río " la relación de los campesinos y la guerrilla en la Macarena.* doi:10.13140/RG.2.1.4864.3048.
- Espinosa, N. (2006) 'Coca, coqueras and cocaleros illicit ethnography of the rural life in the Macarena', *Revista Cultura y Droga*, 11, pp. 113–152.
- Espinosa, N. (2009) 'Etnografía de la violencia en la vida diaria. Aspectos metodológicos de un estudio de caso. Informe de investigación', *Universitas Humanística*, pp. 105–125.
- Espinosa, N. (2010) *Política De Vida Y Muerte. Etnografía De La Violencia Diaria En La Sierra De La Macarena.* ICAHN.
- Fals Borda, O. (1994) *Historia de la cuestión agraria en Colombia.* Tercera. Bogotá, Colombia: Carlos Valencia editores.
- Fundación Ideas para la Paz (2011) *Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena.* www.ideaspaz.org/publicaciones.
- Gaviria, A. (2016) *El capricho de Nixon que torció el destino de Colombia, Semana.com Últimas Noticias de Colombia y el Mundo.* Available at: <https://www.semana.com/cultura/articulo/alejandrogaviria--escribe-sobre-la-guerra-contra-las-drogas-en-su-libro-alguien-tiene-que-llevar-la-contraria/505234/> (Accessed: 13 September 2021).
- George, A.L. (2005) 'Phase One: Designing Case Study Research', in *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences.* Cambridge, Mass.
- Gobierno Nacional de Colombia (1958) *Ley 19.* Available at: <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=8271> (Accessed: 29 October 2021).
- González, F. (2012) 'Prefacio', in Piña, E., *Entre La Frontera Del Desarrollo Y El Desarrollo De La Frontera.* Bogotá, D.C., Colombia: Odecofi-Cinep.
- González-Plazas, S. (2007) *La erradicación manual de cultivos ilícitos en la sierra de La Macarena: un ejercicio sobre la futilidad de las políticas.* Facultad de Economía. Centro de Estudios y Observatorio de Drogas y Delito (CEODD). Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Rosario.
- Goodhand, J. (2021) 'Beyond the narco frontier; rethinking an imaginary of the margins', *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 89, p. 103045. doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.103045.
- Goodhand, J. *et al.* (2021) 'Critical policy frontiers: The drugs-development-peacebuilding trilemma', *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 89, p. 103115. doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2021.103115.
- Gootenberg, P. (2008) *Andean Cocaine: The Making of a Global Drug.* Chapel Hill.
- Gootenberg, P. (2018) 'Orphans of development: the unanticipated rise of illicit coca in the Amazon Andes, 1950-1990', in Dávalos, L.M. and Gootenberg, P. (eds) *The Origins of Cocaine: Colonization and Failed Development in the Amazon Andes.* New York: Routledge. Available at: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1777011> (Accessed: 6 December 2020).
- Griffith, D. (2009) 'The Moral Economy of Tobacco', *American Anthropologist*, 111(4), pp. 432–442.
- Gutierrez, E. (2020) 'The paradox of illicit economies: survival, resilience, and the limits of development and drug policy orthodoxy', *Globalizations* [Preprint]. doi:10.1080/14747731.2020.1718825.

- Gutiérrez D., J.A. (2021) “Whatever we have, we owe it to coca”. Insights on armed conflict and the coca economy from Argelia, Colombia’, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 89, p. 103068. doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.103068.
- Gutiérrez-Sanín, F. (2019) ‘Tensiones y dilemas de la producción cocalera’, *Análisis Político*, 32(97), pp. 71–90. doi:10.15446/anpol.v32n97.87193.
- Gutiérrez-Sanín, F. (2021) ‘Tough tradeoffs Coca crops and agrarian alternatives in Colombia’, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, p. 103156. doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2021.103156.
- Holden, C. (2017) ‘Graduated sovereignty and global governance gaps: Special economic zones and the illicit trade in tobacco products’, *Political Geography*, 59, pp. 72–81. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.03.002.
- Infodrogas (2021) *Cocaína*. Available at: <https://www.infodrogas.org/drogas/cocaina> (Accessed: 7 November 2021).
- Jaramillo, J. et al. (2018) *Instituciones comunitarias para la paz en Colombia*.
- Jaramillo, J., Mora, L. and Cubides, F. (1989) *Colonización, coca y guerrilla*. Alianza Editorial Colombiana.
- Jessop, B. (2007) ‘The Development of the Strategic- Relational Approach’, in *State Power*. Polity.
- Jessop, B. (2017) ‘State theory’, in Ansell, C.K. and Torfing, J. (eds) *Handbook on theories of governance*. Paperback edition. Cheltenham, Glos ; Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- Li, T.M. (2014) *Land’s End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier*. Durham ; London.
- Margulis, M., Mckee, N. and Borrás, S. (2013) ‘Land Grabbing and Global Governance: Critical Perspectives’, *Globalizations*, 10. doi:10.1080/14747731.2013.764151.
- Molano, A. (1987) *Selva adentro: Una historia oral de la colonización del Guaviare*. Bogotá.
- Molano, A. (1989) ‘El proceso de colonización de la region del Ariari-Güejar’, in Cubides, Fernando, Antanas Mockus Sivickas, Mario Avellaneda, Henry González, Óscar Arcila Niño, Alfredo Molano, Hugo Acero, Juan Carlos Pacheco, and Ricardo Mosquera Mesa eds., *La Macarena: reserva biológica de la humanidad : territorio de conflictos*. Centro Editorial, Centro de Estudios Sociales, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Universidad Nacional de Colombia.
- Mosquera, D. (2018) ‘Movilizaciones campesinas en el Guaviare (1985-1996): acción política campesina como forma de resistencia’, *Tesis de Pregrado* [Preprint]. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/45088453/Movilizaciones\\_campesinas\\_en\\_el\\_Guaviare\\_1985\\_1996\\_acci%C3%B3n\\_pol%C3%ADtica\\_campesina\\_como\\_forma\\_de\\_resistencia](https://www.academia.edu/45088453/Movilizaciones_campesinas_en_el_Guaviare_1985_1996_acci%C3%B3n_pol%C3%ADtica_campesina_como_forma_de_resistencia) (Accessed: 18 May 2021).
- Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario (2003) *Panorama actual de los municipios que conforman la Zona de Distensión*.
- O’Donnell, G. (1993) ‘On the state, democratization and some conceptual problems: A Latin American view with glances at some postcommunist countries’, *World Development*, 21(8), pp. 1355–1369. doi:10.1016/0305-750X(93)90048-E.
- Oficina de las Naciones Unidas contra la Droga y el Delito - Sistema Integrado de Monitoreo de Cultivos Ilícitos (2006) *Colombia Monitoreo de Cultivos de Coca*.
- Ong, A. (1999) *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham.

- Ong, A. (2000) 'Graduated Sovereignty in South-East Asia', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 17(4), pp. 55–75. doi:10.1177/02632760022051310.
- Ong, A. (2005) '(Re)Articulations of Citizenship', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 38(4), pp. 697–699.
- Ong, A. (2006) *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Duke University Press.
- Ong, A. and Collier, S.J. (eds) (2004) *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*. Malden, MA.
- Ortiz, D. (2016) *LAS POLÍTICAS DE DESARROLLO ALTERNATIVO EN EL GUAVIARE: FORMACIÓN LOCAL DEL ESTADO Y PRODUCCIÓN ESTATAL DEL ESPACIO*. Trabajo de grado para obtener el título de sociólogo y antropólogo. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.
- Pegler, L. (2015) 'Peasant inclusion in global value chains: economic upgrading but social downgrading in labour processes?', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 42(5), pp. 929–956. doi:10.1080/03066150.2014.992885.
- Peñaranda Currie, I., Otero-Bahamon, S. and Uribe, S. (2021) 'What is the state made of? Coca, roads, and the materiality of state formation in the frontier', *World Development*, 141, p. 105395. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2021.105395.
- 'Publications' (2021) *Building sustainable peacetime economies in the aftermath of war*. Available at: <https://drugs-and-disorder.org/category/publications/> (Accessed: 18 May 2021).
- Ramírez, M. (2001) 'Entre el Estado y la Guerrilla: Identidad y Ciudadanía en el Movimiento de los Campesinos Cocaleros del Putumayo?.'
- Ramírez, M.C. (2011) *Between the Guerrillas and the State: The Cocalero Movement, Citizenship, and Identity in the Colombian Amazon*. Duke University Press.
- Ramírez, M.C. (2017) 'Las conversaciones de paz en Colombia y el reconocimiento de los cultivadores de coca como víctimas y sujetos de derechos diferenciados', *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue canadienne des études latino-américaines et caraïbes*, 42, pp. 350–374. doi:10.1080/08263663.2017.1379135.
- Ramirez, M.C. and García, R.R. (2005) *Drogas ilegales en Colombia: experiencia reciente e implicaciones de política*. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/19503282/Drogas\\_ilegales\\_en\\_Colombia\\_experiencia\\_reciente\\_e\\_implicaciones\\_de\\_pol%C3%ADtica](https://www.academia.edu/19503282/Drogas_ilegales_en_Colombia_experiencia_reciente_e_implicaciones_de_pol%C3%ADtica) (Accessed: 29 November 2020).
- Ruiz, M. (2006) 'Operación Colombia Verde ¿asunto de locos?' Available at: [http://static.iris.net.co/semana/upload/documents/Doc-1297\\_200684.pdf](http://static.iris.net.co/semana/upload/documents/Doc-1297_200684.pdf).
- Salgado, C. (2010) 'Procesos de desvalorización del campesinado y antidemocracia en el campo colombiano', in *El campesino colombiano entre el protagonismo económico y el desconocimiento de la sociedad*. Bogotá, Colombia: Pontificia Uninversidad Javeriana.
- Salgado, H. (2012) *El campesinado de la Amazonia colombiana: Construcción territorial, colonización forzada y resistencias*. Tesis presentada a la Facultad de Estudios Superiores como requisito para la obtención del grado de Filósofo Doctor (Ph.D.) en Antropología. Universidad de Montreal.
- Salgado, H. (2017) 'La coca: entre la sobrevivencia y la resistencia del campesinado amazónico. Un balance de su trayectoria y resignificación política.' Unpublished Article.

- Sanford, V. (2004) 'Contesting Displacement in Colombia: Citizenship and State Sovereignty at the Margins', in Poole, D. and Das, V. (eds) *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*. Santa Fe, N.M. : Oxford England, pp. 279–289.
- Scott, J.C. (1977) *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven.
- The Aerial Eradication of Illicit Crops* (2005) *Transnational Institute*. Available at: <https://www.tni.org/es/node/6115> (Accessed: 3 November 2021).
- Tiempo, C.E.E. (2006) ' *Vamos a bombardear La Macarena* ', Uribe, *El Tiempo*. Available at: <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1917655> (Accessed: 9 September 2021).
- Tobón, G. and Restrepo, G.I. (2009) *Erradicación de cultivos ilícitos y desplazamiento forzado en el parque natural Sierra de la Macarena | Cuadernos de Desarrollo Rural*. Available at: <https://revistas.javeriana.edu.co/index.php/desarrolloRural/article/view/1185> (Accessed: 26 July 2021).
- Tokatlian, J.G. (1998) 'Política antidrogas de Estados Unidos y cultivos ilícitos en Colombia: La funesta rutinización de una estrategia desacertada', *Análisis Político*, 35, pp. 47–69.
- Torres, M.C. (2011) *Estado y coca en la frontera colombiana, Estado y coca en la frontera colombiana: el caso de Putumayo*. Bogotá: Odecofi-Cinep. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/41968319/ESTADO\\_Y\\_COCA\\_EN\\_LA\\_FRONTERA\\_COLOMBIANA](https://www.academia.edu/41968319/ESTADO_Y_COCA_EN_LA_FRONTERA_COLOMBIANA) (Accessed: 23 November 2020).
- Torres, M.-C. (2018) 'The making of a coca frontier. The case of Ariari, Colombia', in Gootenberg, P. and Dávalos, L.M. (eds) *The Origins of Cocaine: Colonization and Failed Development in the Amazon Andes*. New York: Routledge. Available at: <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1777011> (Accessed: 6 December 2020).
- Tovar, H. (1993) 'La coca y las economías exportadoras en América Latina: el paradigma colombiano', *Análisis Político*, 18, pp. 5–31.
- UNODC-SIMCI, O. de las N.U. contra la D. y el D.-S.I. de M. de C.I. (2020) *Monitoreo de Cultivos Ilícitos (SIMCI), Monitoreo de territorios afectados por cultivos ilícitos 2019*.
- Uribe, E. por S. (2019) 'Evolución de los cultivos de coca en Colombia: 1986-2017', *Razón Pública*, 11 March. Available at: <https://razonpublica.com/evolucion-de-los-cultivos-de-coca-en-colombia-1986-2017/> (Accessed: 15 September 2021).
- Uribe, G. and Ferro, J.G. (2002) 'Las marchas de los cocaleros del departamento de Caquetá, Colombia: contradicciones políticas y obstáculos a la emancipación social', *Cuadernos de Desarrollo Rural*, (49), pp. 59–84.
- Uribe, S. and Franco García, R. (2005) *Evolución de los cultivos ilícitos de coca en la cuenca del río Guayabero, Meta*. Bogotá, Colombia: La Unidad de Parques Nacionales de Colombia. Contrato FAP, Sierra Guayabero. Available at: [https://www.academia.edu/10987638/Evoluci%C3%B3n\\_de\\_los\\_cultivos\\_il%C3%ADcitos\\_de\\_coca\\_en\\_la\\_cuenca\\_del\\_r%C3%ADo\\_Guayabero\\_Meta\\_with\\_Roberto\\_Franco\\_Garc%C3%ADa\\_](https://www.academia.edu/10987638/Evoluci%C3%B3n_de_los_cultivos_il%C3%ADcitos_de_coca_en_la_cuenca_del_r%C3%ADo_Guayabero_Meta_with_Roberto_Franco_Garc%C3%ADa_) (Accessed: 13 September 2021).

- Valencia, L.A. (2019) 'Conflictos socioambientales y conservación con comunidades locales en los parques nacionales naturales : el caso de la vereda Bellavista en el PNN Sierra de La Macarena'. Available at: <http://repository.javeriana.edu.co/handle/10554/45059> (Accessed: 8 July 2021).
- Vera, J.P., Valencia, L. and Cubides, J. (2020) 'La vereda Bellavista y la formación del espacio en zonas de frontera: Naturaleza, ordenamiento territorial y campesinos cocaleros en el Parque Nacional Natural Sierra de la Macarena'. Non-published article.
- Yin, R.K. (2017) *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. Los Angeles.

# Annexes

## Annex A. Case selection strategy<sup>69</sup>

The decision to select this location basically relies on two main reasons, one related to previous studies, and the other in relation to the characteristics of the place. First, in Colombia there are principally seven regions where coca cultivation takes place: Nariño, Putumayo-Caquetá, Norte de Santander, la Guajira, Chocó, Córdoba-Antioquia and the south of the Meta-Guaviare (see *Figure i*). Four of these regions are part of one of the largest ongoing projects of research in this topic named Drugs & (Dis)order (see *Figure ii*), where well-known scholars are developing interesting contributions about the constructive role of coca in the regional context. However, the south-east of the country (Meta-Guaviare) has not been studied from this perspective. Thus, my research paper will serve as a “building block” (George, 2005, p. 76) to add insights and validity to the hypothesis and findings from the mentioned studies.

Second, there are several variables in common between the four already studied regions and the Meta-Guaviare; it is an area of late colonization where coca cultivation is the main activity, environmental legislation take place in most of them, and illegal armed groups control most of these areas. While this makes them comparable, the historical dynamics and the geographical location is different, which can (or not) have implication in the path and/or outcomes here analysed. Therefore, the study of this particular region can be valuable for enriching the current debates. This reinforces the *external validity* (Yin, 2017) of my research.

---

<sup>69</sup> This section is part of a paper submitted to the 2021 Case-study course at the International Institute of Social Studies.

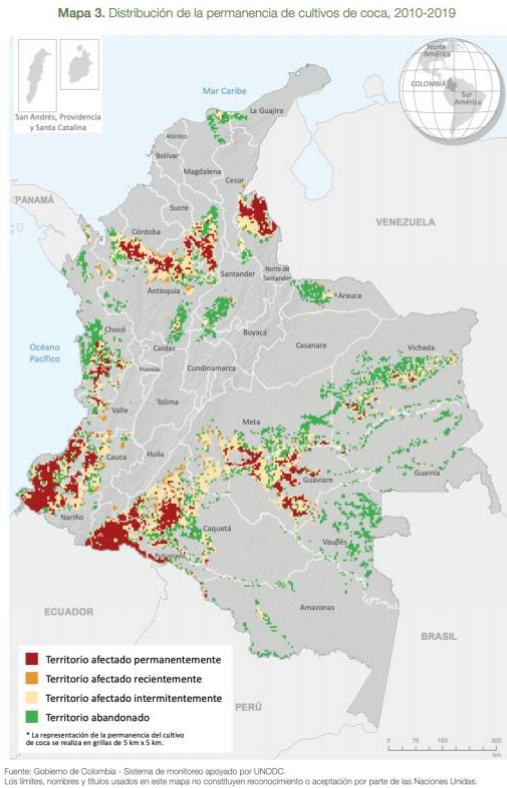


Figure i. Distribution of the permanence of coca cultivation, 2010-2019 (UNODC-SIMCI, 2020)

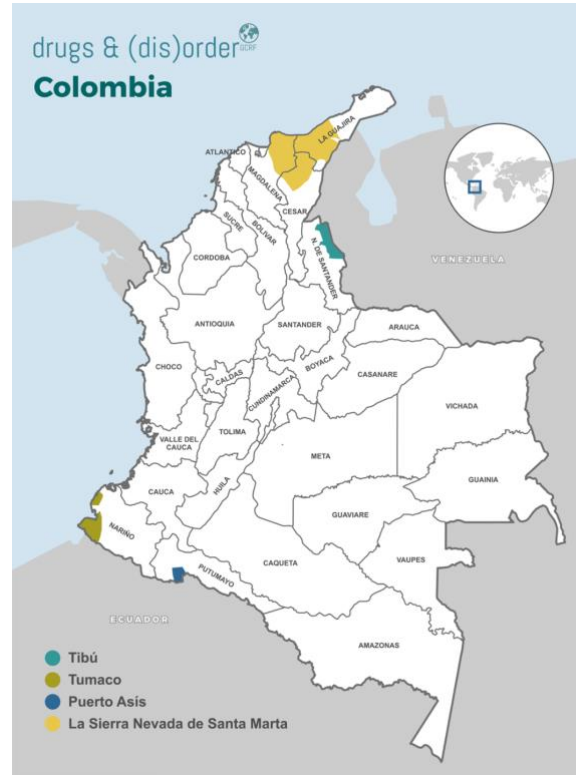
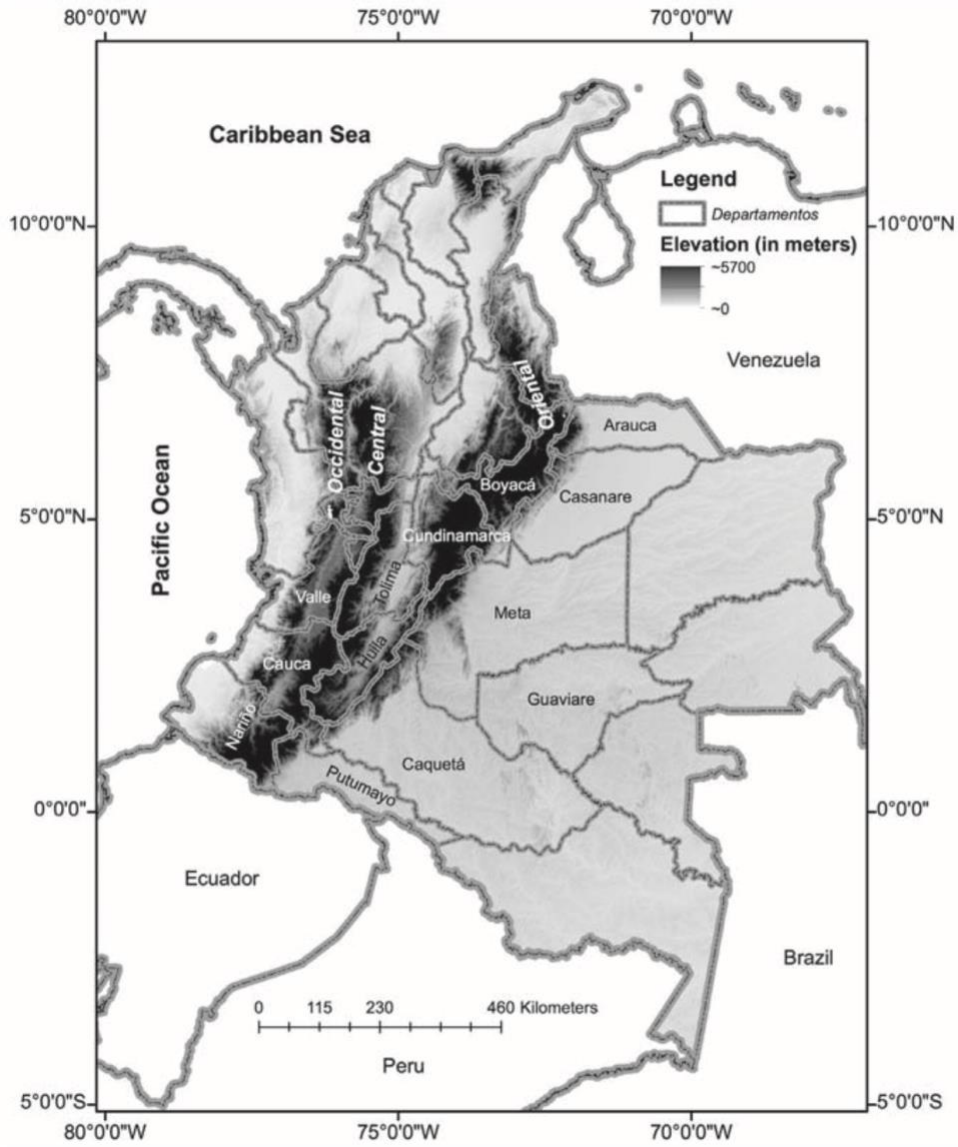


Figure ii. Research sites of the project Drugs & (Dis)order (2021)

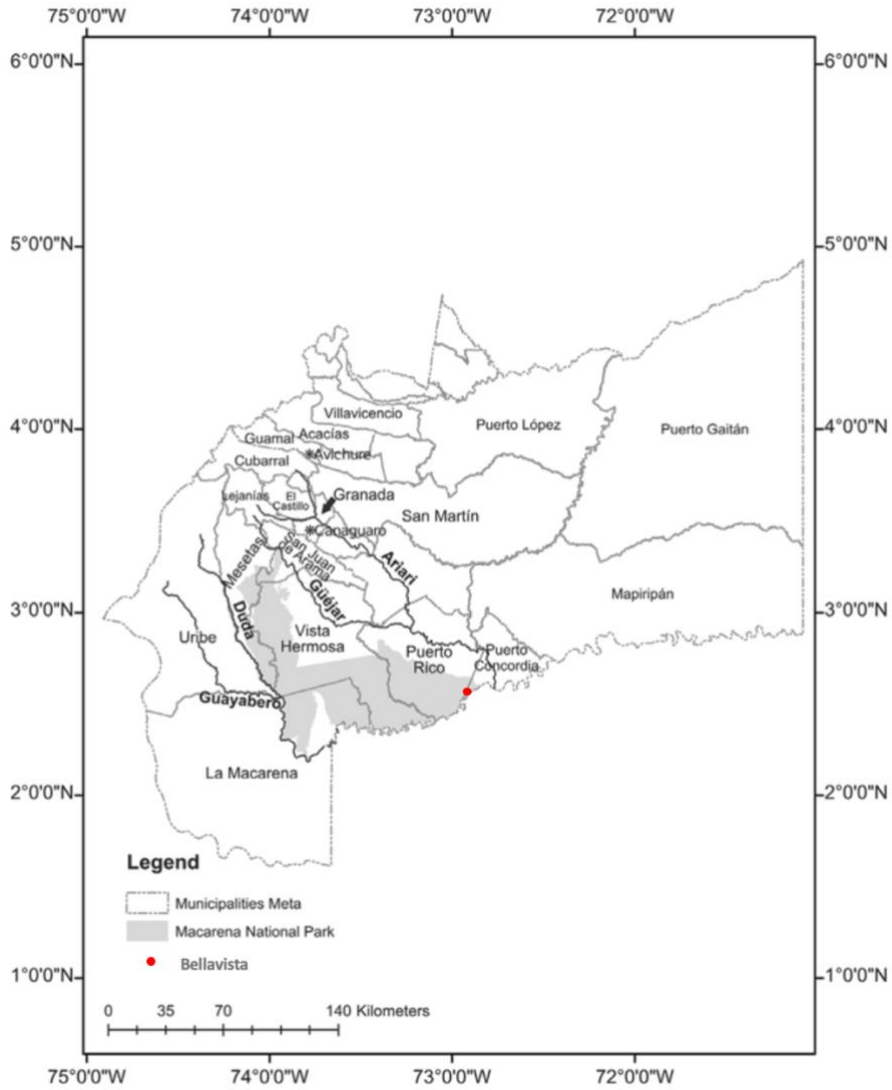
## Annex B. Map of Colombia



*Map 3. Map of Colombia*  
*Source: Torres, 2018, p. 137.*

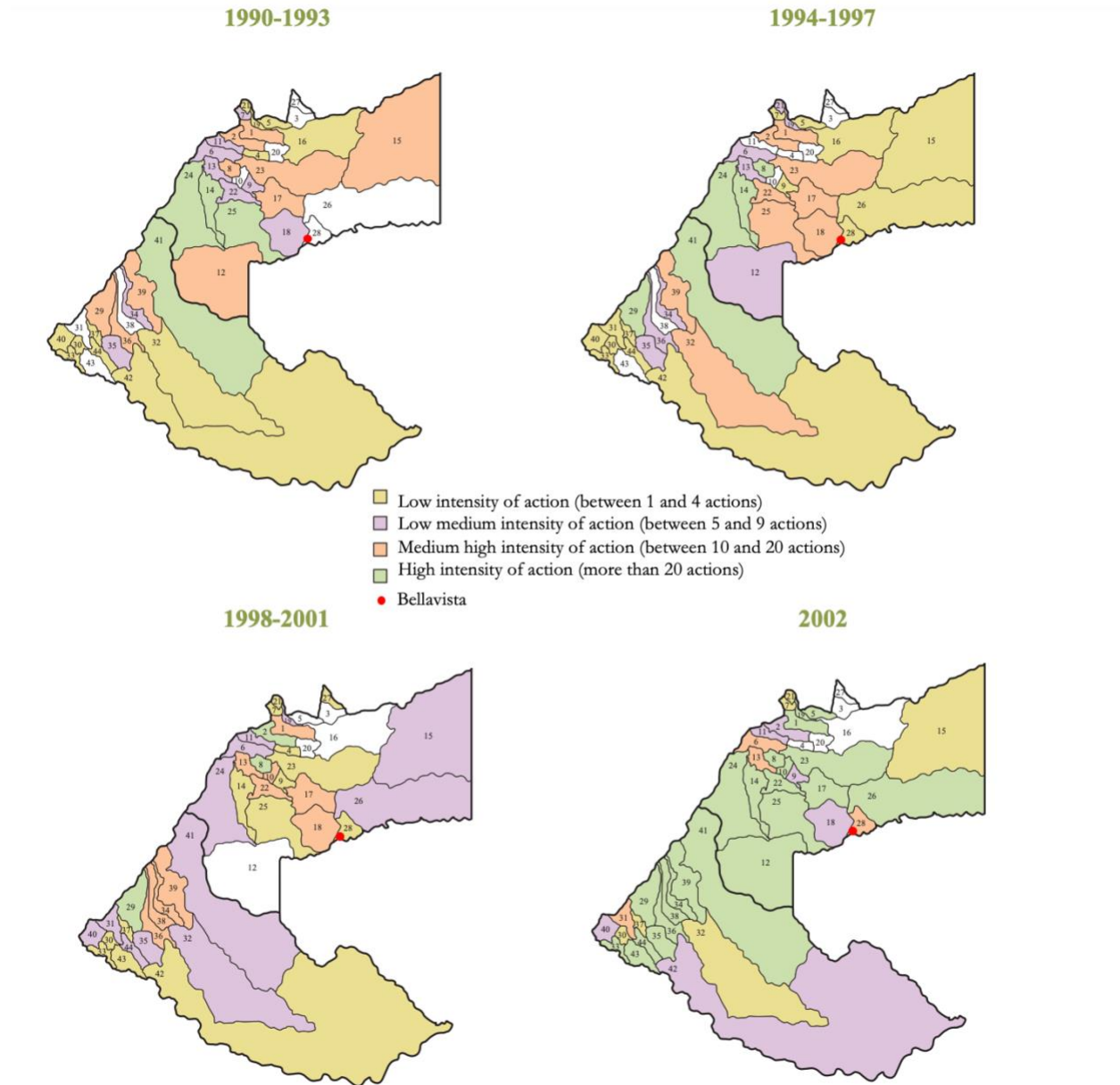


# Annex C. Rivers' Map



Map 4. Meta Department, main western rivers, and Bellavista  
 Source: Torres, 2018, p. 138. Bellavista location added by the author.

## Annex D. Intensity of the armed conflict map



Map 5. Intensity of the armed conflict map

Source: Observatorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y Derecho Internacional Humanitario, 2003\*. Bellavista location added by the author.

## Annex E.

### Guidelines for conducting semi-structured interviews

**General description:** These interviews were carried out by me and my research assistant/colleague Luis Fernando Gómez during the fieldwork in Bellavista.

**Methodology:** semi-structured interviews structured which sought to delve into the life stories of the peasants of Bellavista.

**Systematization:** the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and later analysed using Atlas ti.

**Date:** July 2021.

**Number of interviews:** 7

**Profiles:** For reasons of data security and in compliance with the commitment to anonymity promised to interviewees, a detailed list of the interviews conducted is not provided. Yet, in general, it can be said that the interviewees were leaders of the region and some of the inhabitants of Bellavista that are still living there. People between 20 and 85 years of age and that have been in the region for more than 10 years. 3 women and 4 men. The interviewees had different profiles —had arrived at different times in the village, had different resources (especially land) and carried out different activities in the region.

The table below summarises the guiding questions for this exercise.

Section	Guiding Questions	Categories
<b>Previous experiences</b>	Where were you born? Where have you lived? What did you do there? What was life there?	Precariousness- material conditions (conflict, lack of job opportunities) Quality of life
<b>Migration</b>	Why did you decide to migrate? Who did you migrate with? What was your journey here like? What was your plan? What did you expect to find here?	Motivations Expectations Conceptions of quality of life Life strategies

<b>Arrival</b>	<p>When did you arrive? What was the village like? Who had arrived? What did they do? What did they grow?</p> <p>What was the arrival like, how did they settle in and what did they start working on?</p> <p>Did you know that this was a Natural Park? What implications did this have for your life?</p>	<p>Material Conditions</p> <p>State - conservation policies</p>
<b>Beginnings of coca</b>	<p>When did they start growing coca? Who introduced you?</p> <p>How was the process of starting to grow coca?</p> <p>What did you expect from coca cultivation when you started?</p> <p>What were your main motivations?</p> <p>What fears did you have?</p>	<p>Motivations – material conditions (needs, intentions)</p> <p>Perceptions of coca</p> <p>Social relations</p>
<b>Benefits of coca</b>	<p>How profitable is your activity in coca production compared to other economic activities you know?</p> <p>What do you spend or invest what you do with coca? for whom?</p> <p>What have you achieved from growing coca?</p> <p>Have the benefits derived from the crop changed over the years?</p> <p>Do you feel that your life has improved because of coca cultivation? In what way has it improved?</p>	<p>Perceptions of coca</p> <p>Benefits</p> <p>Quality of life</p>
<b>Costs of coca</b>	<p>What have you sacrificed to grow coca?</p> <p>What are the risks you take when you decide to grow coca?</p> <p>How have you experienced state persecution and repression?</p> <p>How do you recover from forced eradication?</p> <p>Have you experienced any victimisation because of growing coca?</p>	<p>Perceptions of coca</p> <p>Risks</p> <p>State</p>
<b>Other activities</b>	<p>Besides coca, what other economic activities do you carry out?</p> <p>How important are they in relation to coca?</p>	<p>Production</p>
<b>Process</b>	<p>What functions did you perform at the beginning?</p> <p>How did they change? What did this change depend on?</p> <p>What resources do you have?</p> <p>How have resources changed since you arrived in the village?</p> <p>What are the modalities</p>	<p>Evolution of perceptions</p> <p>Material changes</p>
<b>Community</b>	<p>Have the conditions in the village changed because of coca?</p> <p>Do you feel that the development of the village and the commons is related to coca?</p>	<p>Community</p>

	<p>Do people make community contributions?  Has coca strengthened or weakened community work?  Which spaces for meeting and collective work have been key in your life here?  What do you think are the values in the relationships in the village? What is the coexistence like?  What are the rules of the village, how were they created and how are they enforced?</p>	<p>Local institutions  (norms, values, organizations)</p>
<b>Farc</b> <sup>70</sup>	<p>Did the FARC play a relevant role in these processes of improvement of Bellavista?  How did the FARC mediate and regulate the purchase of coca paste?</p>	<p>Intermediation</p>
<b>State</b>	<p>What do you think of the Colombian state?  What has been your relationship with the state?  How have you experienced de relation with the armed forces, the anti-narcotic police?  How have you experienced the relation with the Inderena and National Natural Park authorities?</p>	<p>State  Experience of the law</p>
<b>Desirable Future</b>	<p>How would you like to live?  What things would you change and what things would you like to keep from the life you live now?</p>	<p>Quality of life</p>
<b>Ethnographic observation</b>	<p>What do you do daily?  How do you feel about what you do?  Who do you relate with x?</p>	<p>Daily life  Sense of security and well-being</p>

---

<sup>70</sup> This aspect is not going to be asked to every person because of security issues.

## **Annex F.**

### **Compilation of communications from Laura Valencia with peasants of the region**

**General description:** These interviews were done by Laura Valencia Sociologist from the Pontificia Javeriana University (Bogota, Colombia). She carried out her undergraduate thesis at Bellavista in 2018 entitled “Socio-environmental conflicts and conservation with local communities in National Natural Parks: the case of the Bellavista in the NNP Sierra de La Macarena”. This research was done in a collaboration with the development of the Cesycme’s project mentioned in the previous annex.

**Methodology:** semi-structured interviews structured around 6 topics: (1) settlement and colonisation, (2) peasant organisation, (3) relationship with nature, (4) conflicts with PNN, (5) productive practices and (6) future projections.

**Systematization:** the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and later analysed using Atlas ti.

**Date:** The interviews compiled here were done in September 2018.

**Number of interviews:** 12

**Profiles:** For reasons of data security and in compliance with the commitment to anonymity promised to interviewees, a detailed list of the interviews conducted is not provided. Yet, in general, it can be said that the interviewees were leaders of the region and some of the first inhabitants of Bellavista. People between 20 and 85 years of age and that have been living in the region for more than 10 years. 6 women and 6 men participated in the interviews.

The use of these inputs was consulted with both the community and Laura Valencia.

## Annex G.

### Compilation of communications from Cesycme with peasants of the region

**General description:** These interviews were done by the Centre for Social and Cultural Studies of Memory - CESYCME, of which I am an active member. They were developed in the framework of a project named “Memory reconstruction and local and territorial planning for strengthening organisational processes of the Bellavista, Meta” carried out between March 2017 and December 2018. A project approved and supported by the Francisco Javier grants from the Office for the Promotion of University Responsibility (OFRSU) of Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Bogotá, Colombia) in February 2017. During the development of this project, I had a leading role as coordinator.

**Methodology:** semi-structured interviews done around 4 main axes of project — (1) colonisation and settlement history, (2) resource use and production practices, (3) organisational processes and local conflicts, and (4) living in a National Park.

**Systematization:** the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and later analysed using Atlas ti.

**Date:** The interviews compiled here were done in 2017 between March and November.

**Number of interviews:** 9

**Profiles:** for reasons of data security and in compliance with the commitment to anonymity promised to interviewees, a detailed list of the interviews conducted is not provided. Yet, in general, it can be said that the interviewees were male and female leaders of the region and some of the first inhabitants of Bellavista. People between 45 and 85 years of age and that have been living in the region for at least 25 years.

**Agreements on use:** the use of these inputs was consulted with both the community and the members of the Cesycme. In agreement with them, the results of this research will be shared with the organisation to enrich their understanding of local dynamics in order to strengthen the process they have with the Bellavista community.