Social Impact of Coca Crops in Colombia

From Socio-territorial processes to new social configurations: The role of land tenure, armed conflict, environment and coca crops.

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Abstract

This paper explores alterations in social dynamics caused by coca crops in Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, at Choco department in the Colombian Pacific region. The research analyzes the role of armed actors such as paramilitaries and guerillas in the conformation of new social spaces where local people find resistance as the main tool to survive in chaotic environments. Local power as a politics of resistance is also analyzed. Non-governmental organizations are a key tool to comprehend new social configurations. By doing the analysis and comparison using political ecology as the theoretical background along with concepts of moral economy and everyday resistance, with qualitative research methods. The paper aims to interpret and provide a better understanding of those changes considering social-environmental relations. Findings suggest that those changes in social structure are leading to an understanding not just of the organization of the area, but also that social dynamics and coca crops cannot be generalized in the country.

Key words: Coca crops, Land grabbing, Pacific region, social impact, political ecology.
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1. Introduction

To introduce coca cultivations, it is essential to link the subject – at least in the Colombian case – with the war on drugs by U.S. government. The policy from the US entails several factors affecting internal structures in Colombia, such as its institutions and dwellers, particularly in rural places within the country.

Normally, this policy involves military aid and repressive actions. This is especially true in places with relative state weakness and poverty where several elements are juxtaposed such as organized crime, illegal drug activity and severe violence towards civil society. Thus, the policy requires strong measures to be applied in illicit growing areas, in contemplation of eliminating “the bad apple” (Thoumi, 2003:36).

According to Thoumi (2003), the violence generated by the U.S. policy has exacerbated internal conflicts in Colombia thanks to state weakness, which has led to a prolongation of internal hostilities from the 50s¹ and has worsened internal confrontations between armed actors and civil society especially in rural places.

Furthermore, it is important at this point to include the well-known Plan Colombia. Initially the plan was created to offset the illicit crops advance and therefore the armed conflict through aerial fumigations in areas where illicit crops were located. However, the plan meant harassment of the civilian population whereby peasants were most affected by the plan because it destroyed food crops and caused environmental detrimental, not to mention health issues for residents (Nuñez, 2008:77). Plan Colombia began in 1999 with the support of the US and then-president Bill Clinton.

The government of the time argued that the project was mainly military in nature and was consolidated as a mechanism in the counterinsurgency war. It was not intended to debilitate paramilitaries, justifying the antinarcotics struggle and the repressive power of the state.

In the following pages it is outlined how the U.S. policy, coca crops, armed conflict, issues connected to land tenure, violence, and social dynamics have a shared link in the

¹ This is mentioned in the description of the study area (chapter 4) within the paper.
comprehension of those changes in rural places. Coca crops are a key element in parts of the countryside when considering social change and its consequences.

1.1 Aim and research question

The research involved for this paper is the result of particular interest in Colombian social dynamics as influenced by specific issues such as coca harvesting. Therefore, the intention of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of social relations between actors and its changes created by the crops at different levels in the Colombian Pacific Region, specifically in two different but adjacent towns Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó.

The significance of this thesis lies in the lack of case studies on the topic. Some studies are addressed to a national level and pay insufficient attention to small-scale context, especially in places like the chosen municipalities, which are a part of the country that is disregarded by the state.

The overall aim of this study is an interpretation of social change in the Colombian Pacific Region from a political ecology perspective, where social organizations replace the central state turning in new structures based on ethnic and racial principles related to land property. The study has a focus on the two municipalities of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó in the Choco Department, Colombian Pacific Coast Region. The importance of these towns lies in their strategic geographical position.

The department has a highly biodiverse tropical rainforest. The department has two great rivers: Atrato and San Juan, which have hundreds of tributaries (Cleveland, 2005:1). Home to several fauna and flora species as well as ethnic groups such as indigenous people and Afro-Colombian communities, both ethnic groups represent a significant part of the Colombia’s cultural heritage. The paper will be focused on black communities from the municipalities mentioned above.

To understand the aim of this work, it is imperative to take into consideration land tenure problems, political instability and armed conflict. High levels of rural poverty and low social and institutional levels are also significant. In this way, the paper also aims to:
- Interpret how coca crops have modified social dynamics in Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó

- Analyze social relations in rural places and their connection with coca cultivation and land tenure issues in an armed conflict context.

It is important to state the question that guides the process of the study. How do coca crops impact social dynamics, particularly land tenure issues, in an armed conflict context??

1.2 Structure of the paper

The document is structured as follows: The literature review and theoretical framework in part two offer an overview of Colombia’s history as a possible explanation for both the political and social structure of the country. Then follows an outline of illicit and coca crops, along with a theoretical framework from political ecology including concepts of moral economy and everyday resistance. Part three will present the methodology used during the research and justify the methods used to gather empirical data for the case study as well as a reflection on its ethical issues and study limitations. Part four displays a description of the study area where the author makes an account of the country and different actors involved in the conflict as well as the department and towns where the research is taking place. Subsequently, part five is devoted to the case study. Moreover, a relation between the environment and land degradation, taking the example of oil palm, investigates cultivation that is altering both the environment and social structures. Part six displays the discussion and analysis of the empirical findings. Finally, part seven presents conclusions of the study.
2. Literature review & theoretical framework

2.1 Coca crops in Colombia

Colombian illicit crops have been studied from diverse disciplines and perspectives. Recently, there is increased interest in its environmental and social consequences of various issues that the conflict has itself, such as illicit cultivation and illegal mining. Some scholars argue that Colombia’s geographical position is a “tragedy of a geographical advantage”, where the country’s geographical location in several arguments must be taken into consideration to understand the complexity and the extension of the armed conflict (Velaidez, 2000).

Maria Clara Torres, in her text *Coca, Politics and State*, approaches the role of the state, coca and local economy in the Amazonian department at Putumayo city, a large coca growing area in southern Colombia. In her book, Torres addresses how the coca economy influences the local state-building, configuration of the city and its inhabitants in the national society configuration. She argues that it is important to understand the type of citizenship that is constructed from the illegality of coca farming. The work is developed through a case study in Putumayo, where elements are contrasted. The illegality in this department is part of the political framework, probably at different levels compared with the rest of the country in terms of coca cultivation. The author writes about the paradox of marginal conditions and illegality as a configuration in the local state, through and as a consequence of voter turnout (Torres, 2012:154). Clientelism has a strong presence in the area but cannot be argued as generalization in other areas of the country. At the same time, the coca economy brought some autonomy to the area and has been developed away from the central state (Torres, 2012:156) when that area needs to take shelter from that repressive state. However, the area needs market regulation and appropriation of surplus by the state but is also using groups outside the law with the capacity of coercive practices such as paramilitaries and guerrillas (Torres, 2012).

On other hand, there is the text *Illicit Crops Impact*, where the author analyzes the role of illicit crops from installation to eradication. Especially in the Caquetá department, which is
part of the larger crops with specific political conditions especially where it shares borders with Ecuador and Brazil. Velaidez (2000:129) argues how coca crops have exacerbated political relations, especially with Ecuador, when Ecuador government claims the presence of guerrillas and crops in its borders. Southern Colombia is part of a strong bastion from guerrilla and has constant conflict with paramilitary forces defending the territory for economic reasons.

The work of the author, emphasizes in the relation of coca leaf cycle with its aerial eradication in the frame of Plan Colombia (Velaidez, 2000:156) and analyses the socio-economic and environmental impact of coca eradication with chemicals in Cartagena del Chiara Municipality, in the Caquetá department, as a study case. The study displays the main problems related to political confrontations between guerrillas and the local state, in a frame of illegality. Also the study in mention, relates the process of coca production to the environmental impact on soils due to burning of forest and logging. Moreover, the use of agricultural chemicals for its care is affecting other crops leading to social and economic clashes between peasants.

Furthermore, the author examines the role of laboratories as strong economic influences for peasants and guerrilla groups, but also how the use of chemicals in those laboratories is damaging the rainforest and peoples’ health. The author analyzes the role of Plan Colombia and its consequences for the illegal economy and food security and as generator for more coca crops in the area (Velaidez, 2000). Finally, the author draws a relation between the lack of political will from the Colombian government and makes an important argumentation about the lack of appreciation of the Amazon’s biodiversity that is threatened by the use of chemicals for aerial eradication.

The article, *Spatial Analysis of Illegal Coca Cultivation in Colombia* by Rincon et al., explores how smallholders represent an important step in world’s largest illegal agribusiness: cocaine. Arguing that the coca phenomenon is normally being studied from a national perspective rather than a local one affects in the perception of the problems in social terms. The study analyzes economic, social, environmental and institutional factors
within municipalities in the Nariño department in two different years (2001 and 2008) from a regional perspective.

Likewise, the study considers social impacts and their relation with the environment, especially when in rural places that are highly dependent on natural resources. For instance, at the same time coca crops has affected the soil and food crops (Rincon et al, 2013:109). This study uses Exploratory Spatial Data Analysis (ESDA) to visualize and describe the distribution and clusters.

The results shed light on how, in 2001, ecosystems were affected by the expansion of coca cultivation, especially in those areas that have fertile soils (Ibid, 2013). The existence of coca cultivations is not just due to environmental wealth. The soil fertility is favorable for the harvesting but also depends on social, economic and institutional conditions. Alluding to the importance of social-environmental relations to study this phenomenon when understanding the deforestation affecting humid tropical forest.

From the same author, along with Kallis, is Caught in the Middle, Colombia’s war on drugs and its effects on forest and people. Colombia is the world’s leading coca producer. From 1994, the Colombian state, along with U.S. aid, has waged a war on drugs based on air fumigations (Rincon & Kallis, 2012:13). This has affected the forest, social dynamics, the economy of municipalities and peasants, and has caused a notable increase of the armed conflict.

The study has a focus on the socio-environmental impact of the U.S. policy in the Nariño department in the Pacific Coast region. This displays that aerial fumigation policy has not eradicated the crops, but has instead diffused production through the territory, especially in socially and ecologically vulnerable zones (Ibid, 2012:5). Furthermore, fumigation is leading to what the authors called the “balloon effect”, making reference to crops spreading due to eradication. This phenomenon does not respond exclusively to aerial fumigation but also to manual eradication, which was the case in Peru and Bolivia (Ibid, 2012).
The text concludes by stating that fumigation is likely to produce more coca cultivation in the area, hence causing more social impact through displacement. The author denominates this process as “cat and mouse” dynamic (Ibid, 2012:7) causing at the same time displacement of armed conflict actors and people. However, forced displacement of peasants must be related mainly with the dynamic of the armed conflict but also with the problem of coca cultivation.

From another perspective and experience there is the text of Armenteras: Landscape Dynamics in Northwestern Amazonia: an assessment of pastures, fire and illicit crops as drivers of tropical deforestation. The author discusses the interaction between fire forest and illicit crops for environmental impact. The main result shows how illicit crops and forest fire are changing the landscape in the area and are converting primary forest into secondary forest, losing particular species (Armenteras, 2013). The author argues that the study of illicit crops along with other environmental issues should be framed in an integrated manner due to the multiple differences within the problem of illicit crops and environmental damage.

In Economic Crisis, Drugs and Alternative Development by Guridi, the analysis is made from the tradition of the Andean countries in coca crops (e.g. Bolivia and Peru) and responds to an increase in the demand from the US and Europe (Guridi, 2002). In this way Colombia, Peru and Bolivia have handled the bulk of coca leaf production during recent decades, causing a social impact on the three countries where this plant is harvested. The study has a particular focus on Colombia since is the country with presence of both cultivations and laboratories, concluding that Colombia has a particular phenomenon when studying coca cultivations in part due to its relation with the US and the war on drugs.

According to Kalmanovitz & Lopez in the text Land, Conflict and Weakness of the State in Colombia, communities (e.g. indigenous, afro-Colombian and peasants) are the main characters in the war on drugs, armed conflict and conflict over land disputes. In the text explains how coca crops have affected different communities and how the problem should be considered carefully depending on the department where the crops are located.
(Kalmanovitz & Lopez, 2005). The text is an approximation from the economical perspective, offering and narrow analysis that does not cover the social impact, even though the authors are aware of the differences between regions and departments. This is especially biased text considering that one of the authors is the president of the Bank of the Republic of Colombia.

The previous text lead us to official publications that constantly neglected the environmental impact in zones where crops are located and being eradicated by aerial fumigations, which is the leading cause of both social and ecological impacts. The government denied any detriment for the municipalities and dwellers.

In short, the main issues on the topic are related to deforestation and social impact. Fumigation is causing what Reyes (2014) in his text *Estimating the Causal Effect of Forced Eradication on Coca Cultivation in Colombian Municipalities* and other authors call the "balloon effect". This is the multiplication of coca crops to other municipalities and departments in the country in the context of *Plan Colombia*. While these crops are eradicated by aerial fumigation, another sort of issues emerged. In other words, social impact is being spread to other departments and coexisting with the current issues, at the same time the damage for the environment is being increased by this type of eradication (Nagle, 2004).

### 2.2 Land titling and black communities in Colombia

Roneros (2014) explores the situation of the study area. The Pacific Region and black communities have suffered from a lack of local policies that respond to stakeholder’s needs. Communities during the time have had to accept a top-down vision of progress, especially a neoliberal notion of development. For the author, paramilitaries are the main group responsible for coca crops in the area, along with a terror scenario. Residents are forced to grow coca, and are living in circumstances where crops are a key element to survive in such environments. The main problem according to the author is the lack of an agrarian reform and real acknowledgement of black communities in the country.
At this point, it is important to include the work of an expert in Pacific Region black communities. Ulrich Oslender has studied black communities in the area for several years, analyzing and interpreting the general situation, explaining what is happening in those areas where apparently they condense several elements, and creating a particular theory called "geographies of terror" that helps to understand those specific areas with specific conditions. For the author, the area has been subsequently included from the 90s in cartography of violence, due to its history with land tenure, coca crops, biodiversity and other stakes like different expansionist campaigns from the armed actors and state interests.

Despite the state’s attempt to be more inclusive and multicultural during the 90s, parallel processes between land titling and a growing armed conflict made this place and the population more vulnerable to the situation, and “geographies of terror” shows how these communities have to live in the terror on an everyday basis with selected killings, massacres and constant threats (Oslender, 2008).

Some insights from the Colombian scholar Arturo Escobar reflect on the role of local knowledge within the importance of black communities, whether it refers to land, cultural practices or social movements. This plays an important role when studying these communities. For Escobar, social movements are part of new social structures in the region, especially when they have to struggle in context of violence. These movements are considered as constructors of political strategy for the defense of the territory, culture and identity linked to particular places and territories (Escobar, 1998:29). This is also connected to the role of coca crops in the area and the struggle of communities to survive.

Escobar also argues that culture became a political process in those contexts of constant struggle due to the constitution of several meanings that seek to redefine social power. These have specific aims such as redefinition of identity, the right to territory, autonomy and finally the right to construct an autonomous perspective of the future from local knowledge (Escobar, 1998).

Finally, the current report on monitoring coca crops made by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for 2015 shows how the number of hectares of coca crops has
increased compared to recent years in the area. According to the report, the Colombian government, through the recent peace agreements made between the state and the guerrilla, refers to the problem of coca crops and its possible sustainable reduction through alternative development in rural landscapes (UNODC, 2015).

There is a broad content about coca crops and its issues at different levels. Some findings shed light on the problem and what the current situation of policies and regulations is. The literature describes the problem as a result of an institutional and weakness of the Colombian society (Rincon et al., 2013). Including land tenure is an important element to understand the problematic of illicit crops, particularly when crops are located in parts of rural places.

The complexity relies on the information around the illicit crops, different works from NGOs such as Justicia y Paz (Justice and Peace) and Ciencia, Sociedad y Desarrollo (Science, Society and Development) lead to a broad understanding of the real social effects in small communities, not just regarding social and environmental aspects but also in a general overview.

2.3 Theoretical framework
According with characteristics of the study and the topic, this section is devoted to the theory perspective that may help in the analysis of the area and guide the research to a better and integrated understanding.

2.3.1 Political Ecology
The research will be framed within a political ecology (PE) perspective, where PE is devised as a radical critique of the apolitical perspective and the depoliticizing effects of mainstream environmental research. At the same time, within political ecology there is a perspective that leads to understanding how nature may be transformed into a resource related to human needs and practices (Le Billon, 2001). Thus, it may be understood how illicit crops were used as a transformation of the armed conflict and equally important for social dynamics in Colombia and particularly in the towns of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó.
Considering what PE is for other scholars within the field, who argue that a broad range of meanings embedded in the field make it difficult to categorize PE in just one specific meaning. However, "the many definitions together suggest that political ecology represents an explicit alternative to "apolitical" ecology, that it works from a common set of assumptions, and that it employs a reasonably consistent mode of explanation" (Robbins, 2010:5). In short, PE Explores social and environmental changes with an understanding that there are better, less coercive and more sustainable ways of doing things (Ibid, 2010).

In order to understand what is happening in places like the study area, with a strong tradition of land grabbing and human rights violations contextualized in an armed conflict, PE perspective helps to comprehend how social-environmental relations work, specifically when those dynamics have to co-exist in explicit violent conditions and a broad resource endowment. In the words of Richards (2010) when analyzing the role of the forest in the conflict in Sierra Leone, the author argues violence as a social project, a project where war is influenced by environmental or resource factors, even though it is not a specific “resource war”. The interpretation might be employed elsewhere, yet it needs a specific approach to understand the social projects involved in the Colombian case.

PE is a useful framework for analyzing human-environment relations in agriculture in general and contract farming in particular (Grossman, 1998:18). Moreover, PE states the importance of studying these processes in their historical context due to complexities embedded in local specific conditions (Ibid, 1998).

As it is described in the presentation and the literature review, the complexity of the topic follows a path where the knowledge and theory are intertwined in a suitable way. The former statement exemplify why PE is a helpful approach because "by definition, illicit drugs intermix the power of governments and economic forces with outcomes and resistance by local peoples" (Young, 2004:249). In this case study, local communities are highly affected by coca harvesting and cocaine base production. Moreover, have to struggle with other problems such as multinational companies.
PE is usually applied to interpret dynamics in developing countries. Thus, in these cases it would help to delineate power relations that maintain this complexity, as it also provides a conceptual framework to analyze the situation of people living in certain landscapes such as Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó. In sum, this approach may bring up thoughts to interpret and grasp social impacts in resource wealth and the advantage of geographical position contexts.

However, within PE are embedded different perspectives from which the topic might be analyzed. Equally important is considering the field in general, what authors like Walker (2006) argue in the way on how the field is "unlikely to have a practical impact". What is needed is a more applied approach from political ecologists, and that is one of the tools that make PE useful, especially in this problem.

Continuing with the different perspectives within PE, particularly for this research, coca cultivations will be approached from its relevancy, and understanding how people's livelihoods are threatened and affected by the growing of the crops and use of chemicals for its care. There are two different but related concepts that may broaden the scope of understanding and interpretation: moral economy and everyday resistance. These concepts are embedded in peasant studies that are also included in PE studies. Given the nature of the case, they might help when narrowing the structure of the analysis.

2.3.2. Moral economy and everyday resistance

Another perspective suitable for this research is the concept of moral economy, understanding it as social system of mutual resistance and tolerable association (Robbins, 2010).

Moral economy is understood from the perspective of a set of social reciprocity and mutual obligation, or in the words of E.P Thompson (1991:343): “In the bargaining between unequal social forces in which the weaker still has acknowledged claims upon the greater.” In this sense, what one may extract from Thompson’s words is that moral economy may refer to a set of understandings where the hegemony of one group may not be imposed but articulated in the everyday experience of a community’s dynamics (Watts, 1983).
The articulation of moral economy within this paper makes no reference to dearth riots in European history, especially the 18th century English uprisings. The term “moral economy” may be taken far beyond the 18th century and from the English circumstances. It is more about social exchanges, just as the case study in the present paper will display. Furthermore, in the third world, different aspects from Thompson’s theory have been studied in social exchanges in communities where the results have widened the comprehension of the theory itself and utterly changed the communities’ perception (Randall & Charlesworth 2000).

In short, the moral economy is necessary to some communities’ survival, where the relations are hierarchical and exploitative. In this case, the exploitation leads to a survival where coca and oil palm cultivations are replacing food crops for daily consumption in a violent context.

Moreover, everyday resistance refers to localized riots or other forms of upheaval representing endemic disorders (Mathewson, 2004). This term makes reference to “… a stratagem deployed by a weaker party in thwarting the claims of an institutional or class opponent who dominates the public exercise of power” (Scott, 1989: 52). This would explain the situation of the communities in both towns, as a strong survival mechanism in chaotic dynamics portrayed in the case study of the present paper.

This “political” form of resistance is being used in power relations, especially when those relations are based upon fear and terror. Resistance offers to subordinate group’s wide possibilities to survive in the best political and non-violent way and to preserve, black communities’ intrinsic characteristics of its culture. With both concepts embedded in peasant studies, it helps to form an image of how small communities are the protagonist in PE stories about land use and the forest as a political entity for counter-insurgency (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2011).
3. Methodology

In this chapter, an introduction will be made to the methods used in the empirical part of the research process, along with a description, ethical issues that need to be taken into consideration and, finally, a presentation of the limitations of the empirical findings.

3.1 The case study method

The case study method has been chosen for the purpose of this paper. By using a real example in two different but adjacent towns, an attempt will be made to connect theory with practical issues presented in the place.

A case study, according to Yin (2009:18) is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and in a real-life context. Case studies provide a particular understanding of raw data within a contemporary phenomenon, while also allowing the researcher to look at the phenomenon from different perspectives. These perspectives may vary from surveys, interviews, and participatory research (Clifford, 2010).

When doing case study research, it is also an opportunity to recover knowledge “from below” (Fals Borda; 1982, Paulo Freire; 1970; in Clifford 2010:143), which for the purpose of the research, would help to record the voices of hundreds of people who have experienced different problems without the power to complain about it.

The aim of the case study is to look for explanations coming from particular examples, and gain understanding of the phenomenon through different data sources (Yin, 2009:33).

Within the aim, the researcher might compare data with a theory. The case study offers different techniques in data collection and interpretation of the information. The study case can both precede and follow the theoretical research. During the research process, the data-gathering procedure was leading to a better understanding of political ecology theory. Moreover, at the end of the fieldwork, the interpretation generated from data collection led to understanding the phenomenon from another perspective.

In this text, the case has been specified in the early stages of the literature review and indirectly in some parts of the theoretical framework.
Even though, the motives to conduct a case study are specified in the presentation of the paper, due to a lack of studies of the area from a political ecology perspective. The method is traditional within qualitative research, where the researcher gathers the data from an existing theory to demonstrate if the theory does or does not apply to the case study or phenomenon (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:2). In the next section, I will explain more of the qualitative research features in the research.

3.2 Qualitative research methodology

According to Ritchie & Lewis (2003:3), qualitative research has been defined by different authors and from different perspectives. On the one hand, it is understood as an attempt to understand the role of the methodology in the researcher’s work. On the other, it is understood to involve a naturalistic and interpretative view of the world. However, Ritchie & Lewis (2003) also argue that those practicing qualitative research have a tendency to place some emphasis on human interpretation of the social world and the significance of both participants and the researcher to understanding the phenomenon studied.

For this type of research and its aim to increase the understanding of the place’s situation, the thesis employs a qualitative research method. Consequently, applied research in the case study offers tools through the knowledge, understanding or resolution of a contemporary issue. The main objective leads to deeper insights into a current problem (Ibid, 2003).

During the research and in the method, a wide range of secondary data was used. The author conducted fieldwork in the form of semi-structured interviews with ex coca growers, local leaders and personnel from no-governmental organizations and at some point UNODC. UNODC was also useful for particular information in satellite images. It is essential to make reference to archives from NGOs, especially Justicia y Paz (Justice and Peace) that were also used as an important source for the case study due to the complexity of the fieldwork in these two municipalities, and for security reasons.
For secondary data, the literature review, theoretical framework and other publications were drawn from academic and governmental publications concerning coca crops, political ecology, black communities, a historical overview of local contexts and land titling. The literature covers a wide range of concepts and descriptions of the issue necessary for the comprehension of the problem.

3.2.1 Interviews and non-governmental organizations archives

As mentioned above, semi-structured interviews were used when conducting the fieldwork. For Clifford (2010:103), this type of interview is referred to as informal, conversational or “soft” interviews, talking with people in ways that are self-conscious, orderly and partially structured. This type of tool was useful or the complexity of the topic in the interviewer-interviewee relationship, where this form of interviewing has some degree of predetermined order but still ensures flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant (Dunn, 2005:80 in Clifford, 2003:105). This type of interview was especially preferred with ex coca growers. For the personnel from NGOs, more structured questions were addressed to determined other aspects and approaches of coca crops (Fig 1).

Non Governmental Organizations personnel (Directors and other officials)

- What would be the position of the organization within the communities processes?
- Do you work together with local community council or is it two separate processes?

Former dwellers of the municipalities

- What do you remember the most from your former home?
- How was your daily routine at home?

Figure 1: Example of some questions for respondent interviews
(Source: Carolina Nuñez C)
This phase of the gathering part was conducted during two weeks, where the researcher conducted the interviews and also had the opportunity to share experiences with ex coca growers. The meeting took place in Quibdó, a nearby city, isolated from the danger of conducting the interviews at the interviewee’s home.

Mainly in Bogota (the capital of Colombia) interviews with personnel from the NGOs were attended. Some officials from the NGO were interviewee, first Justicia y Paz, (Justice and Peace) and other official from Ciencia Sociedad y Desarrollo (Science, Society and Development).

Participatory research has no exact methods (Clifford et al. 2010). Instead, it relies on informal collection methods or data. The sustained dialogue (Ibid, 2010) between the researchers and the community is more significant to understand and articulate the knowledge from the academy and the community.

Furthermore, as is mentioned above, some governmental institutions play a significant role in the process of data gathering, such as DANE, the National Administrative Department of Statistics (Departamento Nacional de Estadisticas). Furthermore, satellite images were used in some areas due to the impossibility to access these crops (Annex 1).

3.3 Research limitations

There is a wide range of possibilities when doing research in coca crops, particularly in an armed conflict context. Access to the area is difficult for various reasons and military force from the state and paramilitaries forces guard the area. As the paper will show in the description and according to secondary data and empirical findings, these two actors have some sort of “association” for strategic purposes.

Additionally, there is relative peace or what is called “a tense calm” perceived in the area. Even in the nearby city were the interviews were conducted, the atmosphere is different compared to other places. However, the topic itself is delicate when speaking about in general within the region. It is an uncomfortable subject in the cities and is avoided by ex-coca growers due to coarse situations experienced in the past.
About the Organizations, there was some kind of mistrustfulness from the beginning. They felt the need to protect the residents from any kind of aggression, regardless of whether there was any intention to attack them in any form.

3.4 Ethical issues

Within qualitative research and case studies, issues might be about confidentiality and anonymity (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). The relationship between participants makes the research more fluent in the way respondents give the information. At the same time, the researcher has the obligation to protect the confidentiality of the obtained data.

The participants were given information about the research and its purposes, so they gave consent about whether or not participate and assist during the research process. Another relevant point is how the information is framed and how it is presented in the text with the intention to not mislead. It is also intended to protect people involved in the research for security reasons and avoid any type of harassment due to present threats towards both ex-coca growers and personnel from NGOs.
4. Description of the study area

The following chapter gives a political, geographical and social outlook of the study area. Given the description in the literature review and theoretical framework, this chapter elucidates how is Pacific Region’s composition as part of a divided country, in the same context Choco the department, is framed in the concept of periphery.

This is followed by a general description of Colombia’s armed conflict and its actors. Special attention is given to paramilitaries and multinational companies.

To contextualize, it is necessary to describe the study area and the composition of the country. Colombia is located in the northwestern corner of South America and has five continental natural regions: Andean mountain range, Caribbean coast, Pacific coast, Orinoquia (grassland plains), and Amazon rainforest (Fig 2). It is politically divided into 32 departments and 1,101 municipalities. 23 of those 32 departments and 274 municipalities reported the presence of coca crops during the first decade of the 21st century (Rincon et al. 2013).

![Figure 2: Colombia’s Natural regions.](Source: Armenteras, Et, al. 2013)

4.1 Pacific Region.

The Pacific Region has been assumed as a platform for war and as an accumulation scenario from the state and economic actors (ILSA, 2013). The former statement might resume part of the region current issues. To understand why the region has such importance, it is vital to make reference to its geographical location. The Pacific Coast
Region is made up of four departments: Cauca, Cauca Valley, Choco and Nariño (Fig 3). This region is situated between

the border with Panama to the north and Ecuador to the south. To the east side are borders with Colombian Andean mountains, and to the west side with the Pacific Ocean (Ibid, 2013:11).

This strategic position lays on the Pacific Ocean a space that covers almost half of the earth. Therefore, this location gives access to the world’s largest continental area (Ibid, 2013). This area consists of vast ecological, hydrographical, forest, mining and cultural wealth that for the state, national and international business companies represents a fundamental region for resource extraction due to its environmental wealth.

Furthermore, relations between peasants, ethnic groups, Afro-Colombian communities, multinational companies, the state, military and armed groups shape the complexity in interactions within a logic of power, mainly linked to resources and the territory. In short, the area has permanently been under two different and opposite logics, one from the forces who conceive the area as a business source and the second, from below, contemplates the land, alternative development and a collective construction of the territory through local powers and mutual assistance.
The region has an important history of state-owned land (*baldías*) for the rest of country and the conflict’s conditions make this place especially vulnerable to land grabbing and coca cultivation, mainly by trained armed groups.

In that way, Pacific Region and Choco, presents problems of land titling what is called socio-territorial processes (Escobar 2009). These territorial processes are linked to communities’ cultural construction, which is attached to the territory. Taking into consideration that in Choco lives both indigenous people and 90% of the population is Afro-Colombian, this has a complex articulation within national dynamics both institutional and social.

In Colombia’s Constitution of 1991, the state made a reformation for the document changing former conditions of people and the state itself. In those changes were two main elements that are connected to the area and the theme of this paper. First, Law 70 of 1993 (Ley 70 de 1993) was the first step in the awareness of black communities and their territorial rights. They are finally acknowledged during the 90s, and so began the process of individual and collective land titling (Baquero, 2014). The so-called reformation might also be interpreted as a legal instrument for community participation and a clear visibility for the different organizations as non-governmental ones.

Second, rules and processes of land titling exacerbated the war in the area and with this a considerable boom in illicit crops (especially in coca crops). So this law opened a path for two different but overlapping processes: land titling and coca crops boost. It is significant to mention that the law was not regulated in its totality, hence one may understand the law’s gaps and ambiguities especially to comprehend why these issues continued for so long.

In short, the Pacific Region and Choco condense multiple elements and diverse expressions including political, social, and territorial conflicts to be analyzed in a holistic way. In this context, Choco is one department with some of these issues. It is the department most affected by Law 70 due to its percentage of black community population.
4.1.2 Choco and periphery
Choco has several of the issues named above, such as armed conflict, land titling and coca crops. In its history, all factors have overlapped and are interrelated, making the department a special one at the national scale (DANE, 2013). According to governmental statistics, Choco is probably the “second poorest” department of the country. This makes reference to its economic and social conditions. Part of the department condition lays on the perception from the state over the land, also taking into account its environmental wealth. The state, along with multinational companies, developed several types of projects in the area, acknowledging the area as a source of capital and avoiding the value of local knowledge and local actors.

Exactly 90% of the department’s population is Afro Colombian communities. This implies a strong connection with land and the acknowledgement of local knowledge. Afro Colombian communities in this area have been struggling against neoliberal development projects mainly approved by the government and implemented by national and multinational firms. They have also been disregarded by the state, even when they started to recognize black people’s rights concerning land.

The place also has a strong tradition of land grabbing, due in part to its social structure and its link with the territory. This is also because of the presence of armed actors such as guerrillas and paramilitaries who have, together with economic interest, affected the process of land titling stated in law 70 of 1993. Together with armed conflict, coca cultivation and cocaine production has exacerbated the issues of these communities.

According to Ronderos (2014) Colombia’s society presents an internal division, turning it into a dual society between a central area and a large periphery. There is a peripheral Colombia that cannot wait for the elites to take action upon their own situations. Instead, they have to organize and find their own way to face and solve such problems. Choco is part of the large periphery where the state services have a poor presence or sometimes no presence at all. Regarding this topic, Ross (2003:20) makes reference to how resource-rich countries develop atypically high poverty rates and at the same time this pattern responds to
the governments doing an unusually poor job providing education and health care for their citizens.

According to Ross, environmental and resource richness may weaken the states, making them less capable of resolving social conflicts. This occurs as states weaken the territorial controls, opening the path to criminal groups and warlords and reducing the government’s accountability for offsetting social and economical issues.

Additionally, to understand Choco’s social structure, it is essential to link race as a mental construction. Founded in experiences from the colonial period (Pisano, 2012), race was related to class position. Therefore, to be black was to be a poor person. A person born of one black parent and one white parent is a rich-ascended person and then whites a rich person. This heritage from the colonial era makes a social race division in Choco and forms a part of the country’s mentality. In institutional terms, Afro communities were not taken into account about their territorial rights and different privileges in the national constitution, such as education and health public services (Ibid, 2012).

In this vein, it is relevant to bring up the role of local knowledge as a knowledge that might be contrasted to formal or conventional knowledge. In this case, oral history is a valuable segment, mainly because it is vital in the context of pacific black communities and how they perceive the world, places, natural resources and the coca leaf. Moreover, black communities from Choco have cultural practices linked with the land such as La ombligada² refers to how the child has the right to own the house and the land where the house is settled. This tradition is from the 19th century (Oslender, 2002) and has brought internal conflicts over the land and lack of clarity in processes of land titling during the 1990s. For the sake of the communities’ survival, it is necessary to have awareness of local knowledge that is barely considered by the different stakeholders and actors of the armed conflict and in its war strategies.

² Ritual where a newborn’s belly button is buried in the backyard or a nearest tree from the family’s house. This makes this child own the house and the land. This tradition was made from the 19th century. (Oslender, 2002)
4.2 Colombia and armed conflict

Colombia has a long history of violence, mostly related with political instability created during the time of *La Violencia* (1948-58), a civil war between two of the main political parties: liberal and conservative.

To understand political instability, it is necessary to mention some historical facts to comprehend the complexity of the situation. Colombia like some Latin American countries has its democracy origins in power detention from local elites, rather than in mass demonstrations and popular claims as many European countries did (Ronderos, 2014). There was a political decentralization process in 1863 when the state was relatively powerless and began to have different administrative problems in different regions. Local elites had constantly negotiated with the region’s administrations and the two largest political parties of the country (Ibid, 2014).

In this context, the state in the midst of political negotiations gradually lost its power in the regions and different departments. This situation was use by insurgent groups, such as guerrillas FARC\(^3\) Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) created in 1964 the oldest and largest left-wing guerrilla in the country. From the beginning it was a geostrategic group with expansive purposes that subsequently added drug trafficking to its practices (Rangel, 2004).

The weakness of the state is in the periphery, where the poverty is isolated from the "center" and local elites, these groups created its own rules and social dynamics, accentuating some other conditions that highlight the conflict such as land grabbing and coca cultivation (Ibid, 2014).

According to Ronderos (2014), it is important to understand how the weakness of the state allowed the creation of insurgent groups such as guerilla and subsequently created counterinsurgency groups such as paramilitaries. In the rise of communist guerrillas, the

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\(^3\) FARC In spanish fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. (The revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) created in 1964 the oldest and larger left wing guerrilla in the country. Created in the context of *La Violencia* a civil war between the two main parties Liberal and Conservative, in the beginning was a group with liberal ideas then turn as a communist group.

ELN In spanish Ejercito de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army) Second largest guerrilla in the country, created in the same year of Farc 1964, a group of marxist and liberation theology ideas. (Unric.org, 2016).
state attempted to recover part of the regions established paramilitaries forces with the intention to battle guerrillas and its expansionist campaign in the countryside that directly implies an illegal appropriation of the land.

At this point, paramilitaries and guerrillas have begun a constant confrontation in the countryside. The armed conflict escalates under a functioning democracy, with a relative normality in the main cities and a crude violence in the periphery thus making Colombia a dual society (Ibid, 2014).

In this type of society, it is necessary to understand what weak democracy meant for the country and from where these groups took advantage of the situation, especially in the periphery. The state does not work, as it should. If something happened in the "center", where the elites are placed, “then the state might work but if the problem is "outside", like an agrarian reform, then it will not work out" (Ibid, 2014:18).

A considerable part of the country’s history during the 20th-century framed in a political instability. A particular phenomenon of Latin American countries known clientelism had its roots in the bipartisanship from the 19th century and might be an important element to comprehend the situation of the country. Furthermore, this political patronage was consolidated during the National Front4 when it acquired major influence in the countryside and other regions of the country. This phenomenon needs to be understood as a prolongation of political relations along with the agrarian problem in the armed conflict.

Permanent confrontations lead to the ongoing condition of violence. Colombia was a decentralized state after the 90s (Diaz &Sanchez, 2004). It began a new political process where regions were responsible for their own processes. In administrative terms, this means they have to sort out all kind of issues, even those related with coca crops, land tenure and security.

4 National Front (1958-1974) a political coalition between the two largest political parties (Liberal and Conservative). Based on the equitable rotation of power to end rivalries and thus begin a new peaceful democratic period after a crude bloodshed provoked by political rivalries between the same two parties during la Violencia (1948-58), also to ward off the National Army from the power avoiding a possible dictatorship. Martz, J. D. 'Contemporary Colombian Politics: The Struggle over Democratization' The Colombian Economy 1992.
To understand the entire picture it is necessary to take the problem as a multidirectional situation where land is the main problem, but also some other issues are taking place at the same time. This is the reason why it might need a holistic explanation to understand the situation of a divided society and a fragmented country.

Regarding coca cultivation in the area is still more complicated, due to the lack of agrarian reform and land titling of communities. Both landowners and the peasants harvested the land. The products were mainly based on subsistence crops and supplying larger cities in the country with agricultural products. Occasionally, some peasants were landowners, yet this was hard to prove due to lack of legal documentation of land ownership. In this process, guerrillas and paramilitaries, in the absence of the state, took over the land and in other cases forced the peasants to grow coca and poppy (Rincon et al. 2012).

Besides, during the 70s, drug production within Colombia was related mainly to marijuana crops, which increased during that decade. However in 1997, Colombia became the main coca producer in the world, accounting for more than 50% of the world’s total production (Fjeldså et al., 2005).

Illicit crops emerged to "boost" the complexity of the armed conflict during the 80s and 90s. These crops and cocaine base production (cocaine laboratories) were the key to the development of the conflict itself and among its actors (guerrillas, paramilitaries, army, state and multinational companies) for the amount of money that the drug business imply, and of course the strategy of armed actors in the battle for the territory.
In Figure 4, the Pacific region with its four departments displays changes in the crops for each department per hectare for the last eight years. Respectively, Chocó has a pattern for increasing and decreasing hectares each year. This pattern is related to eradications framed in Plan Colombia implementations, where the destruction of crops has failed and has been counterproductive (Quimbayo, 2008).

However, the figure also displays crop dynamics at different levels. The percentage shift makes reference to the increase in numbers of hectares for those years of each department but also it represents a significant increase in 2014 compare to 2013, with a percentage of the country’s total production in 2013\(^5\).

Nariño is associated with the most number of hectares taking into account that this department has a strong presence of indigenous people using the leaf for rituals also solid guerrilla groups incidence, the department share borders with Southern departments which

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represents the major challenge when coca crops speaking, and also as a visible consequence of *Plan Colombia*.\(^6\)

### 4.2.1 Armed conflict actors

In previous parts of the paper, there has been a contextualization of the Colombian situation understanding coca crops from the armed conflict complexity, which I consider is the vital importance to understand the impact not just of the crops itself but also the issue that it represents for the armed groups’ revenues.

Within this scenario, stakeholders, with their own particular interest, interact over the crops or the base production. The circumstances may change according to the region. Colombia, a decentralized country, has different results and strategies depending on the region. However, in this case the main players are the state, paramilitaries and multinational companies.

### 4.2.2 Paramilitaries and para-economy

Within the studied area, there are several actors involved in the process of coca crops. The main characters are the paramilitaries after guerrilla displacement at the end of the 90s (Baquero, 2014). The different guerrillas came to the region at the beginning of the decade and then expanded into two different fronts: one for the South and the other for the North. This also occurred in Choco (Ibid, 2014).

On the other hand, paramilitary formation may have occurred at the end of *La Violencia* (1948-58). The second part began during the 80s with the drug trafficking war, and its alliances with these sectors made paramilitaries stronger in its presence. A third and last stage from 1994 to 2006 was characterized by a massive eruption in the society (Duncan, 2007).

From the beginning, the guerrilla’s strategy was based on consolidation in the area, which by the time was null. This strategy included the obstruction in the titling process carried out

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during the same period. The obstruction led to the forced displacement of several dwellers creating an internal chaos that began to affect the rest of the country. Paramilitaries came to the area at the end of the decade with the intention to “regularize” the hectic situation. This “regularization” was based in their strategy, which entails violence as a mechanism for social control and a war against guerrillas over the territory.

Paramilitaries’ strategy in the area may be recognized in three main stages: taking advantage of the public order situation, increasing violence against the people in the villages and creating extreme rural poverty (Nuñez, 2008:20). Paramilitary groups’ behavior needs to be analyzed in an integrated manner, taking into account the region’s potential, as it may be considered as a rearguard zone, an important base production and drug trafficking area, a reason why paramilitaries wanted to dislodged guerrilla from this zone (Loinsight, 2002, p99).

Besides this strategy, paramilitaries did not have any intention to expand their territory as guerrillas did, instead they respond to local power logic and a counterinsurgent doctrine, keeping the dominance of an area and evicting guerrillas and everything related with them.

In this regard, the strategy of paramilitaries might be defined from several perspectives that overlap to form a complete understanding of this phenomenon. It responds to a particular interest in the area in resources such as gold mines and coca cultivations as an important element in its funding for war and domination purposes (Nuñez, 2008). This is part of what is called para-economy and is a vital part of their strategy along with violence and terror to civil society.

In terms of para-economy, paramilitary forces and its funding for war purposes are concentrated in an range of the illegal economy, which means illegal mining, illicit crops and long bargains with multinational companies. These are the main components of its income, even though they have some minor incomes from other sources such as politicians.

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7 See Loinsight. 2002 La Estrategia integral del paramilitarismo en el Magdalena Medio Colombia.
and army forces (Loinsight, 2002). Drug commerce is also important in this matter. Some of the multinational companies are involved in drug commerce according to NGO reports.

4.2.3 Multinational companies

Another important actor in this scene is the multinational company, which has been causing problems to the residents in general. These problems are also related to land grabbing and banana cultivation. Due to the issue with land titling in the study area, specific companies such as Banacol, Uniban and Chiquita Brands contributes to the problematic in the area with its alliances with paramilitaries, displacing communities from their territory for their own interest (Justicia Y Paz 2012).

Through the relations with paramilitary forces, these companies have made land expropriations for business interests such as oil palm. This might entail massacres of civil society, to landowners, Afro Colombian community leaders, human rights advocates and various officials from the NGOs (Ibid 2012).

According to NGO reports, Banacol has also interfered with the commerce of drugs from Colombia to Europe through Panama and this also implies the corruption in the whole system and the responsibility of these companies that are, in one way or another, helping to maintain the status quo in the area by funding paramilitaries through violence and corruption as their control mechanism.
5. Case Study: From socio-territorial processes to new social configurations: the role of land tenure, armed conflict, environment and coca crops

This chapter will provide information about the case study and some evidence about municipalities. The chapter includes a description of its social dynamics and how social alterations from coca crops and its consequences have changed the lives of the residents. Furthermore, a relationship between oil palm, coca crops and land degradation was also important for the social impact. Finally, the discussion and analysis of empirical findings is made.

5.1 Curvaradó & Jiguamiandó

Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó are part of the lower side of Atrato River at in the Choco department. These communities had a particular development and inclusion in the midst of armed conflict and the process of territorialization named in previous parts of this paper.

The adjacent small towns are located very close to the river (Fig 5) and, according to dwellers, national, and environmental reports this particular element makes these places unique due to their highly fertile soils (UNODC, 2015). This is precisely the reason these places are part of a complicated situation for dwellers, the environment, and local powers.

As Oslender (2007) argues, to understand the logic of these places within the department it is important to first understand their own practices as communities as a whole, from where they think and act. Secondly, is also vital to comprehend their social structure, which is quite different from the western pattern that we already know. To understand these communities it is important to do it from the logic of the rivers, in which case, determine their social and economical structure from the use of natural resources (Oslender, 2007:48).

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8 In these municipalities lives 2400 people and about 600 afro-Colombian families (ColomPIBa, 2011).
In Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó, almost all inhabitants are part of black communities. This implies that they belong to a specific social structure from which Afro Colombian councils decide on almost everything in the area. This is linked to political, environmental, social, cultural and economic processes. Conversely, external ideas and practices are being applied to these places, ignoring the fact that people from this area have had different survival methods. Even in cultural terms, their practices are different since they stress attention for oral tradition as a strong traditional content and a wide range of festivities as a manifestation, whether they are celebrating life or death⁹.

In rural places like Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó with high biodiversity, communities' livelihoods depend directly on the environment for almost all resources. For example, they need land for food crops such as cassava, potato, cocoa and fruits among others (Restrepo, 2002). Rivers, given the fact that these are riverine communities, are highly important for fishing practices and the protection of marine species. Equally important are flora and fauna, which are essential for diverse practices both for alternative medicine and alimentation. As it is previously mentioned, dwellers have been severely affected by the armed conflict in which coca crops are involved along with different actors. Constant contradictions are affecting the area where on the one hand, organizations are funding assistance for alternative development as a solution for coca crops. On the other, while are being eradicated by the U.S aerial pesticide fumigation, aimed at eliminating coca crops but also is destroying other crops and place’s biodiversity not to mention dwellers health (Oslender, 2008: 80). In words of an ex coca grower:

“To this regard, we did not have any voice, they do not listen (Pause) people from the state or from abroad come to us to talk about alternative projects and everything, about how productive it might be for the community and for the families and that we do not have to grow coca or as some call it “the plant that kills” and of course we do not want to harvest that, you probably have to talk to the people who are behind all this well, at the end and by the moment the project for the community council sounded very good after a while I do not know, the US and national government do what they want. Look, in a council reunion they mentioned a possible aerial fumigation because of course they know about the crops in the area, the thing is that they did not know if that was true or not or even when this

fumigation it would be made… well, yes…. they have destroyed thousands of crops, yes coca crops too but also our food crops, rivers and our children’s health… everything.” (Interview ex coca grower, Bogota, March 4, 2016)

The quote above demonstrates the permanent contradictions in the planning for the area and for the circumstances that are not fully integrated in different types of projects. International organizations like the World Bank have funding plans for alternative development in the third world countries through the Biodiversity Program (Oslander, 2008). On the other hand, fumigations like the named above, or other projects from multinational companies with oil palm plans or banana cultivation has exacerbated land-titling issues in the communities.

What is happening deserves special attention because different processes still are taking place, even though they are small towns they are full of features to analyze, but also to integrate all issues to understand what is occurring and the reason why the places are suffering these processes. As it is important for the purpose of this paper, social dynamics needs major consideration for the analysis of what is happening in social configurations from the attachment of communities to the land.

5.2 Description of Social Dynamics
Empirical findings and some literature made the description of the dynamics possible. As previously mentioned, these places have non-western practices and traditions. This also implies their relation with the land is a socio-territorial attachment and thus a conjunctural process in the situation of coca cultivations, armed conflict and other elements that are part of the issues presented in the place.

Both towns have had a similar experience of the complex situation within the area. Changes began in the early 90s, when residents were forced to flee from their homes. Allegedly multinational companies looking to secure control of resources such as bananas, mining and timber forced them to leave their land and their homes if they refused to work with them. All forced displacement was and still is made by paramilitaries to make way for new projects related to oil palm (PIBcolombia, 2001). Within the wide range of paramilitary
strategies are massacres, public assassinations, dismemberment, the burning of houses or villages and various other human rights violations (Baquero, 2014:30). The population of the towns were permanently harassed to the point that they were forced to flee from their homes to larger cities where, in fact, there is no space for peasants.

The above paragraph means to mention fear as a strategy but also as a mechanism for ensuring social obedience and the establishment of power by ultra right-wing paramilitaries. These precepts are based on a “peace” that paramilitaries wanted to export from place to place within the region and the country. Paramilitaries see themselves as protecting civil society from harassment by guerrillas. They do this by the use of terror, working to show how powerful they might be and how the society may work if civilians just obey their instructions.

As mentioned above, part of their strategy is mainly based in violence. Among other tactics are massacres, the murder of community leaders and false alliances against residents with the purpose of obtaining information that might be useful to their purposes. In this process, as officials from Justicia y Paz disclosed:

“No one has the slightest idea of what is happening in those places where different armed actors are focusing their war strategies, we are talking about a place that is strategically “chosen” for its soil richness, the river, the people, the poverty all together makes this place a good one for these actors. We in the organization, for example, tried to protect Carlos. He was a peasant from the area, forced to harvest coca first by guerrillas and then by paramilitaries, we tried to protect him, to protect his family. One day he just was walking around buying things, getting drunk with a lot of money in his pockets, he was like another person, then we thought mmm, they are going to kill him, this is not good, we talked to him and he said “it’s ok. They [paramilitaries] gave me some work everything is just ok” Three weeks after that he was found floating face down on the river. This is a typical paramilitary strategy. We all know that when someone is suddenly rich something bad is going to happen...” (Interview, Bogota, Feb 17, 2016)

This is an exemplary case for the community. Fear is part of everyday life in Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó since armed actors occupied the area. Communities must survive in such environments being afraid of what is next for them. Hence, residents are frightened to do

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10 Fake name given from the Organization in order to protect their work and family’s security of the victim.
the opposite of what paramilitaries order, such having regular festivities as part of the black community culture or any kind of cultural and social expression. This is better summarized by Lair (2009: 70) who says, “the strategic representations of armed actors in the Colombian case imply a destruction of social dynamics, even though, these representations are not radical as it might be in civil war cases, this situations are used by these actors with the purpose of control populations in the long run”.

The above quote leads to an understanding of how violence (in this particular case paramilitary violence) is part of the daily routine. Fear, more than violence, is what is playing an important role in their social structure.

During the 90s, paramilitaries came to the area displacing the guerrillas from the area FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and looking for places to start their campaign (Baquero, 2014). They made agreements with top down powers: local authorities such as the regional mayor, some politicians from the department and also multinational companies. As the first stage, one may talk about how their strategy implants new social configurations through forced displacements with the intention to occupy the land for coca cultivation or other crops. After a while, some of the population returned to their places, constantly facing harassments including being forced to grow coca and make a monthly payment of certain amount of money in exchange for being left alone.

To protect this area, several NGOs from different parts of Europe helped – and still are helping – to protect these areas, including Diakonia from Sweden, PIB Peace International Brigades Colombia project from Belgium and others as well as local NGOs. It is important to mention the work of the Catholic Church in these places. It plays an important role within the problem of the area, the church helps to offer people temporary places to sleep and eat some meals. Furthermore, they collaborate in the process of associations with local leaders (Ibid, 2011).

After the first forced displacement, international organizations along with Colombian ombudsman created what are called "humanitarian and biodiverse zones" with the purpose
of protecting the population and natural resources from the terror and constant violations by armed actors. This includes growing coca, which threatens their cultural roots (ILSA, 2013). Moreover, the state also implemented diverse laws and strategies to “protect” the department communities, especially with the territorial precedent, taking into account that the land of both places is part of collective territories according to law 70 of 1993.

Furthermore, within the social configuration, recuperation processes for cultural heritage of these communities are taking place because Afro Colombian cultural practices are in constant deterioration. This decline is related to rupture in oral history and different types of rituals that are significant part of these communities.

Regarding the role of the central state in this social structure, it is necessary to talk about the lack of access to health and education facilities. As this is part of the country’s periphery, education levels are very low. Access to schooling is difficult in the area. Consequently, there is one primary school in the area and this school is in the nearby municipality, which means children must walk several kilometers to school, according to dwellers of the area. A similar situation is in connection with health center and nearest hospital, located in Riosucio, several kilometers away.

Finally, the role of the woman in social dynamics is also relevant. Even though there is no evidence in studies about gender in this part of the country, women are important in cultural practices. They are also recognized as sexual violence victims and are equally disregarded for education according to Justicia y Paz archives (Justicia y Paz, 2011).

5.3 Local state and politics of resistance
The creation of the local state in these circumstances is related to the conception of the organization from below.\textsuperscript{11} Taking into account local knowledge as basic part to their configuration (Escobar, 2000). When studying black communities from the Pacific Coast Region, it is important to think about particular dynamics, possibly the opposite of what is

known in a globalized world. This region has its own social, political and economical mechanisms.

In the context of a weakened state, partnership processes are taking place in several rural place of the country. This phenomenon responds to gaps left by the state in the deployment of its administrative power. When the situation develops as it has in Colombia, there may be two different options at the rural level. One is a militarized solution: supporting and joining armed groups (as many did). The second one is linked with this partnership organization. This includes the work of NGOs, humanitarian organizations and communities’ councils. Nevertheless, stakeholders are working to protect the people from violence, social inequality and helping with agricultural projects to protect the land and their livelihoods, among other practices. This is a form of what Appadurai (2001) called “deep democracy” where new forms of organized power are being created in the context of globalization, neoliberalism and within nation state borders.

Even though Appadurai’s analysis was implemented for urban processes, the idea of this kind of governmentality may be applied in this context. Hence, it is connected with the Foucauldian concept of power, where it is primarily positive, “rather than negative, [and] is exercised rather than possessed and omnipresent rather than localized” (DuBois, 1991:5).

In both municipalities, the local state is represented by the organizations named above. However, the main actor is the council. NGOs and other organizations cannot operate without the council’s permission or authorization, taking into account that working with black communities entails putting an emphasis on territory control as a previous condition for survival and as way to reinforce culture and biodiversity (Escobar, 2005:135).

Given the recognition from Law 70 of 1993, these practices, such as black community councils, are entitled to that authority, especially when the state does not offer guaranties for dwellers’ survival, not even when protecting their lives from armed groups or multinational companies. Justice and Peace organization, for instance, supports the recognition of peoples’ rights and is in a permanent state of monitoring and helping
working towards the acknowledgment and possible dialogue with the President of the Republic and the Home Office in the violations committed by different actors.

Humanitarian support is given by different kinds of organization that have helped in the creation of humanitarian areas and are in the permanent care of black communities through different processes such as the implementation of agricultural projects, various awareness workshops in human rights and others. Through this work, it is also important to mention the Science and Development Corporation, who are assisting the community through planning and development of projects for biodiversity protection working along with the University of Chocó, a higher educational center in the department located in Quibdó. Officials from this organization argue:

“We are aware of what is happening in the area, even though we have no physical presence, we know how black communities are dealing with the situation, we are working towards generating new projects for them… the communities. Even though it is sometimes difficult to implement the projects… due to… yes the situation itself…Look, these are communities that are needing real solutions, - to the point - suggestions, hard work from all of us… the situation is difficult but we are still working to generate peace… a different sort of peace” (Interview, Quibdó, Feb 29, 2016).

They seek a peace created from local knowledge for the local people. This kind of help is what black communities councils are taking into account when they stated the place as a strong connection with social movements that perceive the obligation to work towards local rather than national aims. Or in the words of Escobar (1998:56), “the work of activists of the Colombian Pacific Region originates a network of its own, which encompasses local communities and ecosystems”.

The work of these organizations in the area is framed by the politics of resistance. These organizations are intensifying the autonomy of locals over their own resources and strategies demonstrating respect towards local knowledge and natural resources. These organizations are creating new environments for the dwellers, even though organization and their officers still have to cope with armed groups and their constant harassments.
This kind of work is constructing a different sort of tie between the communities within the area. They are helping the construction and reconstruction of social and political gaps left by the violence as social movements are constructing a political strategy for the defense of the territory, culture and identity (Ibid, 1998). This is what the politics of resistance might do in chaotic environments disregarded by the state and the public attention in Colombia. Figure 6 explains a possible local power structure where councils are above all organizations, but always in contact with each of them. Funding assistance from the European Union is helping the work of several NGOs not just in the area but also in the country.

![Figure 6: Organizations of NGOs in the area](source: Carolina Nuñez)

### 5.3.1 Non Governmental Organizations

As previously described, a wide range of organizations is supporting the area from diverse perspectives. In a way, these organizations are replacing the duties of the state, at least in part, as usually happens in conflict areas where the government might not be aware of the importance of social and cultural dynamics.

However, some organizations are in permanent dialogue with the state, working towards a connection that permits a critical consciousness of the problematic. Justice and Peace and
Science, Society and Development are two of many organizations working with civil society in the area. According to personnel from both groups, there are at least seventeen more NGOs working in different domains with the communities in the area. It is also important to mention that, within these groups, there is a lack of organizations working with women. This work is necessary due to vulnerability of women and the need to attend to their vulnerabilities, working towards a reconstruction at distinct levels but especially regarding an integrative approach from and for black communities.

5.3.2 Afro Colombian community councils

Within the social and administrative model of the community, undeniably the most important agency of authority and power in the area, and the department, is black community councils. Due to the specific organization of these communities, a social and political structure responds to its particular connection with the ecosystem and spirituality (Restrepo, 2002).

To understand its cosmogony, councils are part of the organization within the community. Old men are the most important people in hierarchical terms, even though the councils are mainly comprised of community men. The intention of these councils is to protect cultural heritage and promote local autonomy, facing the central state and its neoliberal developmentalist policies.

In order to understand the reason for councils, it is vital to also comprehend the relation between the central state and the “periphery”, as explained in the literature review. According to Baquero (2014), the state, in an attempt to bring progress to the Pacific Region, is in an apparent evolution based on a business mentality from neoliberal policies that has lead to a critical moment in the history of the area in relation to communities and its role in such projects.

During the 90s, a state development plan was based on an extractive economy, especially the extraction of resources (e.g. gold, platinum and timber). This situation was held under the unawareness of experts and local knowledge, altering subsistence models (Ibid, 2014) from that moment. Popular participation is considered an important step towards the
creation of councils. Even though there was popular participation, councils are considered a more structured model of participation and organization.

Law 70 of 1993 was responsible for the consolidation of this kind of organization. According to Baquero (2014:33) “It is considered as a powerful legal tool in defense of black communities rights and after 1992 there is a clear visibilization of these communities in the national administration” Understanding that the government in its constitutional reform during the 90s offered to black communities the acknowledge to their territorial rights. Moreover, The state actions can be read as a contradiction in its logic. On the one hand, it is a positive step forward in the integration of the country as a nation, but on the other it is trying to implement development projects, ignoring the fact that these communities have territorial rights and thus have a particular knowledge of the area that must be respected.

Furthermore, the state is creating at the same time a worsening of the conflict in the area causing more problems between the actors in relation with the land and territory.

Afro Colombian councils are an organized group with particular aims. The most important of these aims is protecting the community in the armed conflict struggles and social conflicts of the area itself. These councils have a particular critique towards the development imposed from above and from the different actors, including the problem of coca cultivations and the impact it has on families and the community. Therefore, councils are creating their own social structure and administration following its own systems and generating vindication.

5.4 Environmental violence
Within political ecologist texts the term environmental violence is used as a reference for the extraction and the excessive use of resources for human practices (Richards, 2001:76). However, the present case study is not contemplating the environmental effects of coca crops and its alternative development created from the state, the oil palm and its consequences for the soil and resources that are essential for community highly dependent on natural resources.
5.4.1 Coca cultivation and land degradation

In general within Colombia, illicit crops are allocated in highly valuable ecosystems, characterized by wealthy natural resources. These crops affect soils, rivers and the survival of flora and fauna species. The deforestation of native flora in primary forest is done by cutting or burning thousands of hectares for the purpose of coca crops (Tavera, 2000). Deforestation is also causing several problems for the local environment. According to Tavera (2000: 110), this problem is causing, among others:

- Destruction of ecological niches and food chains
- Soil erosion
- Extinction of endemic species
- Alteration of rainfall patterns and local weather
- Rise in carbon dioxide levels
- Decline of water springs

According to state statistics in recent years (DANE, 2013), it is known that to grow one hectare of coca it is necessary to destroy four hectares of forest. Once the site has been deforested, agricultural process such as seeding, maintenance and harvest begin. During this stage of the process, chemical products are needed and therefore introduced to the soil (Tavera, 2000).

Coca crops demands a high amount of space and nutrients. This implies the necessity of eliminating other types of crops.

Occasionally, growers or warlords (especially the latter), feel the need to increase the production of leaves. Bio-stimulants and pesticides are used to control plagues. This has an impact on soils, causing sedimentation and thus flooding during rainy seasons (UNODC, 2015). Pesticides in the soil are also affecting animals that eat grasses infected by the chemicals used in the crops.

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12 Primary forest: Are forest of native tree species where there are not indication of previous human activity. Greenfacts.org http://www.greenfacts.org/glossary/def/forest.htm
All of the above leads to an understanding of how crops are altering the environment. Along with the environmental impact is also the deterioration of the working population in those cultivations. Alongside this problem is the presence of laboratories, which implies another type of chemicals, is being used for base cocaine production (Figure 7). According to Justice and Peace:

“One of the secrets that became known yesterday was the testimony of one of the settles, when says very scared that with permission of the multinational banana, paramilitaries have cocaine laboratories in the area, in which they converse with some state officials. Another person says that he wants to leave because paramilitaries are forcing him to do bad things and now he is expecting to be relocated”
(Justice and Peace Archives, Sep 2015)

The above quote echoes how the existence of these laboratories is affecting not just the environment but also residents and directly involves multinational companies in the drug production process. Even though laboratories are not part of this research, they play an important role in the configuration of environmental and social impacts in the area and are, therefore, worth mentioning.

Nevertheless, the state’s attempt to solve the situation of coca cultivation and other illicit crops generates the Alternative Development Plan. This entails small-scale crops in different coca areas of the country. The idea from the beginning was to replace illegal crops in general for legal ones through agricultural assistance (Miranda, 2000: 153). The process has gradually changed through the years since it was created in 1986 when peasants had the opportunity to work the framework of legality through bank credits to the rural sector.
Besides, the fact that illicit crops damage the environment, there is another type of crop that equally affects the area environment and is also linked with paramilitaries’ activities, along with companies that manufacture different sort of products from the oil palm.

5.4.2 Oil palm and its consequences for the environment

A brief introduction to the topic will be made, followed by a description of the environmental degradation and some comments on social impact.

Within the problem area, it is also important to mention the role of the oil palm. This plant came to Colombia during the 1930s and became popular during the 1940s with a crop installation made by United Fruit Company now known as Chiquita Brands (Mingorance et al., 2004:49). During the 50s and 60s, the plant became more popular due to rising demand for vegetable oils and fats. Since then it has been part of governmental strategies.

Despite success of the plant in several areas of the country, there is a significant degradation of the environment. This is not entirely because of the plant, but rather the implementation modalities that imply large-scale crops that bring deforestation as well as the contamination of soils, water and air through the use of agricultural toxins. It also causes intensive droughts in soils that leads to an impoverishment of communities and, in some occasions, irreparable damage of soils. In the case of the study area, as mentioned, high soil richness permits almost all kinds of plantations. In this particular case, both towns are recognized as a potential area for the harvest of oil palm, according to Colombia’s geography department and its forest zoning areas (IGAC, 2014).

In this context, oil palm, and what they imply for the resources and land degradation, must be included as a recent problem for the community. According to the 2005 ombudsman’s report, these plantations have eroded soil due to deforestation and rivers have settled for the same cause. To the previous statement, is necessary to mention that oil palm is creating

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13 Since then, the crop has grown steadily: 18,000 ha. In 1960, 130,000 in 1995 and estimate of about 200,000 today. Mingorance et al, Cultivos de Palma Africana en Choco 2004: 49
14 At this point is important to add that countries that are major growers of the plant have similar characteristics between them. Among those characteristics are; great extensions of own-state land, Complicate democratic histories, with problems of economic development whose leaders and entrepreneurs seek niches to develop economic activities, cheap labor and little labor rights protected and where there have been guerrilla or illicit crops Ibid, 2004.
internal confrontations among residents due to a lack of clarity about its use and the relation between paramilitaries and multinational companies that are forcing these communities to grow this plant, due to its large scale production and capital benefits for multinational companies and what is considered as its armed wing, paramilitary groups (ILSA, 2013: 71).

Oil palm should also be included in the context of social impact, due to its capacity for destroying the soil (as mentioned above), the palm itself is not the problem but its way of implementation and all that surrounds its business context, which once again involves the paramilitary and its relation with companies in the area.

5.5 Social Impact
According to different facts that occur in the area, it is necessary to talk about the shift in the social and cultural context in relation with coca cultivation, understanding it as a component in a more extensive and complex framework.
Different parts of the present paper have highlighted the importance of comprehending the whole picture in an integrated manner, due to the complexity of the situation itself, and also the impossibility to untie one element from the other.

To talk about the social impact in both places is to understand how the resistance took place at different levels. Even though the research has not focused on political features, it is vital to consider it to grasp social elements and environmental issues. As previously mentioned, paramilitaries transformed the area through elements such as forced displacement and coercive practices. This includes alliances with politicians and the army at a local and national level to facilitate the access to territories and to finally set up self-government (Loinsight, 2002).

One may talk about a social impact from the moment guerrillas occupied the area during the 80s and early 90s. However, strategies between guerrillas and paramilitaries may vary in their ideologies, and it is recognizable as a major alteration after paramilitary penetration. Cultivation of coca is a part of the war economy strategy, and this sole element changed structures in Afro Colombian communities. It made them gradually shift to new
agricultural practices, which are different to their traditional systems of production (Escobar, 2005).

When black communities are forced to grow coca, what happens after that is a detriment to their social and economic structure. This entails the use of chemicals when harvesting coca, (sometimes with the intention of accelerating the growth process) and then an increase in cocaine production, which implies significant upswing in warlord’s income. When families are forced to grow coca, their income increases. Even though they already have everything in the community, this generates a contradiction that is difficult for residents to cope with, because introducing new situations into rural environments from western and globalized practices such as the value of the money and a small-scale representation of wealthy, which was the case of Carlos, quoted previously in this text15.

Besides the case of Carlos, some other cases extracted from the NGOs’ archives are portrayed as a problem, especially in relation to alcohol, drug consumption in young people and domestic violence:

“I remember how after several threats from them… my parents decided to grow coca there was like grow, die or leave those were the options. It was difficult, but at the end my parents decided, so they did it we all did. I helped too, with the time my father and older brother started to drink very often you know we had so many problems… my dad became a very angry and violent person towards all of us… I think it was all that we went through, the situation, the pressure everything” (Justicia y Paz Archives, 2010).

Likewise, after growing coca for long periods during the year, residents tend to forget the old patterns in relation to cycles and techniques, taking into account their specific relationship with the environment and given resources (Ortiz, 2004). This is a reason why the work of the NGO Science, Society and Development has such relevance in the process of cultural recuperation, where some people from the community find a space to recreate their practices and to work towards the restoration of rural systems.

Coercive practices leading to a submission through the crops must be added to all of the above. Also, a “behavioral guideline” is imposed by paramilitaries in both places, that

15 See description of social dynamics p. 33
gradually changes social patterns according to these actors’ interests, creating what is called a social anomie. This term is used to make reference to social degradation done by paramilitaries in the north side of the country, and might may be applied in this context. (Alonso, 1997: 45).

“Either you are with us, or leave or die… lets make a communitarian work and plant coca and oil palm, this land is not yours, the progress is here, we have removed guerrillas from the area now we have to work together” (Justicia y paz archives, august 2006).

The quote above also makes reference to the counterinsurgency manual written by the Colombian army after the visit of the U.S. army mission (Yarborough) in 1962, where paramilitaries were created with the purpose of eliminating guerrillas at all levels and “re-educating” civil society. At the same time, this counterinsurgency ideology persecuted all who were related with social movements or any manifestation of unconformity with the status quo (CINEP, 2004: 1).

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16 According to Durkheim, social anomie makes a reference to the lack of ethical values, that leads to social disorder when two social groups does not share same social bounds. In Alonso. M. Conflicto armado y configuracion regional. Medellin 1997.

17 Letter read by a paramilitary command during the incursion to the area.
6. Discussion
This paper attempts to offer an interpretation of social changes caused by issues related to the land and coca crops in an armed conflict context. The example from both places illustrates the process of how different elements have accelerated the changes in social structures.

The purpose of this section is to link the literature review and theory with empirical findings, offering a complete analysis considering the new insights from the research. To achieve this it is necessary return to the introduction where aims were stated. This paper aimed to:

- Interpret how coca crops has modified social dynamics in Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó,

- Analyze social relations in rural places and their connection with coca cultivation and land tenure issues in an armed conflict context.

6.1 Coca crops and social dynamics
So far, the paper has displayed how coca cultivation is an issue for the social structure in Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó. Empirical findings, along with literature, led to the recognition that this activity is a forced practice linked with other issues such as violence and socio-territorial processes.

According to the data gathered, the reality (in this special case when there is not particular research about the study area) is much more different to what is portrayed in the literature. In order to understand features of the two municipalities in relation to coca crops and social dynamics, it is important to consider unexpected findings such as the understanding of how coca leaf is affecting the communities, when is still decoupled from the base production.

The coca leaf (and crops in general) is leading rural places to participate in an imposed regime from the government and the US, especially the latter. These cultivations are changing the way communities with a particular local knowledge are shifting in the perception of the place where they belong. This perception is a strong part of their culture when socio-territorial features are linked with cultural practices (Escobar, 1998).
In the literature in general, terror is depicted as strong element for social configuration (Oslender, 2008). However, beyond terror there is a stronger component in this frame: the fact that community survived in the context of terror when at the same time are creating resistance spaces and dynamics such as the work of NGOs with the community and local councils. Resistance is thus becoming an everyday component for new social configurations, even though coca cultivations are generating ruptures in cultural practices within the Afro Colombian population.

In this resistance context, the social structure is also changing, making people more aware of their own configuration and cultural practices even when they are being “re-educated” and forced to behave differently through coercive mechanisms. In this sense, Ronderos (2014) argues that the vision of progress is an imposition from outside the community while Rincon et al. (2013) say that top-down policies are spreading the armed conflict while at the same time causing social damage in vulnerable communities (e.g. the black population) which are part of the large periphery.

Furthermore, everyday resistance and moral economy are concepts that lead to understanding the social resistance in both towns, especially the one created from community councils for the struggle in the defense of something more than the territory, even when this has strong meaning for black communities. Therefore, I consider councils as the main actor in the resistance struggle, even when they are under intensive harassment and different pressures from the communities. It is vital to mention, how social alliances between these communities systems of food exchange are reinforcing moral economy and social ties.

The story of violence is not the only one that needs to be told. The resistance is found in areas where coca is grown, even though the results may vary depending on the department and region studied. In the case of the Colombian South, results could be different due to endemic characteristics and actors involved. Hence, the Colombian case for social dynamics and coca cultivation cannot be generalized.
6.2 Land tenure, coca cultivation and armed conflict.

So far, the paper and literature have shown how the land is probably the main issue not just for the development of the armed force but also for the social conflict in the area. With the constitution of 1991, the country started a decentralization process where black communities began to have acknowledgement to be included in administrative, political and social practices (Oslender, 2008).

Moreover, the findings suggest that despite the process of 1991, facts related to land grabbing are taking place in the departments, which have a history of state-owned land. This last element is still used by armed actors in the pursuit of their own interests. If there is a titling regulation from the state, armed actors are ignoring the law and still creating chaotic environments upon the land, coca cultivation and war strategies. This political ecology perspective led to a wide understanding in the interpretation of the transformation of nature as a resource for human practices in war strategies.

Returning to the literature, an element that is not taken into consideration is the way paramilitaries are giving shape to social configurations based on their “behavioral guideline” and the strong connection between army and the state with paramilitary groups as a way to understand how and why paramilitary intervention has such success in the area. In this sense, the theory applied was useful to delineate power relations, especially in the given context where nature is becoming a politicized entity by stakeholders developing strained relations among them (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2011). The case study is confirming what Young (2004) argues from a political ecology perspective about how the intermix between governmental power and economic forces in such circumstances results in resistance outcomes by local people.

The role of coca crops, land tenure and the armed conflict are important because they are simultaneously shaping physical landscapes and therefore social configurations in the area. The spatial configuration of the crops entails a direct conflict with warlords especially when the land is part of a community’s territory.
This study led to an understanding of the complexity in the meaning of the land from a social perspective. Unexpectedly, I have found several issues that are lacking attention in the area. One is the role of women in the violent context and especially in the community as a part of a hierarchical structure where women are relegated to housing maintenance and are not part of communities’ councils, which are an important part of the community. Nevertheless, a much more critical situation for women is sexual violence and deep study and assistance in this area is needed.

In sum, the findings of this paper led to an interpretation of the complexity embedded in the land and all its multidirectional issues, expressly within black communities for reasons explained within the paper. One of those multidirectional issues, concerning the research question, is way coca affects social elements considering the population’s strong attachment to the land and the impacts of its division. Forced displacement and the new social configuration based on fear are part of those issues. However, the role of resistance is present on a daily basis, with the permanent struggle of NGOs and councils generating geographies of resistance especially in the context of corruption and contempt of the law 70 of 1993 by paramilitaries groups.

Additionally, the paper itself highlights the importance of an understanding of coca as a crop in relation to land and intrinsic situations in a particular community. Cocaine and its production in laboratories were not taken into consideration, in which case this may be considered a gap in the research.
7. Conclusions

This paper reflects on the social impact of coca cultivation in a specific area where different situations related to land tenure, land grabbing and state neglect converge. Additionally, it considers environmental degradation in the area as a problem that may also affect social structures while other elements are altering other internal dynamics. This case study is part of a much larger structure, embedded in Colombia’s armed conflict history. However, it is a particular case given the characteristics of the place, the Afro-Colombian community, the role of the land and actors in scene.

The impoverishment of the communities and abandonment of the area lay the foundations for what is known as a “para-state” in which paramilitaries create a new small state ruled by their behavioral guideline and supported, in one way or another, by local and national elites.

The study does not offer a solution to the issues of the area. However, it does offer an interpretation of social structures altered by coca crops and land as a main problem in dispute. Regardless of the adversity community councils and other organizations face, they have, in the first instance, done notable work towards the protection of the community as a human right, and are running diverse projects to preserve cultural practices and assisting in the advocacy of land rights from the law 70 of 1993 in the second instance.

Empirical findings led to an understanding that the situation is more complex in reality, despite the limitations of the study. However, other elements such as fear and terror allowed me to see a wider scope in those alterations while at the same time are a vital element in the comprehension of the resistance as a key mechanism with which the community survives.

The role of NGOs is utterly important to understand the resistance as a method to confront adversities and in the battle for the rights of the communities. Likewise, councils are constantly struggling for the right to the territory and to construct an autonomous perspective ahead. In this sense, these organizations have developed a framework that
incorporates socio-territorial concepts linked with biodiversity, humanitarianism, local economies and local powers.

What is happening in the department and even in the region may differ from the case study, which leads one to think that Afro Colombian conflicts are not homogenous. There is a variation depending on the actors, resources, illicit crops and its number of cultivated hectares. However for further research, some topics may include:

- The role of woman in the communities and how vulnerable women are in the context of armed conflict.

- A more holistic approach for community councils: understanding them as a strong entity of resistance and an example for many other processes in the country and how they can be more represented in the literature, especially as a comparison between actors and between processes in Colombian regions.

- A new contextualization of Latin American countries in the frame of the war on drugs policy from the U.S. government, and how this may lead to ask: What is the context of drugs in modern capitalism? How do other countries’ drug consumption affect remote places outside their own nation-state’s boundaries?

Finally, there are many more elements to be understood in the area, especially the changes that lie ahead in the context of the resistance and the struggle for life as a human right, particularly in the present moment when Colombia is facing an apparent peace agreement with FARC guerrilla. But there are also some further inquiries: What is going to happen with the country’s periphery, and paramilitaries in the ongoing social change that the country is frame in? Surely there is a path to follow about the relationship between human beings and nature where particular relationships such as those seen in coca cultivations have been created.
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Interviews

P. Alberto Franco 2016 (Justice and Peace)
Jhon Jairo Cuesta 2016 (Science, Society and Development)
Carolina Jerez 2016 (Justice and Peace)
Ex coca growers 2016
9. Appendix

Annex 1

Landsat Image Coca crops in Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó. (With permission)

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, Bogotá, Col.