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# A political ecology of frontier dynamics in the northern Colombian Amazon

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fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science  
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# A political ecology of frontier dynamics in the northern Colombian Amazon

## **Abstract**

The Amazon is the land of the unknown and untameable, emblem of the wild, the uncontrolled, where life blows up. This natural richness makes the northern Amazon, especially the Caquetá department, a territory of particular interest for different extractive industries. In the last century, neoliberal policies have fostered colonization and the dispossession of local inhabitants. However, these processes are resisted by bottom-up movements and revolts. This research wants to analyze frontier dynamics in Caquetá by describing these contrasting discourses and the imaginaries in dispute. The dominant discourse is studied through the analysis of the national public policy of the last sixteen years. Then, the local imaginary is analyzed by describing the process of resistance of farmers and local movements. This process grows out of the construction of an alternative discourse, based on a relational epistemology and radical interdependency between beings, and challenges the western dualist and hegemonic system and worldview.

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## **Introduction**

### **Problem statement and research question**

Named the lung of the world for its huge capacity of CO<sub>2</sub> storage and oxygen production, the Amazon is also one of the most deforested territories on earth, and its deforestation rate does not seem to be slowing down. In particular, the Caquetá department, located northwest of the Amazon region of Colombia, has been the most deforested in the country during the last 20 years (IDEAM; FCDS - Unidos por los bosques, 2022). More and more threats are rising for this ecosystem and its inhabitants. Oil and mine extraction have been considered the main drivers of development during the last twenty years, but in the eyes of rural communities, this has brought environmental degradation and worsening economic conditions. The national political system has encouraged the entrance of foreign extractive industries and the expansion of big landowners, offering them incentives and military control to secure their investments (Palacio, 2010; Diaz Parra, 2015). At the same time, conservation strategies have also been a reason to deploy military forces and displace local inhabitants from areas of economic interest (Bocarejo & Ojeda, 2016; Hein et al., 2020). Increasingly, communities living in the northern Amazon have to deal with armed actors and illicit traffic, as well as governmental repression. This repression is one factor that has led farmers to organize social movements and fight for their rights (Ramírez, 2011).

These bottom-up movements counterpose the representations, definitions, and delimitations of the Amazon biome proposed by Colombian policymakers with their own alternative imaginaries. This dissertation is an analysis of the opposing discourses of government and farmer movements in the Caquetá. On one hand, international and national companies see this territory as an economic source and sustain natural resource exploitation in the name of development. On the other hand, local farmer movements propose an alternative model of development based on environmental respect and cooperation between species. These differences are rooted in contrasting epistemological and ontological bases, being epistemology the worldview and values on which knowledge is built, and ontology the study of being and of the relation between beings. Governmental narratives are constructed on the western and colonial epistemology that perpetuates anthropocentrism and capitalism. Local epistemology is decolonial, biocentric, and based on a relational ontology that foresees cooperative relationships between different beings.

In order to understand conflicting actors' interests and ideas in those areas that are far from the control of the central power, the Amazon territory has been studied as a frontier by several political ecologies (Acosta Garcia and Fold, 2022; Hein et al., 2020; Ioris, 2020; Palacio, 2001; 2010; Schmink et al., 2019). The term frontier is debated and has multiple meanings. When we speak about frontiers we imagine liminal spaces, something that is constantly changing, maybe a land full of opportunities. It is used to define the integration of the wild areas into the settled land, but it can also mean technological innovation or spaces where to find new economic opportunities. Frontier-making has been historically related to the civilizing mission of colonization and the quest of capitalists to incorporate new areas

under their economic control. Although the usage of this definition precedes the rise of capitalism, “*frontiering has been an essential component of the expansion and strengthening of capital*” (Ioris, 2020. p.2). Extractive or resource frontiers have been described as places where policies and laws are designed to satisfy the global demand for natural resources (Peluso & Lund, 2011). Frontier-making is then a mechanism to establish land control, enabled by practical and legal instruments such as enclosures, territorializations, and militarization (ibid.).

Enclosures and territorialization are both processes of territorial demarcation. While the enclosure is a form of privatization of the land, territorialization is a way of restricting access that reinforces the power of the authority over the governed subjects. The creation of protected areas for conservation purposes has been described as a modern form of enclosure (Bocarejo & Ojeda, 2016). These mechanisms of privatization and conservation are often related to the process of subject-making, which is the categorization of the local inhabitants that allows only specific ethnic groups to remain on the territory. In protected areas, environmental policies are often aimed at excluding farmers from their boundaries while allowing indigenous presence based on the narrative that configures indigenous as protectors of nature, versus the reckless deforesting farmer (Hein et al., 2020). Based on the Colombian Constitution, indigenous communities, when legally recognized as “*resguardo*” (indigenous reserve), have “*inalienable, imprescriptible, and unseizable control over their territory*”<sup>1</sup>. Indigenous communities are subject of rights, and their culture shall be protected by the state. On the contrary, farmers' communities are not recognized as subjects of rights, and their cultural inheritance is often disregarded. Nevertheless, farmers and indigenous communities and movements share the same epistemology. Not only because they inhabit the same territory and participate in the same struggles, but also because they share the same radical interdependency with nature.

The war narrative and the consequent militarization is another instrument of frontier-making used in Caquetá by hegemonic classes to maintain land control. Farmers have been frequently mistaken for members of guerrilla groups and executed, both in armed confrontations and in false positives<sup>2</sup>. These executions have been perceived by a large part of the population as a success of the Uribe government, which brought to his reelection and to the so-called Uribe era (from 2002 until 2022). Still, this stigmatization survives and too often farmers are killed or criminalized for living in a territory that is controlled by armed groups and for having a role in the coca market (Ciro, 2018). Small farmers are constantly arrested for commercializing coca, and whenever they own plots, their properties are confiscated for the extinction of dominion, a mechanism through which the state<sup>3</sup> takes over territories where

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<sup>1</sup> Law 21 of 1991, with which Colombia ratified the 169 ILO Convention of 1989 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, the broader international convention to guarantee indigenous rights.

<sup>2</sup> False positives is the name that has been given to the homicides of civilians disguised by guerrilla soldiers carried out by the government during the armed conflict. They were declared as achievements by the Uribe government to demonstrate the effectiveness of the army in suppressing revolutionary forces (Palacio et al. 2010).

<sup>3</sup> As Ingrid Bolivar points out (2011), the state is an evolving process of construction from territories, and not an unique “totalizing” entity, hence it seems more proper to use the lower case letter to name it.



illicit crops are spotted. But this does not seem to erode the coca market. Even if the peace agreement of 2016 between the state and the revolutionary guerrilla forces FARC-EP included an agreement for partially funding the substitution of illegal crops, the population complain about the government's non-compliance with what was stipulated. The categorization of the farmers as colonists, criminals, or *guerrilleros*, is part of a governmental narrative that aims to legitimize their dispossession and strengthen armed control. It becomes necessary to understand the identity of the local farmer, and its role in relation to the territory, in order to overcome those categories.

The investigation tries to answer the following research question: Which are the government and farmers' contrasting discourses and representations of the Amazon at the root of frontier dynamics in Caquetá?

Gramsci's theoretical concept of hegemony is fundamental in order to understanding how discourses and representations work to legitimate the dispossession and stigmatization of local farmers. He defines hegemony as the superstructure<sup>4</sup> of ideologies, systems of thought, and norms that maintain the domination of one class over another (Woodcock, 1985).

Thus, public policies that are produced by the dominant class are also made to benefit themselves or maintain the status quo. Therefore, political control can be understood through the analysis of the narratives that are reproducing cultural hegemony. The dominant narrative of the government is aimed at legitimizing capitalist and colonial relations of production in the Amazon, which condemn local inhabitants to a subsistence economy. But these narratives are contrasted by bottom-up movements of indigenous, farmers and workers, that are experiencing the negative effects of uneven development. The strategies of militarization and criminalization of local inhabitants are then the response of a state that is losing its ideological predominance and is trying to silence alternative worldviews and interests through forced control. Gramsci also indicates that hegemony is always contrasted by counter-hegemonic projects. The struggle for hegemony generates the struggle for dismantling the capitalist economy and the political and ideological superstructures of the hegemonic system. Counter hegemony is then constructed "*within the capitalist social formation by means of cultural or ideological ascendancy of the anti-capitalist forces*" (Im, 1991, p.126). The alliance of anti-capitalistic forces can build what Gramsci calls counter-hegemonic construction, that is the construction of the ideological, epistemological, and political alternative to the hegemonic system. All revolutionary movements can become part of the counter-hegemonic process when gathering together and proposing alternative structures.

Escobar (2020) refers to Gramsci when he talks about the actual climate crisis as a capitalist crisis, responsible for creating spaces for a counter-hegemonic struggle to emerge. He reads this crisis as an ontological crisis, that is related to a particular ontology, modern, western, colonial, and anthropocentric. Focusing on Latin American activists and social movements he

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<sup>4</sup> In Marxist theory, the structure is constituted by the ensemble of the relations of production, it is the economic base on which political and social processes are built, while these socio-political and cultural processes are named superstructures (Im, 1991).

highlights how they challenge this ontology by proposing alternative forms of “*ontological politics, namely, those forms of politics that explicitly or implicitly draw on radical relationality*” (Escobar, 2020, p.XIV). He claims that modern epistemology is based on a radical dualistic difference between subject and object, and particularly between nature and humanity, whereas radical relationality envisages a deep interrelation between all the entities of the world. Thus ontological politics proposes an alternative ontology that challenges the modern separation of humans and nature. He then extends the domain of ontological politics to all political strategies struggling for a pluriversal transition, the transition to a pluriversal world based on radical interdependence and where different worldviews can fit. In the context of the present research, what is referred to as hegemonic strategy is the ensemble of narratives that favor the expansion of landowners and extractive industries, conveying the message that development means growth and growth can only be achieved through resource extraction and private investment. Discourses of development, growth, and conservation are read as instruments of the dominant class to gather consensus on local economic control and oppression. Whereas, the political activity of local farmer movements is identified as a counter-hegemonic project, as they propose a political and epistemological alternative to the dominant capitalistic and modern one. We then analyze the hypothesis that the subsistence of a farmer’s medical knowledge based on the botanic diversity of the forests they are living in, and the way in which they exist together and communicate, testify to their radical relationality. Local farmers talk to plants, and they ask them for help when they need to heal. Within local ontology, nature is a subject and manifests itself in multiple bodies.

## **Case study**

A central contribution to the political economic studies of the Caquetá department is constituted by the work of Estefania Ciro (2013; 2016; 2018) and Margarita Serje (2011). The researches of Nicolàs Acosta Garcia and Fold (2022) and Amador-Jiménez and Millner (2021) are also fundamental to understanding the role of the state in farmers’ dispossession in Caquetá. Not many studies have focused on the epistemology of local farmers and their relationship with the territory, which is the root of their resistance. Most of the epistemological studies talking about radical interdependence are based on indigenous cultures (Descolá, 2013; Quiceno Toro, 2016). Then, the present research wants to envisage the analysis of policy narratives, which are supposed to support the extractivist economy and farmers' marginalization, but also the description of creative territorial alternatives by focusing on farmers’ resistance. Analyzing the process of frontier-making through political ecology envisages the study of both the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes in the region. It means deconstructing the discourses about growth, conservation, and war in order to understand where they originate and for whose profit. At the same time, it means understanding the outbreak of local movements, such as farmers organizations, and their different views and relations with the territory. The research followed three phases: a first phase of literature review, a second of field research, and a third of analysis of the first hand data.

A case study is analyzed in northern Caquetá, involving people from five farmer communities in the municipality of Curillo and San José del Fragua. This research is part of the project “*One Amazon: A One Health assessment of emerging epidemic threats and resilience among Amazonian indigenous peoples, in the light of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic*”, conducted in Colombia by the Universidad Nacional, and Universidad del Valle as UV-GESP, the group of research of epidemiology and public health. The area of investigation has been decided in collaboration with Coordosac (Coordinadora Departamental de Organizaciones Sociales, Ambientales y Campesinas del Caquetá), a departmental organization coordinating farmer associations and syndicates from the rural area, where the other two organizations involved in the project converge: ASOPORTALES or Portales del Fragua, and ASMTRAC-CURC (Asociación Trabajadoras y Trabajadores de Curillo). Portales del Fragua represents people from San José de Fragua. ASMTRAC-CURC brings together people from the communities around the municipality of Curillo.

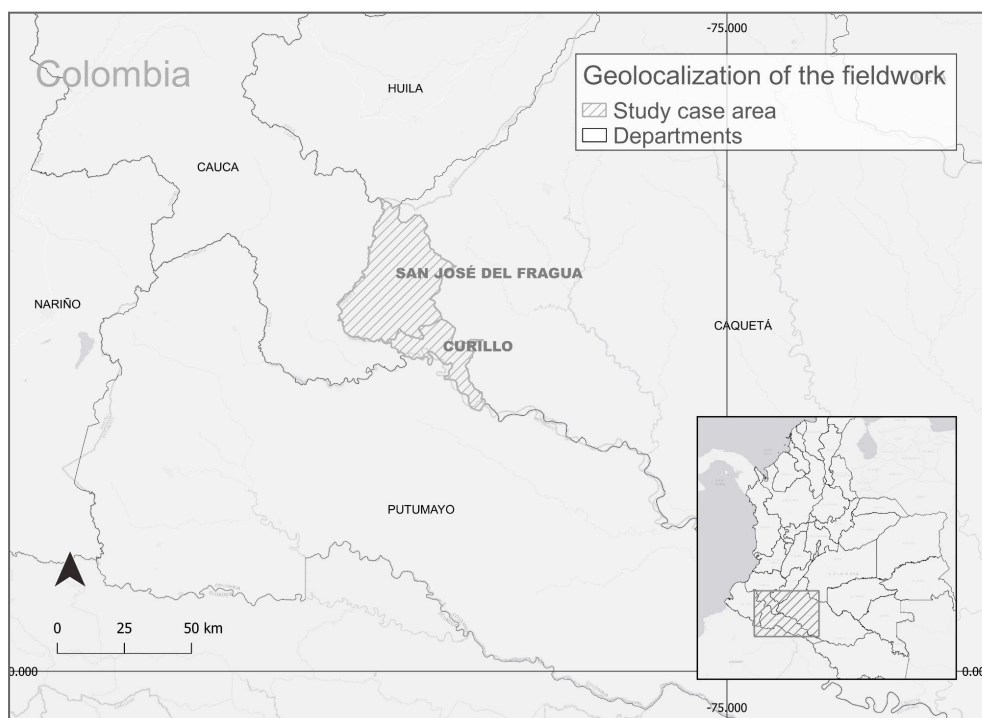


Figure 1: Geolocalization of the fieldwork area. (Source: Author, realized with QGIS).

## Thesis structure

The first chapter illustrates the main concepts on which this research is rooted. The process of frontier-making in Caquetá is studied referring to theories that come from political ecology and related fields that have contributed to deconstructing the dominant narratives of governmental discourses. Hegemony and counter-hegemony are core theories useful to understand contrasting discourses and imaginaries of state and bottom-up movements. The local counter-discourse is then presented in the frame of post-development theories, highlighting the transformative potential of alternative epistemologies. The second chapter describes the methodologies that have been applied to identify both the dominant narratives

and local counter-discourses. Hegemonic narratives have been analyzed by looking at the texts of development plans through the narrative policy analysis, while the local imaginary emerges from the interviews and the participant observation realized during the fieldwork. Chapter three traces the history of frontier-making in Colombia and Caquetá, describing the context needed to understand the origins of the struggle of local farmers. The chapter then ends with a description of the reality of local farmers' movements and how they are organized. The fourth chapter discusses the results of the policy analysis confronting them with primary data from the interviews and secondary data from the academic literature. It discusses three main hegemonic narratives around the discourses of development, conservation, and militarization. Chapter five tries to depict local farmers' resistance process to contrast these narratives by telling their life histories, traditional knowledge, and political fights.

## **1. Conceptual framework**

This chapter offers an overview of academic theories in the realm of frontier making, hegemony, and post-development. The concept of frontier-making brings together a wide range of theories (territorialization, accumulation by dispossession, hegemony) and offers the possibility to consider the different and often conflicting perspectives over the territory. The concept of frontier is used in this research to understand the clash between the governmental representation of the space, which sustains private actors, and the territorial reality of local preexisting orders. The theory of hegemony is then fundamental to understanding the discourses of growth, development, and the marginalization of local farmers as hegemonic discourses shaped to maintain the dominance of a specific class over the others and to present a specific worldview as the only one possible. In particular, the dominant discourse is shaped within the modern dualistic epistemology, whereas farmer movements' struggles and their ontological politics represent the counter-hegemonic construction of an alternative system.

### **1.1 Frontier-making**

The term frontier contains in itself many symbologies and significations, defining a binomial of known versus unknown territory, where the unknown is a land of otherness to dominate. The configuration of space as a frontier corresponds to a geographical categorization that opposes the center and the periphery, being the civilized world the center, versus a periphery that has to be ordered and territorialized. This process of territorialization uses boundaries for particular intents (Rasmussen and Lund, 2018, in Hein et al., 2020). In the case of the Amazon, territorialization is guided by economic interests, and the frontier is the new domain of intervention for previously established relations of production. In his book "Frontier making in the Amazon" Ioris explains how frontiering "*has been an essential component of the expansion and strengthening of capital*" (Ioris, 2020. p.2). In this sense, frontier-making is the appropriation of land or resources for the benefit of capitalism. The definition appears to be instrumental in justifying colonization processes: if a territory is a frontier, then it is

implicit the necessity of its colonization. This colonization passes through the dispossession of local inhabitants for the exploitation of local resources to satisfy the demand of central areas (ibid.). Conceiving the Caquetá department as a frontier means referring to socially produced categories and to a hierarchization of the space (Acosta Garcia and Fold, 2022). This hierarchization is then functional to the capital accumulation of a dominant class.

Harvey (2006) defines accumulation by dispossession as the commodification of the land with the displacement of the peasant population, the appropriation of natural resources, and other forms of privatization. He also highlights how the state has often a crucial role in the reproduction of these mechanisms. Considering the process of frontier-making as a mechanism of accumulation by dispossession allows us to think about an order that dispossesses someone while providing capital to others. The delivery of Amazon territories to extractive industries indeed provides new land for capital accumulation of the hegemonic powers, dominant classes, and privates, by taking it away from local inhabitants. In marxist theory, the need for growth and frontier expansion are mechanisms of capitalist economies to maintain power relations and solve internal contradictions (Harvey, 2006). The expansion necessity has to be satisfied by generating a surplus through the exploitation of more labor power, more natural resources, or new market relations (Robbins, 2012). Ioris (2022), calls this process *accumulation by frontier making*, focusing on how the exploitation of the Amazon is inscribed in a context of global relations of production. Private accumulation of the territories of the Amazon is founded on the idea that this territory is available for capital investment, under the assumption that there was no presence previously “*At the frontier, the private property of land and resources is established through the imposition, via multiple social and political mediations, of a rational, legitimate institution upon what was considered an anomic, savage and unlawful pre-frontier reality*” (Ioris, 2022). On the contrary, as capital expands to new areas, and privates acquire more land and control over natural resources, this contemporary implies the dispossessing of local inhabitants from those resources (Peluso, 2018 in Ioris, 2022). The history of the Amazon is indeed a sequence of dispossessions that began with the Spanish colonization. This colonization left behind colonial structures rooted in politics and economy, and the current economic relations and dynamics of land tenure are a result of this history.

Acosta Garcia and Fold (2022) have studied the Caquetá department as a frontier describing the mechanisms of dispossession of local inhabitants by state and non-state hegemonies. They use this framework to explain the territorial reality of “*conflicting interests and ideas of the state’s project of development, of local elites, of social movements, of armed groups, and of local peoples*” (ibid., p. 193). The situation of informality with respect to land tenure in Caquetá has indeed favored land accumulation in the hands of already important families, and the entrance of different mine and oil companies (Diaz Parra, 2019). The Colombian neoliberal governments of the last 16 years have favored foreign investment guaranteeing cheap labor without asking for environmental and social responsibility, positive externalities, or local improvement. The entrance of private companies and the defense of their investments

have been ensured with the employment of public forces<sup>5</sup> to repress social struggles. This strategic militarization has been declared a commitment of the Uribe government, operated through strategies such as “business hegemony” and “democratic security” (Palacio et al., 2010).

The Caquetá scenario brings together oil and mine extractivism, agribusiness expansion, and coca cultivation, under the aegis of armed actors. The wildness of the territory brought the FARC-EP guerrilla here to hide and organize its power and control over local regions and economies. Then, the paramilitaries came after to defend the interests of the privates and the state, often allied to the army (Molano, Ciro, 2013; CNMH, 2013). The interconnection between governmental power and paramilitarism has been proved by many testimonies, namely those of the two famous drug lords Salvatore Mancuso and the most recent of Otoniel<sup>6</sup> (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022). Caquetá is considered a marginal territory in the political discourse, but this label has been highly discussed. In fact, the absence of the central power has been used by regional powers as a pretext to affirm their hegemony by administering public funds as if they were private investments (Ciro, 2013). Other implications of the frontier narrative are related to the configuration of these areas as lands to domesticize and barely inhabited, or inhabited by a certain kind of population. On the one hand, the configuration of this territory as an empty space legitimizes its consignment to parastatal actors for the management of the territory and licit the coca economy, on the other, these territories, considered unproductive, have been used as a credit system by the National Congress for the entire XIX century, and continue to be a fundamental resource today as deliverable mining or oil titles (Serje, 2011). Similarly, green frontiers have been used as a mechanism of land appropriation by the state or by privates (Hein et al., 2020).

## 1.2 Hegemony and counter-hegemony

The word hegemony comes from ancient Greece, where it was used to define the political-military supremacy of the strongest state over other minor states. For Gramsci, the hegemony in the modern world is the dominance of one class over the others (Im, 1991). Culture is a superstructure just as politics or religion, that constitute a set of laws, norms, values, and customs. Human beings are living in societies that are organized following a specific culture. Thus, a much more effective way of controlling the population is by manipulating the cultural parameters and the imaginary of citizens. Cultural hegemony is what made it possible that a particular social class could ascend to power and maintain the

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<sup>5</sup> A well known example of military intervention for the defense of commercial relationships is the history of the banana massacre of la Ciénaga of the north of Colombia, in 1928. Here the government sent the army to shoot at the workers of the United Fruit Company, who were striking for better work conditions, killing an unidentified number of people (around one or two thousand) to assist the interests of USA investments.

<sup>6</sup> Salvatore Mancuso Gomez has been the commander of the major paramilitary group of Colombia, the AUC, Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, until 2004. In 2007 Mancuso denounced the collaboration of the AUC with the military forces to fight against the guerrillas groups. In particular he pointed at general Iván Ramírez, commander of the first division of the Santa Marta army. Dario Antonio Úsuga David, alias Otoniel, has been member of the AUC, of the guerrilla groups FARC-EP and Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), and then commander of the Clan del Golfo, another paramilitary group of the north of Urabá until he was captured in 2021. He also confirms the collaboration of the army in their narcotraffic.

dominance of others. The aim is to make people adopt a dominant worldview, or epistemology, as the only one possible. This brought Gramsci to a reflection about to what extent a set of norms and laws serves to reinforce the dominance of one class over the others, and how much these norms are considered inevitables by citizens. Cultural hegemony is established by taking control of three things, the education system in the society, the intellectuals, and the philosophy that drives people to political action. As the education and political system are based on a western and capitalistic system, they are shaped to benefit the dominant class and capitalist relations. Several methods of cultural control are also meant to discourage the emergence of opposing views and epistemologies.

Gramsci takes up the Marxist assumption that economic structure is primary, but he adds that dominance is achieved by the control of both structure and superstructures. The supremacy of one social group is achieved in two ways, dominance, and hegemony. Dominance is forced control, while the terrain of hegemony is both economical and ethical-political. He affirms that the political and ideological superstructure is shaped to favor the dominant class and to grant the reproduction of the hegemonic system (Woodcock, 1985). He identifies three basic moments for this dominant class to consolidate. The first occurs when one social class becomes a powerful economic actor, able to establish new relations of production. The second happens when this class permeates politics and uses political structures to ensure this dominance. The third operates at an imaginary level, it is the moment in which the control of the hegemonic system becomes perfectly legitimate. The hegemony ensures that a worldview is imposed on others, and the domination of one class is conceived as natural by the dominated (ibid.). Counter hegemony is not an alternative hegemony, but the preparation for a different system. He then highlights how the alternative to hegemony comes up more from a constructive process rather than from the destruction of the capitalist system. Moreover, this process should arise from the coordination of all the subordinated classes, with multiple interests, for the realization of the “*national-popular interests*” (ibid. p.146). This means that this constructive process must unite the multiple projects of all the allied subaltern classes, from farmers to industrial workers, and all collectivities subject to the activity of ruling groups.

### **1.3 Post-development**

Post-development emerges from decolonial theories and practices challenging the development idea and the system of thought in which it has been conceived. Starting from the deconstructing process of decolonization of knowledge, authors from the fields of ecology and political ecology like Escobar (2014; 2020) or Kothari (2019) criticize the concept of development as “*linear, unidirectional, material and financial growth, driven by commodification and capitalist markets*” (ibid. p. XXII). This concept comes from the modern colonial neoliberal system of thought, which has been emerging in Europe since the Middle ages and consolidating in the eighteenth century. This system, influenced by Christian theology, gave rise to the dualistic ontology where lies the separation between subject and object, and between humans and nature. Thinking about post-development gives instead the

possibility to look at alternatives coming from other ontologies, not anthropocentric, inclusive, proposing “*human emancipation within nature*” (ibid. p.XXVIII).

Before going deeper into the analysis of development plans as main documents around which national Colombian policy is structured, it is worth making some considerations about which kind of development they suggest, and about the alternatives of *buen vivir* and *vivir sabroso*. The interest of public policies in attracting the investment of foreign companies, or of local élites, and in accelerating the globalization process, follows an ideal of economic and technological development that echoes occidental prerogatives of growth and consumption. These policies carry on the liberal capitalist political-economic discourse to the extent that they promote a development measured through the gross domestic product of the nation (Kothari et al., 2019). Still, the crisis generated by the hegemonic system is also what led to the rise of creative resistance responses, “*The peoples of Earth are territorializing sustainability in continuous resistance to capitalist expansion and their struggles with the dominant geopolitics of sustainable development*” (Leff, 2021). All over the world, we are witnessing the rise of alternative theories and practices of interdependence and collaboration, resisting hegemony and proposing different worldviews. Here we analyze the case of the counter-hegemonic process carried on by farmer movements in Caquetá outlining the theories that help deconstruct the modern and colonial hegemony.

### **1.3.1 Critics to modern development**

To talk about post-development it is necessary to deconstruct the categories and the narrative of the modern dualistic system, in order to overcome the capitalist economy and propose alternatives to development. Deconstructionism is a domain of post-colonial studies that focuses not only on socio-environmental impacts but also on the discourse and scientific account that legitimize those impacts and that gives a specific direction to territorial governance. Decolonization of knowledge is a basic premise of deconstructionism, which recognizes that social structures and political discourses repose on a specific colonial worldview and occidental ontology: “*Decolonizing knowledge is an epistemological condition for deconstructing the exploitative trends of the global economy and recognizing the ecological and cultural potentials of the people to give life to alternative modes of production, of thinking and being.*” (Leff, 2021). The aim of deconstructionism in political ecologies is to unveil the mechanisms through which the hegemonic power legitimizes social differences and imposes one dominant ontology while restoring dignity and importance to what survives and resists beyond these limits. In fact, the political discourse has also been fuelling the hope in a kind of development and progress built on a rational ontology, that is considered the only one possible. This rationalism, which pertains to western knowledge and to the cartesian system of thought, has been used as a basic instrument of domination. Modern economic, scientific and technological rationality legitimizes the subjugation of those worlds and ways of thinking that are considered “others”.

When it comes to development and sustainability, it gets even more central to recognize cultural identities and alternative ontologies which have been invisibilized by globalization. Since the capitalistic system had irreparable impacts on the environment and on human



health, we are becoming aware of its failures and of the urgency to think about alternatives in a post-capitalist era, where the anthropocentric competitive view leaves space for entanglements and cooperative ways of living. Deconstructionism as decolonization of knowledge gives a prior place to traditional knowledge, as “*This savoir and wisdom are embodied in practices for the sustainability of life, such as food production and health care [...] This environmental knowledge/savoir/wisdom is fundamental to construct alternative rationality capable of uncoupling from the globalized world-system and building other possible life-worlds.*” (Leff, 2021). Many anthropologists from Viveiros De Castro<sup>7</sup> to Descolá, base their ethnology on the description of the indigenous relational ontology and its role in the historical discussion about nature and culture. They claim a fundamental difference in the construction of the subjectivity of Amazonian indigenous communities, that determines an identification with nature. Here, animals, as well as plants, are people. There is no ontological distinction between beings, and there is a relation of continuity between them, where the self transcends physical limits and becomes part of a net of lives. As regards indigenous cosmologies, this is also reflected in their myths of origins and in language words. On the contrary, the modern systems of thought shared by western cosmologies is based on a dualist ontology where the self objectivises the relation between humans and the non-human elements of the environment (Descolá, 2013). Following the French anthropologist Philippe Descolá, the modern idea of nature has been developing in western cultures based on the influence of greek philosophy, Christian theology, scientific research, and anthropology. He also imputes a certain responsibility to landscape painting and its use of perspective. “*The emergence of modern cosmology results from a complex process in which many factors are inextricably intermingled: the evolution of an aesthetic sensibility and pictorial techniques, the expanding limits of the world, the progress of mechanical skills and the greater mastery over certain environments that this made possible, the progression from knowledge based on an interpretation of similarities to a universal science of order and measure*” (Descolá, 2013).

In his book *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Descolá (2013) retraces a history of the construction of what he calls the autonomy of nature and the autonomy of culture, from which originated the modern dualism of occidental cosmology. The responsibility of taking human beings out of this unity came from Christianity. Within Christian cosmology arose the idea of a world created by God where human existence was imputed to exercise dominion over the rest of the creation, which was instead destined to serve his needs. In the middle ages, this tradition was mixed with the Aristotelian philosophy of *physis*, resulting in the identification of nature as the book of creation, where it was possible to read the divine intervention in the world. The Scientific Revolution marked a neat rupture with catholicism, leaving room for a reinterpretation of nature. Divine intervention was relegated to the realm of theology. From Descartes to Spinoza, a new cosmological theory was developing, which was rejecting the interpretation of finalism in nature. However, Descolá once again highlights how the heritage of a more “*discreet*” system of thought, to which he ascribes also Kepler, Leibniz, and Darwin, was still linked to an idea of nature organized on the basis of a transcendent order.

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<sup>7</sup> Viveiros de Castro E. (1998). *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere. Four lectures given in the Department of Social Anthropology*. Cambridge University.

*“In the seventeenth century, however, among both the supporters of a mechanistic world and the partisans of an organicist one, a separation between nature and humanity gained acceptance”* (Descolá, 2013). What Descolá suggests about the modern concept of nature is that nature was consolidated as the realm of experimentation within science, becoming thus an autonomous ontological domain to be exploited. From the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century inherited the idea of constant and necessary progress, a concept that has grown in the context of social studies and applied then to biological research. According to Eiseley (1981), the Darwin approach seems to involuntarily transfer the eighteenth century’s unilinear scale to the biological classification. In fact, he says that the whole organic world inevitably tends to *“progress through perfection”* (Darwin, 1858, in Eiseley, 1981).

The diffused bioteleologic doctrine in which every being had its place in the creation chain was consolidating the common idea that every life form was followed by another in the scale. It is in this period that western cultures started to study different worldviews coming from other cultures. Thus scientists incorporated these cultural discoveries into their worldview and on the teleological natural scale. Such incorporation led to the classification of cultures “others” as primitive cultures, highlighting the gap between those and the more developed western ones (Eiseley, 1981). The first definitions from modern anthropology were identifying culture as a particular attribute of humans. Kroeber and Tylor at the end of 1800 were seeing no distinction between culture and civilization, culture was *“that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”* (Tylor 1871, in Descolá, 2013). The following anthropological studies, from Boas to Lévi-Strauss, through the analysis of other cultures and worldviews, and of the relation between culture and nature, gradually consolidated the distinction between these two as separated domains. *“The duality of the world has become the original (in both senses) challenge to which this science of anthropology has tried to respond, deploying a rich fund of ingenuity in order to reduce the gap between the two orders of reality”* (ibid.). This duality influences modern thought in a way that impedes the understanding of other ontologies whose premises are outside this opposition. It is above this difference that the collision between the policies and the territorial reality is resting, beginning from a clash of ontologies. A deconstructionist approach helps thus in the identification of those western imaginaries and systems, that are still inscribed in modern occidental ontology and are used to decide and structure actual policy implementation.

### **1.3.2 Alternatives to development**

When the linear and materialist conception of development approaches the multicultural territoriality of Colombia, it collides with local ontologies and alternative theories to development. Indigenous and afro populations of Latin America have in fact refused the unique idea of modern development proposing a development based on the achievement of *buen vivir* or *vivir sabroso* (ibid.). These concepts originate respectively from indigenous and afro epistemologies. *Buen vivir* is a pluralistic and under-construction category, shared by many indigenous cultures of Latin America, that has been built in opposition to the

development model pursued by modern power structures. Through the concept of *Buen vivir* people from indigenous cultures can articulate their own path to reaching the common objective of what they consider a good life. This ideal is distant from the pursuit of “*economic growth, consumerism, the commodification of nature*” (Chuji et al., 2019, in Kothari et al., 2019, p.112) and proposes instead the quest and the construction of “*harmonious living*” within a communitarian context (ibid.). Each specific ontology contains its proper construction of *buen vivir* meaning and application, which makes this category changeable and situated. However, there are some common elements that make possible the configuration of a unique category. First of all, it involves a critical posture with respect to capitalist objectives conveyed by the quest for constant expansion and resource consumption. It furthermore presupposes the rejection of patriarchy and coloniality, challenging the dualistic objectification of nature to propose ecological and biocentric alternatives. In fact, *buen vivir* was born in the frame of relational indigenous ontologies that see the human being inseparable from the environment and in a condition of interdependence with non-humans. The usage of this category commenced in the nineties, until becoming a fundamental principle internationally recognized and cited by the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador. Therefore this theorization also has transformative effects on policy making as it lays the foundation for the recognition of the rights of nature.

In Colombia, the Constitution of 1991 has been called “green” mainly because of its article 79, which states the obligation of the state to protect the diversity and integrity of the environment. On the basis of this article, the Constitutional Court could declare some non-human identities subject of law<sup>8</sup>. It is worth mentioning also the right to prior consultation established by the Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization and ratified in Colombia by Law 21 of 1991, which aims to ensure the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples to their territory and the protection of their cultural, social and economic values. These legal instruments are gradually opening the space for the auto-determination and territorial autonomy of indigenous communities. Another example is the construction of *Planes de vida*, literally “life plans” for ethnic groups, that correspond to more common development plans but radically differ from them for being based on the needs and aspirations expressed by each community, rather than on the economic development imposed from above. By integrating in the public policy alternative instruments, an alternative development concept also makes its way and begins to assume importance. *Vivir sabroso* is another category used in Colombia by afro American epistemology to define their way of living in the community. “*The idea of vivir sabroso [...] is not a goal or an end, but a process, a doing, a day-to-day existence. Vivir sabroso is something that is realized, but that runs out, and therefore, it does not stop being pursued. Various agents are involved in this process: the saints, the dead, the plants, the relatives, the mountain and the river.*”<sup>9</sup> (Quiceno

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<sup>8</sup> This has been the case with the recognition of rights of the whole Amazon region and the Atrato river, declared subjects of rights respectively from sentences T622 of 2016, and STC4360 of 2018. These legal precedents have paved the way for the further recognition as subjects of rights of several other rivers and of the Pisba plateau.

<sup>9</sup> Own translation from the following text: “*La idea de vivir sabroso es potente en muchos sentidos. No es una meta ni una finalidad, sino un proceso, un hacer, un existir día a día. Vivir sabroso es algo que se realiza, pero que se agota, y por tanto, no deja de buscarse. En ese proceso están implicados varios agentes: los santos, los muertos, las plantas, los parientes, el monte y el río.*” (Quiceno Toro, 2016).

Toro, 2016). It is also a composite concept made of multiple symbologies. It comes with the reterritorialization of the African ontologies after slavery and talks about a syncretism that gathers afro indigenous and Christian elements together, to build an ideal of good life, in a reality where humans and non-humans live together.

In Caquetá, the coexistence of farmer, indigenous, and afro movements, and a common political position configured around decolonial, communitarian, anti extractivist fights, created intersectional activism through a history of common protests. If intersectionality is *“the effort to understand all of the above categories as fluid and political creations that always exist and operate in combination”* (Perreault et al., 2015), it is worth reading about local interaction between movements and people from different origins through the lens of intersectional political cooperation. Intersectionality was first used in feminist political ecologies as a theory to study the connections between identity formation and stratified power relations. The feminist analysis then extended to the analysis of the ecological context where identity formulation takes place. Access to nature and work practices were thus studied focusing on how gendered subjectivities are created upon cultural definitions implying the materiality of nature. Intersectionality thus also started to deal with the interaction between human and non-human nature, studying the stratification of discriminations from gender categorization to race, class, and so on, until species categorization. These categorizations operate in combination and as a consequence of the opposition of humanity and animality (ibid.). Feminist and intersectional studies put the focus instead on interspecies (Haraway, 2016; Tsing, 2015), and also political collaborations (Loopmans et al, 2021). In geographical studies, intersectionality has been applied to understand the local interaction of power relations, connections, and solidarity that are composing and shaping the territory.

The Amazon forest is an intricate connection of living beings one dependent on the other. Nature here is a tangle of herbs and shrubs, palms and bamboo, standing and laying trunks covered by lichens, leaf-cutting ants making curvy paths in a soil crowded with other millions of decomposers. Coexistence is ensured by cooperation and sympoiesis, where pollinators depend on flowers as well as trees depend on pollinators, and in the same way, humans depend on medical plants as well as medical plants need the protection from environmental damage that humans could provide to them. With respect to interdependency, Haraway (2016) suggests that it is a way opposite form of conceiving the relationship between living beings with respect to independence and competition encouraged by neoliberal individualism. Capitalism and its way of self-perpetuation have been scientifically proven to be unsustainable, not just for extractivism and its effects, but also for cultural and social disruption. Therefore to survive in a damaged planet we should look at what it is like surviving at the limits of the system, where bonds between beings are perpetuated. This kind of interspecies entanglement is at the center of new ethnographies which are studying the processes of salvage accumulation and dispossession, but also how cooperative interactions between species can give an alternative to survive the Anthropocene. The work of Tsing (2015) responds to Haraway’s invitation (and cooperation) in investigating the interaction between and intra-species. In her ethnography with Matsutake mushroom pickers, she talks about capitalist accumulation and unequal commodity chains, and also about the resulting

man and nature collaborative interactions and survival: “*Matsutake tell us about surviving collaboratively in disturbance and contamination. We need this skill for living in ruins.*” (ibid.). I refer to these studies to talk about the relationship that farmers from the communities that I worked with establish with medical plants. This inter-species relation survives despite the destructive effects of neoliberal policies on the territory and is part of an alternative ontology where humans and nature cooperate to survive together.

This conceptual framework is applied to answer three main sub-questions:

1. Which are the hegemonic discourses in the policy narrative favoring frontier-making in the northern amazon?
2. What is the counter-hegemonic discourse of farmers' movements?
3. How are the relationships between beings conceived in local ontology?

## **2. Materials and methods**

The research lasted six months and was part of the One Amazon project, an intercultural rural health program conducted in four countries, with the aim of building a monitoring system for emerging epidemics in the Amazon. In Colombia, the project involves two focus areas, one in Caquetá and the other in the Amazon department. The project will last another two years by now. In Caquetá the University of Univalle is collaborating with local associations of ASMTRAC-CURC, Coordosac, and Portales del Fragua. The present research was developed between Cali and Caquetá. The first phase has been a literature review of the political ecologies of the Colombian Amazon and investigations into exploitation and green militarization in Caquetá. Methods from narrative policy analysis were used to interpret international conservation plans, and to analyze the last four national and regional development plans. A map of actors at a municipal level is realized to identify the economic stakes in this territory, presenting an inventory of exploitation titles already conferred or ready to be conferred and exploited by companies in the municipalities of the case study. The second phase has been a participant observation during the visits to communities and communitarian assemblies, integrated with interviews about local medicinal plants. The aim of this second phase was to understand how a strict relationship with nature has historically conferred to local farmers traditional medical knowledge, and how this relationship has been affected by local dynamics of extraction, territorial policies, and new emergent economies.

Following the approaches and theories of radical political ecology, this research has been based on a mixed methodology that envisaged a literature and documental analysis, complemented with a participatory approach based on fieldwork, establishing a formal and informal dialogue with farmers and developing participative observation during assemblies and meetings. I stayed three months in Cali in the offices of GESP of the Universidad del Valle developing the documental review. Thereafter the fieldwork lasted approximately two months, during which I lived in Florencia Caquetá and had been visiting the communities and families of the municipalities of Curillo and San José del Fragua, which were selected by local leaders to participate in the project. This investigation aims at understanding macro and

micro dynamics through which exploitation processes in the Amazon are reproduced and legitimated. Hence the subject of research ranges from international and national policies to a regional, municipal, and then territorial level of actions.

In order to answer the first sub-question and identify international economic interests, I looked for secondary literature about international funds allocated for the Amazon region. For what concerns national interests, I analyzed the narrative deployed in the last four national development plans. The national development plans (PND) are the legal documents that provide the guidelines for public policies formulated by the Government team. The documents, each of which is issued at the beginning of each president's term, indicate the main drivers of economic development in which the government plans to invest and the goals that it aims to achieve. Therefore, the analysis of these national plans helps to answer both the first and second subquestions, as they list the policies implemented during the last 16 years to stimulate growth and achieve conservation. Capitalist interests in the region are also evidenced by the widespread presence of extractive industries operating in the department. To answer the first subquestion I then retrieved institutional data about environmental licenses and exploration and exploitation titles sold to oil and mine industries, covering the municipalities involved in the case study. The third and fourth sub-questions are addressed with the information coming from semi-structured interviews. To answer the third sub-question the interviewees were asked about local socio-environmental problems and their participation in farmer movements. Then, to understand how farmers conceive their identity in relation to nature (sub-question 4), the interviews focused on local knowledge about the usage of medical plants.

## **2.1 Narrative policy analysis**

Policy analysis began to be used as a practical instrument between the sixties and seventies as an institutional instrument of public agencies to technically define policy design. However, the theory changed at the beginning of the 21st century with the so-called argumentative turn, when analysts engaged with a critic of the epistemological limits of neo-positivist policy analysis based on the scientific postulates of positive science, strongly influenced by economic science. This policy science aimed to produce quantitative empirical results by separating facts and value assessment, results that could be then adapted to all political and social contexts, regardless of the contextual differences. The argumentative turn was conversely based on the premise that the understanding of social and political reality depends on different perspectives and ontologies and it critiques from an epistemological point of view the “*the one-dimensionality objectivity of conventional policy analysis, often advanced as value-neutral scientific policy analysis* (Fischer, 2007)”. Influenced by poststructuralism, the argumentative turn highlights how policy development is guided by a discursive process, which is grounded on a specific perspective and on a particular narrative. The methodology proposed within this theory is based on the discursive analysis of the logic of the policy discourse. Frank Fischer in *Evaluating Public Policy* (1995) identified four interrelated discourses and two levels of analysis. The policy can be evaluated at a first level, for its technical and contextual discourse. This entails technical verification and situational

validation, which means detecting if the policy is achieving the objective for which it is made and if its objective is useful in solving the situation. These kinds of methodologies are considered to be part of the empirical tradition. The, it can be evaluated on a second level, a level that involves the analysis of the system discourse and the ideological discourse. This ideological discourse analysis then took on the task of political critique, by performing an evaluation of social values on which policies are based, such as equality, freedom, or community, but also depicting the mechanic of structuring the social order on the basis of ideological discourses (ibid.). Narrative policy analysis is one of the post-empiricist approaches, as it studies the ways in which a policy produces certain narratives rather than the empirical verification or situational analysis of causal statements. Narrative policy analysis focuses on the usage of a specific language, symbols, and categories, with the awareness of who is narrating and who are those who are subjected to this narrative. Policy narrative is an instrument of the dominant class, thus narrative policy analysis wants to deconstruct power structures and ideologies conveyed into policy making. The methodologies applied in this kind of analysis include “*content analysis (Linder 1995), actor or stakeholder analysis (Bridgman and Barry, 2002), network analysis (Hukkinen et al. 1990), semiotics (Van Eeten and Roe, 2000), (Fischer, 2007)*”. The present research uses the methodology of narrative policy analysis to study the last four national developmental plans of Colombia. I collected institutional data from governmental databases, first-hand data from the interviews, and second-hand data from the academic literature. Results arise from a comparative analysis of institutional data with the information provided by the interviews.

## **2.2 Participant observation and interviews**

Participant observation is an ethnographic technique that foresees the complete immersion of the researcher within the context of research. This means not only studying practices and meanings by observing the field from a detached point of view, but also participating in the everyday lives of the communities. Of course, the reality would always be filtered by the eyes and the experience of the researcher. Still, this could be seen both as a disadvantage and as an advantage. The term participant observation was first used by Bronislaw Malinowski in 1920, to describe his methodology of work in the Trobriand islands. At the same time, Margaret Mead was studying the adolescent life of girls in Samoan culture applying a similar methodology (Kawulich, 2005). This methodology provides the researcher with an instrument to build situated knowledge along with those participating in the research, from interviewed people to visited communities. It gives a better understanding of happenings through the direct experience of local everyday life and perspectives. The process passes through establishing relationships within a community and learning to communicate and cooperate with its members, to understand what is happening in the present and how networks are established.

Participant observation in the selected communities has been structured in four visits, for a cumulative period of eighteen days. The first visit lasted four days, from the 9th to the 12th of June. The second visit was carried out in collaboration with other members of the research group, and it lasted from the 19th to the 22nd of July. The third and fourth visits lasted

respectively from the 10th to the 13th of August, and from the 20th to the 25th. I was able to realize sixteen semi-structured interviews, three of them with local leaders (interviews n.2;5;15), and one with a local political scientist and environmental activist, (n.1), who engaged with the same communities of this research. The other interviews were carried out with farmers and healers, and all depositaries of traditional knowledge who voluntarily decided to collaborate. Interviews with farmers focused on four main topics: the geography of the displacement that occurred along the life course of the interviewees their participation in social or political movements through a socio-biographical narrative, their relation with the territory and with medical plants, and their healing practices. Interviews were coded through the NVivo program<sup>10</sup>. Other information comes from the field diary where I reported the dialogues that I and my group of work had with coordinators and workers of Coordosac, with the researchers of the University of the Amazon, and the heads of the health department of the regional government.

Ethnobotanical research was likewise developed with a participant observation technique. Data collection was based on observing the interaction between communities and nature. Participation in practices included collecting plants from the forest, visiting the orchards, accompanying the farmers on their journey, and the preparation and eventual consumption of plants. The technique applied in the research comes from Rapid Ethnobotanical Appraisal, a research methodology derived from the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). These techniques are shaped for research conducted in a limited period without specific technology, allowing only a first look at the local conditions that have to be outlined, rather than a detailed and long-term study. Community members collaborate with the researcher in order to help identify plants and usages (Martin, 1995). Regarding the right to intellectual property, the investigation was carried out according to the Code of Ethics of the Society of Ethnobiology (Society of Ethnobiology, 1998; Gerique, 2006). At the same time, visits and dialogues seek to delineate the life stories of informants and sages, to trace the path of their knowledge appraisal to understand how local farmers built the relationship with the territory that they inhabit. Indeed, traditional ecological knowledge has been defined as an inheritance that is transferred from generation to generation. It implies a collective cultural identity, and it represents a key element to understand the local relationship between humans and nature. Plants identification has been conducted with local inhabitants as well as its usages and doses in artisanal medicines. Plants are usually called by their common territorial name, which changes a lot on a regional basis or following different ethnic languages. Thus, a medical plant can be named differently within the same community. The herbarium was made to support the information compiled on medicinal plants of common use in local peasant communities of Curillo and San José del Fragua. During four field trips in five communities, medical plants were recollected and identified by local farmers or healers, which were interviewed about their relationship with them, and their uses for each species. The herborization was realized in collaboration with the HUAZ herbarium based on its methodology (Correa et al., 2012) with the aim of creating an herbarium to share with the communities.

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<sup>10</sup> Nvivo is a support program for qualitative analysis of text, video or images by using coding systems.



## 2.3 Positionality

This research moves into the domain of participatory action and radical advocacy as it wants to engage with local movements in highlighting how place-making politics, in a context of oppression, resulted in creative intersectional activism. Action research is born in the framework of citizen science but it radically differs because it abandons the governmental context to become an instrument through which local knowledge can guide social change. In Latin America, Fals Borda funded a tradition (PAR) based on the collaboration between researchers and communities. The basis of the research is the recognition of the importance of traditional knowledge of the communities, hence the decolonization of the epistemology of social sciences. PAR aims to be decolonial and anti-hegemonic, giving a prior space to local ontologies and everyday political praxis. When deconstructionism engages with activism, it becomes radical advocacy, a posture that diverges from traditional political ecologies for its more politically oriented, radical approaches (Desvallées et al., 2022). The engagement with territorial praxis means a posture of critics of the state and institutions, as it is focused on direct action in politics, taking the side of social movements in their struggle for participation and auto-determination.

The development and implementation of this research involve ethical considerations and respect for an ethical code. Notes were taken publicly, and the first meeting with the communities was dedicated to explaining the purpose of the research and clarifying doubts. The same presentation of the project was replicated at every meeting. Interviews were recorded by mutual agreement under signed consent. The awareness of a situated perspective in participant observation is what brings to question the positionality as a researcher. Following Donna Haraway, positionality is linked to knowledge and power, thus the invitation to northern researchers is to pay attention to the academic context and theoretic realm in which they have been investigating (Sundberg and Dempsey, 2013). Participant observation takes into account the cultural relativism of the observer and the consequences of the influences on methods of research of the western dominant knowledge, that through colonialism imposed a system of thought based on “*assumptions about the way things are and ought to be*” (Perusek, 2007). Doing research in the global south as a student from the global north undertakes to think about positionality daily. It means being recognized as the other, and this western and occidental otherness brings with it many categories and definitions that your presence is charged with. To be white and from outside Latin America means to be *gringa*, independently if you are from Europe or the US. *Gringa* is a lot of things, depending on the different contexts. In the Academic and University environment, thus within the research group, it firstly means a partial exclusion because of this colonial perspective the gringo is charged with. Then, it means an effective lack of knowledge of the local context.

Indeed, I had not been able to read the behavior of the participants to one assembly, who, according to the other two members of the group expedition, reacted with suspicion when the mining topic was touched on during the presentation of the project. It has been fundamental to have an external collaboration in order to monitor my methods and change them according

to the local conditions. The project was in fact in an initial phase, and the University with which I was working was reaching this area with me for the first time. The workgroup decided not to follow up with interviews about extractivism during fieldwork, and I had to accept that my knowledge of the territory was quite negligible. The initial aim of the research was in fact to focus on extractive industries. Thus, interviews were meant to regard local legal and illegal economies, and mine and oil extraction. But afterward, it was decided to change the questions in order to talk about the territory without mentioning mining or oil companies, which brought me to include ethnobotany in the research. Even so, I had the opportunity to talk about these topics with a political analyst and with some local leaders. It has been necessary and of fundamental importance to conduct all the fieldwork with a local leader. She was my first contact and introduced me to territorial reality. I conducted the research with her and carried out the visits that I did to five communities of Curillo and San José del Fragua. The Caquetá is not a tourist site because of the previous FARC-EP presence which was known to be strictly rooted in the city. Tourists were suggested not to visit these areas even after the peace accord. The research in this area is dangerous, as it moves into territories controlled by illegal actors. That is why the accompaniment of researchers and local inhabitants and leaders was fundamental for me in this context, firstly as a student, and secondly as a stranger.

The first visit was meant to present the project to the communities, I just accompanied the leader in the assemblies that she was leading. The second and third visits were conducted in collaboration with two other members of the research group, a Phd researcher and the group director. During the last visit to communities, I went strictly for the interviews with people I already took contact with and dealt with. If the presence of a European woman was rare in Florencia, it applies even more to the rural context, where strangers arrived just within the framework of peace agreements and with an international organization. This is how my presence was first understood, people related my figure to development projects or to the UN. I was aware of being controlled by illegal groups that asked about the project and our visits. In some cases being a stranger means some degree of insecurity for the international presence is related to international entities, which are not always welcome, and sometimes this is instead a guarantee, depending on the area, and depending on the entity. However, the fact that I was there with local leaders helped to make people understand the intention of the University. That is why, before the presentations, glances were diffident and after each introduction made by the leader everything changed and many people were happy to share their experiences. Besides the diffidence that could raise a stranger's presence, the other side of the coin is the curiosity for the otherness that my presence was representing, which also helped me to make connections. Then the participation in assemblies and visits to the territory and to the forest, while sleeping and living in the communities, but also playing football and going swimming together in the huge Caquetá rivers, has been the basis to establish trust in both senses. I felt secure within the communities as long as I was with people members of the association, and people became comfortable with my presence. Thanks to the local leaders and thanks to the other members of the project, the same investigation, which could have been very difficult and dangerous, became easy and enjoyable.

### 3. Historical and political context

The process of frontier-making in the Amazon responds to the exigencies of a bundle of local and global relations of production, and from the connection of multiple actors with different interests over the territory. The theory of frontier making and frontier expansion provides this research with the reading keys for a long-term study of a local reality that is considered in relation to global structures. Indeed, some hegemonic narratives have been historically used to support capitalist relations globally, nationally, and locally. The aim of the chapter is to describe the historical context in which these narratives have arisen, and how they have been resisted locally. It traces the history of colonization of the Amazon and its cartographic representations, always related to specific economic aims. Going for the historical moments that are key for understanding the national dynamics that have shaped the pattern of colonization, it then traces the history of farmers in Caquetá and describes their struggles. The last paragraph gets towards a description of the reality of farmer movements in the municipalities of the case study by referring to their resistance project. Resistance is based on a counter-discourse that resists the dominant ontology, dualistic and anthropocentric by proposing to conserve and defend traditional knowledge and ontology as well as the earth.

#### 3.1 Frontier-making in Colombia

This paragraph presents the main historical facts that are key to understanding the interests in dispute of the state and local farmer movements. This makes it possible to set the following public policy narrative analysis into a large-scale period, understanding how the hegemonic system has been established during the last century and where counter-hegemonic processes originate from. *“Since these unknown lands are the frontiers, margins, and peripheries of civilization, they have a crucial strategic dimension. They represent the external environment, the no man's land necessary for their economic reproduction, since it is precisely the existence and maintenance of spaces where “disorder” and anarchy reign that make it possible to reproduce in perverse ways the rapacity of the current economic order.”*<sup>11</sup> (Serje, 2011).

The regional division of Colombia presented by policy plans has always been connected to the economic potential of the territory, which is in turn related to its natural diversity. Institutional cartography has been developed following commercial routes and in the quest for resources to exploit. The first identifications of the natural regions of the Colombian territory and the definition of the Amazon border were made by the Chorographic Commission of the 19th century. Thanks to the travels of Caldas and Codazzi, helped and physically carried by local guides, the first maps of the Colombian territory were realized. This classification of biomes as geographic units was adopted in the 1990s, supported by further studies of the IGAC and the National University of Colombia (Nieto et al., 2010). Geography and cartography were seen as instruments for the government to *“operate on nature”* (Caldas F., 1809), necessary for the political projects of the elites and criollos. The colonial order has since then been imposed through cartography, with a zonification that is

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<sup>11</sup> Author's translation.

functional to modern planning and supported by it. This fragmentation does not correspond to the differences in the national biome but rather to a hierarchization of national areas based on economical functions decided by the élites: “*The “regions” are consolidated, in large part, around the defense of economical interests of the élites in their fight for maintaining a position in the market and the national context*” (Serje, 2011). During the first years of the republic, the economic structure did not change with respect to the colony. Actually, the colonial structure was consolidated with the mechanism of the haciendas, a feudal system where many hectares were owned by one family with other farmers under their dependence. In the mid-nineteenth century, slavery ended and there was a transition from an extractive economy based on mines to an economy based on agricultural export trade. This led to the construction of new roads to connect the interior of the country to the harbors, but also to shape the agricultural policy functionally to foreign exports to access the international market. Then the agricultural history passed through different *bonanzas*, where the economy was based on main different products that have succeeded one another, from quina to café (Palacio et al., 2001).

The process of resource extraction became systematic during the quinine golden period (Arcila Niño et al., 2000). From the Cinchona plant, it was possible to extract the quinine, that was used to cure malaria and that became highly commercialized in Europe. Between 1860 and 1900 the governments have been supplying barren lands to quina entrepreneurs since the market was in decline already in 1865. Then, during the flourishing of the second industrial revolution, the market focused on rubber, and rubber fever exploded. Few families were leading this commerce, but it was the Casa Arana that detained the monopoly between 1900 and 1933, causing the slavery and the genocide of fifty thousand indigenous people between Brazil, Colombia, and Peru (Ciro, 2016). In the 1930s the situation of the unequal distribution of the land became unsustainable for the concentration of productive hectares in the hands of few families and *haciendas* and rising prices of coffee. Socialist theories had begun circulating between workers and farmers supported by the Liberal party which was in the power in those years. Strikes were organized all over the country, where workers were asking for better conditions and salaries: in 1924 and 1927 in Barrancabermeja against the Tropical Oil Company, in 1926 the strike of rail unions of Magdalena, until the massacre of the *bananeras* when the government sent the police to forcefully put down the marches for labor rights against the United Fruit Co. in 1928 (Molano, 2015). The US ambassador in Colombia described to his government the happenings with the following words: “*I have the honor to state the Colombian authorities have been demonstrating unusual zeal for the protection of our interests: additional troops were dispatched at once to Santa Marta for the protection of the properties of the United Fruit Company as well as to Barrancabermeja for the protection of the properties of the Tropical Oil Company*<sup>12</sup>” (Wayback Machine, 2012). Farmers were also allowed to organize in syndicates after ley 83 of 1931 and they started to organize marches and land occupations in the haciendas, even if many of these syndicates were not legally recognized because of the stigmatization of liberals. From these fights the

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<sup>12</sup> Despatch from Bogotá Embassy to Secretary of State, August 5, 1929.

Ley 200 of 1936 was born, which introduced the concept of “*extinción de dominio*”<sup>13</sup> and created agrarian judges, initiating the debate about redistribution to overcome traditional land property structure (Balcazar et al. 2001).

In 1931 the Agrarian Bank (Caja Agraria) was created to administer funding for the agribusiness sector, which also aimed at impulsing the green revolution, offering to farmers technical assistance and improved seeds. This process led to a progressive control of the sector by private companies that were involved in the management and distribution of the seeds. Farmers who wanted to obtain the credit had to use improved seeds and become buyers of these companies. Then in 1944 president Eduardo Santos promulgated another agrarian law, Ley 100, declaring of public interest the contracts of *aparceria* (sharecropping) a working system where the farmer was subjected to the landowner, thus making impossible the property of land for farmers (Balcazar et al. 2001). With president Mariano Ospina (between 1946 and 1950) the stipulation of contracts between privates and the government became normal, the government started committing with companies to guarantee a consistent demand in return for technical expertise, besides the direct compensation (Palacio et al., 2001). The liberal party was starting to undermine the hegemony of the conservative party. Liberal and communist parties set themselves at the head of the movement for agrarian reform, organizing the fights, but the conservative party in turn used the army to repress the movements, marking the beginning of a historical period of violence, named indeed “*Violencia*”. This civil war saw liberal and conservative party supporters killing each other for nearly forty years, approximately from 1920 to 1960. Its apex happened in 1948 with the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, presidential candidate of the Liberal Party (Molano, 2015).

The unequal distribution of the land has always been a matter of contrast between opposite political parties, contested by liberals and communists, and defended by the conservative party. In 1957 the IGAC was founded, followed by the Incora in 1961. The role of the IGAC was to classify the regions based on their possible land use, while the Incora was created to manage the agrarian reform and land titling. Land distribution involved mostly territories outside of the frontier, and the titling was bound to the technical assistance of the agrarian bank and to extensive production. Farmers were indeed advised to put all their land into production eliminating unproductive forest cover, and intensify the production in order to repay the credits (Palacio et al., 2001). With ley 135 of 1961, the Incora tried to recognize the ownership of the land for little *aparceros* (tenants), however, the law was declared inoperable in 1964 under the lobbying of the elites. In the sixties, after protests and wars against different guerrilla fronts, the National Front encouraged colonization programs through land titles released from the Caja Agraria and Incora. International agencies gave to Colombia more than one thousand dollars for the reform, the majority administered by the Incora for the colonization model (Molano, 2015). However, this resulted in a systemic crisis as it was not supported by long-term credits (CNMH, 2015). Ley 1 of 1968 was made to protect farmer ownership on the territories they were adjudicated with, through the creation of the UAF

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<sup>13</sup> The extinction of domain is a judicial process, in which the state claims assets owned by people, because they were obtained illegitimately (with money from illicit activities) or are used in illicit activities.

(familiar administrative units), a juridical subject that would help farmer families to take possession of the territory they were living in. But landowners violently drove them away from the parcels they were adjudicated (Balcazar et al. 2001). A crucial change in agricultural policy happened in the seventies, with the World Bank strategy of 1973 for the DRI (Integrated Rural Development) aimed at improving the technification of the agricultural sector. The process of categorization of the IGAC was based on a desired image of what was agricultural production, which divided the sector into one modern and technified, and a backward one to improve. The objective of the DRI, and then of the agrarian reform, went from more equal land distribution to raising production. Similarly, the problems of the farmers started to be identified in the exclusion from the market rather than in the mechanism of exploitation of the system. Farmers, into to this logic, were the representing the backwardness “*If the rural population of small producers was mentioned [...], it was done in a negative way, as something whose only characteristic was that it needed to change*” (Palacio et al., 2001).

During the period of *la Violencia* many civilians were displaced from the Andean zone and went down into the lowlands, the government inspired by the USA was enacting a strategy of violent repression in municipalities and rural areas considered communist centers and liberal fortresses. The opposition was already organized in guerrillas and areas of armed resistance. These areas of the frontier were colonized by the direction of the guerrilla which organized local farmers in the Syndicate Union of workers from Tierradentro and Riochiquito, one of those areas was Marquetalia. Here the armed columns were called Bloque Sur and led by a Secretariat for the Resistance composed by Marulanda, Isauro Yosa (Mayor Lister), and Ciro Trujillo, later on they became the FARC-EP founders. The lands were considered enemies of the state, Marquetalia was declared an Independent Republic by the government and was attacked with escalating punitive measures until it was bombed in 1964 (Molano, 2015). It is with this incursion that began the doctrine of National Security, a narrative that still justifies the continuous reinforcement of military assets and armed force presence in conflicted areas. The guerrillas started to organize in fronts, and changed their objective. If before they were a defense regional force trying to create territorial alternatives at a local level, now they became an army aiming at taking the power. The Secretariat for Resistance reunited in May 1965 to discuss military operations to recuperate Marquetalia and Riochiquito and decide the following ones and created the FARC-EP, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (ibid.). The year before, in 1964, some integrants from the liberal youth that came back from Cuba had founded the ELN, Ejército de Liberación Nacional. Between the sixties and seventies, the agrarian movement grew in zones of colonization, as well as many fronts from different guerrillas. Within this context, farmers inhabiting these zones, already seen as the underdeveloped actors of agricultural production, started to be considered *guerrilleros*, members of the armed resistance, hence, enemies. Frontiers and territories considered marginal by the central government were identified as cradles of the resistance against state control. The opposition between central and marginal was connecting marginality to violence, disorder, and lack of civilization (Serje, 2011). These definitions had performative effects on what concerns territorial management, as they were deployed in policies. The zonification is reflected in national development plans, as it will be further discussed.

Even if there was a dialogue between the farmer movement and the armed resistance, they had different aims and demands. Molano (2015) a Colombian sociologist and historian who was also part of the CSV commission on truth over the armed conflict, highlighted the difficulty in seeing the difference between them. However, he gives clarification and writes that the guerrilla was born in the frame of the agrarian movement and depended on it for economic and political reasons while representing their demands and substituting governmental authority on the territory. During the seventies, the progressive decline of the coffee market and the weakness and corruption of local governments brought farmers to approach coca cultivation, as drug traffickers from Perú and Bolivia were providing them with seeds and assistance (Hough, 2011, in Acosta Garcia & Fold, 2022). For many farmers, coca was cultivated as well as other crops, with the difference that once sold it covered the costs of production and provided also capital to invest in basic services (Ramirez, 2001; Molano, 2015). In fact, credit programs from the Agrarian Bank were not sufficient to sustain profitable production, people were frequently losing their harvest and obliged to become wage laborers or *raspachines* (coca pickers) “*to be included in the national economy*” (Serje, 2011). While at the beginning the FARC-EP and ELN guerrillas were prohibiting the production and consumption of illicit crops, later on, they started to take advantage of this traffic with extortions and taxes. Meanwhile farmer movements, as well as the guerrillas, were still asking for an agrarian reform that could guarantee farmers the ownership of the land where they were working, and help the creation of economic unity for the agricultural sector (Molano, 2015). Comprehensive rural reform is still a claim of the agrarian movement, and the first point of the peace agreement of 2016 (Poder Legislativo, 2016).

The falling prices of coffee led the capital to move to banana cultivation and extensive cattle, while the coca was also spreading and there were two important bonanzas between 1977 and 1982 and between 1984 and 1986 (Sinchi, 2000). The heart of these economies was now in colonization areas, where the guerrillas had already substituted the power, thus the government used paramilitary groups to control them while trying to establish peace agreements. Paramilitarism was already a reality in the banana plantations of the Urabá department, where they were intervening with the army to put down trade union revolts and organizations. The killing of syndicalists and municipal officers to defend the interests of the landowners was frequently happening in the north of the country (Molano, 2015). Then, Belisario Betancur signed a peace agreement in 1984 with the FARC-EP, Autodefensa Obrera (ADO), the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), and the M-19, in La Uribe, Meta, where a ceasefire was decided. The agreement provided that FARC-EP could become a political actor with safeguards, and it is when the UP political party was born. The explosion of narcotraffic happened in the years of the presidency of Betancur when Pablo Escobar, the brothers Orjuela and José Gacha started to be very well-known names. Then the election in 1985 saw a political success for the UP, which was considered the political expression of the armed guerrilla, and this led right-wing organizations to form paramilitary groups. Almost all the integrants of UP were killed (ibid.). The armed guerrillas had a renewed outbreak and took complete political and economical control of traffic in colonization areas. The government responded with Plan Colombia and integrated paramilitary groups into the intervention of public forces to contain the expansion of guerrilla and narcotraffic, yet confusing them as if

they were one unique reality. Similarly, the farmers or *colonos* were confounded as members of the guerrillas, thus enemies as well.

Plan Colombia started in 1999 as a bilateral strategy of cooperation between the Colombian government and the United States. The public force was armed with new military technology and an increased number of troops. The policy was based on the strategy of war against drugs and terrorists, and it was implemented through military incursions, aerial fumigations, and manual eradication of illicit cultivation that resulted in the persecution of farmer communities. Between 2002 and 2006 aerial fumigations with glyphosate reached a total of 710.532 hectares (República de Colombia, 2007). Glyphosate ended with all kinds of cultivation while coca plantations were the least affected and continued to spread, as well as fumigations. Farmers were then surrounded by narcotraffic, paramilitaries, guerrillas, and military incursions. What resulted from this stigmatization is the reaction of local farmer movements that took possession of the *cocalero* identity to ask the state to recognize their conditions and stop fumigation. *“It can be argued that the spread of the cocalero identity as a collective marker was a response to indiscriminately repressive anti-drug policies (Ramirez, 2001). Aerial fumigations went over until 2015, when the World Health Organization's cancer research agency concluded that glyphosate "probably" caused cancer in humans, thus Colombia canceled its aerial fumigation program.*

The historical context gives a picture of how colonialism has left room for subsequent neoliberal policies that have been harmful to farmers. The narratives applied in public policy are constructed on a long history of domination. Territorialization has been used as a strategy to craft some specific territories as frontiers and foster their colonization and exploitation. Then, when farmers started to protest against these governmental measures, subject-making and criminalization became the instruments of the legitimation of the armed control of specific territories where resistance was rising.

### **3.2 The struggle of farmers in Caquetá**

Caquetá is a department of the Colombian Amazon. It is located in its northwest, extending from the Oriental cordillera down to the lowlands of the Caquetá river. This department is known to have been one of the most affected by the armed conflict. Its forests were a refuge for important guerrilla fronts, but also for people displaced from other regions. State absence and uneven economic conditions for farmers caused guerrillas' insurgency and the coca market establishment. The state reacted by reinforcing the presence of the national army, with Plan Colombia and related militarization strategies that will be analyzed in the following chapter. This war against drugs caused more dispossession and inequality in the population (CNMH, 2013), and incremented structural violence that, contrary to popular opinion, attracts foreign direct investment (Maher, 2015). The definition by *antonomasia* of the Caquetá region is “the golden gate of the Amazon”. This identification of the territory as a gate implies a symbolic transitional movement across it, from one place to another, configuring it as land to get through. A statue of a settler<sup>14</sup>, walking with his wife and child stands on road

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<sup>14</sup> Realized in 1982 by Emiro Garzón Correa.



21 of Florencia, the capital of Caquetá department, reminding the errants and displaced people of the fifties. The recognition and celebration of the regional development as a history of colonization has gone together with a process of invisibilization of the previous indigenous occupation and their inhabiting with the forest (Serje, 2011). Before the Spanish conquest, diverse indigenous populations were living in this land, “*andaguies, uitotos, coreguajes, carijonas, payaguajes, macaguajes, tamas, yuries, censeguajes, quiyoyos, aguanengas y encabellados*” (Dominguez and Gómez, 1990; in Arcila Niño et al., 2000). Here, the process of colonization began with the expedition of Hernán Pérez de Quesada in 1542, and the subsequent evangelizing missions of Jesuits and Franciscans (Arcila Niño et al., 2000). This Spanish and Christian conquest took advantage of the unprepared indigenous resistance and started the extermination of local peoples and cultures still ongoing<sup>15</sup>. According to recent statistics<sup>16</sup> the actual indigenous population of Colombia is about 1,9 million. It was at least 4 million before the Spanish conquest (Mejía, 2019). The strategy of land occupation was to build “civilized” villages where they would provide a new home and instruments to those indigenous families willing to join them, of course along with a rigid catechism or a more common violent indoctrination. The first missionaries and indigenous Christian villages in the region were founded with Mocoa, Inga, and Andaguies. The latter, originally from the oriental cordillera, inhabited the Fragua river during the XVIth century before disappearing in the XXth century (Arcila Niño et al., 2000), making way for the readjustment of other Andean and amazonian ethnic groups which today are in quest for this land, as Muina Murui, Paéz, Coreguaje and Nasa between others (PDD Caquetá, 2020).

Today’s demographic composition of Caquetá is the inheritance of the internal migration of these ethnic groups, the integration of the afro population shipped here as cargo during slavery, and the periodical wages of immigrants from within the country. These forests have received people displaced in the wake of the war with Peru, during the bipartisan Violence, and during the whole armed conflict. Moreover, during the seventies, farmers were encouraged by different economic bonanzas and governmental policies to settle down in the Amazon and “domesticize” the land. The Baja Bota caucana, the territory between Caquetá and Putumayo, is precisely one of those stereotypical marginal places where people pass by and never settle down. “*Due to its location between Caquetá and Putumayo, the Baja Bota can be seen as a stereotype of the marginal periphery of Colombia, and of the Amazon in particular. People living in the Baja Bota often traveled to Putumayo and Caquetá, but returned home after days, weeks, or even years of being away.*” (Ramirez, 2001). From the eighties, the department became the fulcrum of the coca economy. La Perdiz was a crucial storage center for the commercialization of rubber, which grew thanks to this market and in 1902 became Florencia, the capital of the department. People came here from the neighboring departments of Huila and Tolima, but also from the more distant Antioquia, Santander, Cundinamarca. The majority were landowners with available funds, looking for the

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<sup>15</sup> Just look at the constantly rising number of indigenous leaders killed reported by the NGO Indepaz, Institute of Studies for Development and Peace: <https://indepaz.org.co/lideres-indigenas-asesinados/>

<sup>16</sup> Indigenous Population bulletin of the administrative department of national statistics DANE, retrieved from <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/sites/rid/Lists/BibliotecaDigital/RIDE/DE/PS/boletines-poblacionales-poblacion-indigena.pdf>

accumulation of new capital and reproducing here the economic system of exploitation of mobile workers already consolidated in their regions. From the northwest of Caquetá the rubber was then transported to the Huila department and then shipped internationally (Arcila Niño et al., 2000). When the decline of the rubber market came, the Coloniser Society of Caguan was created “to provide cattle to the failed rubber workers in exchange for clearing up the forest and planting pastures for cattle (Domínguez, 2005; Sinchi, 2000; in Acosta Garcia & Fold, 2022). Another period of colonization followed the war with Perú in the thirties. In this period cattle ranching was implemented with extensive models which facilitated already big landowners to acquire more land. An example is the Lara family which received in those years 5000 hectares, becoming “the country’s largest farm with over 60,000 ha through the dispossession of small land-holders in its surroundings” (Vasquez Delgado, 2015; in Acosta Garcia & Fold, 2022). The colonization process became regular and institutionalized with the relocation directed by the Incora in 1956 of people displaced after the bipartisan Violence. In 1967 already 50.000 families had been established in Caquetá, because of direct institutional support or just hearing the Incora champions on the radio (Palacio et al., 2021). The Agrarian Bank Caja Agraria developed two programs in this department with funds from the US, Caquetá 1 between 1963 and 71, and Caquetá 2 between 1972 and 1976. Former guerrilla members were relocated to Belén, El Doncello, and Valparaiso (Acosta Garcia & Fold, 2022).

The lack of governmental support for agriculture and the low values foreseen for agricultural products led farmers to constitute syndicates and movements. Founded in 1976, FENSUAGRO Federación Nacional Sindical Unitaria Agropecuaria, is the oldest farmer organization in Colombia, and one of the oldest members of South America’s La Via Campesina<sup>17</sup>. This organization is made up of farmers, farmworkers, indigenous, and Afro-descendant community members of the rural sector advocating for comprehensive agrarian and land reforms and the rights of Colombian farmers to live and work the land. The coca economy surged here around 1980 and 1990 (CNMH, 2015). When the FARC-EP guerrilla was born, they were affirming the territorial domain by imposing proportional taxes on landlords for their properties. Then in the eighties, the conflict toughened, and they started to occupy the role of mediators between farmers and narcotraffic. The repressive government reaction to the war against drugs eased the FARC-EP control over the territory, for it worsened the life of local inhabitants who were seeing the state just in its repressive expression (CNMH, 2015). The statistics published by the CNMH about the selective killing of civilians between 1981 and 2012 report that public forces were responsible for a huge number of massacres and selective homicides. If 8.902 selective homicides and 1.166 massacres were attributed to paramilitary groups, 3.900 selective homicides and 343 massacres to guerrilla forces, the public forces were also responsible for 2.399 selective homicides and 158 massacres (CNMH, 2013).

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<sup>17</sup> La Via Campesina is an international agricultural organization founded in 1993 in Belgium, made by 182 organizations in 81 countries, which aims to coordinate the rural people and the indigenous communities of Asia, Africa, America and Europe.

The departmental politicians used the argument of statal absence to affirm its position. The eighties have been characterized by what has been called “*the golden period of departmental barons*” which in Caquetá was embodied by Hernando Turbay Turbay (Ciro, 2013). The Turbay family had origins in Huila as many other families who established in Caquetá after the displacement of the Violence and the colonization conducted by the Incora. The family-controlled local politics for years and their way of doing politics through cronyism has gained the name of “turbayism”. The election of Hernando within the liberal party was linked to the figure of his uncle Julio Cesar Turbay, president of Colombia from 1978-1982. The son of Hernando, Rodrigo, was then elected to the Chamber of Representatives and his mother, Inés, became president of the Departmental Assembly. When Rodrigo was sequestered and killed by the FARC-EP in 1997, his younger brother Diego came back from Europe and was elected to the Chamber of Representatives, and president of the Peace commission decided by president Andrés Pastrana. Diego was also killed by the FARC-EP with his mother and 7 other people in 2000. What characterized the departmental politics, and decided their power, was the controversial administration of national funds. By leveraging on the rhetoric of the state's absence, Turbay was deciding autonomously where to invest these funds, gaining the name of “father of the construction works” (ibid.). The place of the Turbay family was then occupied by Fernando Almario in the nineties, who was instead a member of the conservative party. His strategy was again one of changing votes for public works, in particular, he became famous for the electrification of the department. He presented his role as the intermediary between the state and people's needs as if the funds the department was assigned were reaching the region just thanks to his political influence.

Around 1995 and 1996, farmers reacted to the antinarcotic policy of the Samper government with marches of more than 200.000 people. They were marching against fumigations with glyphosate and the militarization of the region. Paramilitares arrived in Caquetá in 1997 with members of the AUC, Autodefensas Campesinas de Córdoba and Urabá, a group later called the Caquetá Front. They started to control narcotraffic in the south of the department, Morelia, San José del Fragua and Belen de los Andaquies, with the lead of the Castano Gil brothers. By 2001 the front left the AUC to constitute the *Bloque Sur* de Los Andaquies, represented by Carlos Mario Jiménez (Serje, 2011). In 2000 Plan Colombia started, “*which did not distinguish between and among farmers, cocalers, raspachines<sup>18</sup>, guerrillas and paramilitaries*” (Ciro, 2013) and the government increased sharply the military presence. In 2001 the AUC sent paramilitary groups to Caquetá to control the rearmament of FARC-EP in the area, and in the region, there were two training schools of paramilitary squadrons, Puerto Torres and in Morelia between 2003 and 2004 (Ciro, 2013).

The strategies aimed at extinguishing the guerrilla presence and ensuring the secure investments of privates in the nation, by undertaking a real war against what was called terrorism and drugs. Plan Colombia was developed in Caquetá with Plan Patriota in 2002 and Plan Nacional de Consolidación in 2007 (Díaz Parra, 2015). To achieve the objectives of the National Security Strategy, the government developed massive fumigations, and

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<sup>18</sup> Raspachines are wage workers who have no territory and harvest coca leaves for other growers. They are seasonal and migrant workers.

paramilitaries realized several massacres. In these massacres, farmers were dressed as members of guerrilla and presented as achievements of the government's fight against terrorism, these murdered people are known as “false positives”. The first “cocalero” marches against fumigations in Caquetá started during the Samper government, after Plan Condor and Operation Conquest, two main measures of the war against drugs supported by the United States. In 1996 farmers started claiming that they were under guerrillas and narcotraffic control, and fumigation was only damaging them, not the illegal powers. They started to use the cocalero identity to gather together around the same demands. Their movement was seen as strictly related to the guerrillas, thus their claims remained unheard. However, the marches obliged the state and society to recognize the existence of a part of the population that was asking for substitution programs and to be heard by the state. The marches led to obtaining regional agreements between departmental governments and farmers, and “*the population commanded the presence of this “participatory” state where they could have a voice, a platform for their struggle against stigmatization as “violent” people who acted “outside the law”*” (Ramirez, 2011, p.182).

### **3.3 The counter-discourse of local movements**

In December 2013, several farmer organizations (ANZORC, ASCAMCAT, COCA NASA, and others) with the support of the World Observatory of Crops Declared Illicit OCDI and the Open Society Foundations, organized the first meeting of peasants, indigenous and Afro-descendants producers of crops declared illicit in Colombia. This meeting followed the Paro Nacional Agrario y Popular, a national strike launched in august by farmers asking for the enhancement of the rural infrastructure, and the implementation of a substitution plan for illicit cultivation (Aguilera et al., 2018). In 2014 was founded the *Cumbre Agraria, Campesina, Étnica y Popular*, (Agrarian, Ethnic and Peoples' Summit), a national farmer movement where regional and national indigenous, afro, and farmer movements came together to carry on with the demands that arose from the 2013 strike. The Agrarian Summit, in fact, developed a unique list of demands to the state, asking for the development of the *buen vivir*, the structural agrarian reform, and sovereignty, democracy, and peace with social justice. These mandates, divided into eight chapters, express the idea of development proposed by indigenous, afro, and farmers' movements, which is resumed by the concept of *buen vivir*, and list their purpose for an alternative economic system. The second chapter of the document refers indeed to the construction of the own economy, built against the dispossession model, which requires “*The transformation of the productive model of the country, aiming at a planned and agroecological economic policy that regulates the market, based on the strengthening of the peasant, indigenous and Afro-Colombian economy. This new model must promote a peasant economy system that develops a public policy aimed at recovering the Colombian countryside from the bankruptcy generated by openness and free trade policies*”<sup>19</sup> (Cumbre Agraria, 2014). In 2015, various farmer movements and syndicates convoked the *Constituyente de Cultivadores de Plantas Declaradas Illicitas*, (constituent assembly of growers of plants declared illicit). Between these movements, there was

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<sup>19</sup> Author’s translation from spanish.

COCCAM, FENSUAGRO, and COORDOSAC, coordinating their activity with the Agrarian Summit. FENSUAGRO is one of the oldest farmer movements. COCCAM, the National Coordinator of Coca, Marijuana, and Opium Growers legally constituted in 2017. COORDOSAC (Coordinadora Departamental de Organizaciones Sociales, Ambientales y Campesinas del Caquetá) is a departmental organization constituted in 2012 that coordinates environmental and farmer movements, working with the Agrarian summit, FENSUAGRO, and COCCAM. These organizations have an important role in the integration of rural communities into the public debate. Born from the encounter of different local movements, they aim to maintain the dialogue among them and articulate together to resist hegemonic processes of dispossession and marginalization. Local farmer's movements participate in departmental or regional organizations, which in their turn articulate with national movements to provide assessorship in the creation of common spaces where farmers can share their experiences, cooperate, train, and create. The Agrarian Summit recognizes the hegemonic interest in a national administration and policy that impedes the effective participation of the communities in the construction of a rural public policy. Therefore, the movements respond with social mobilization as means of exerting pressure on the governments and getting public institutions' attention. The process of resistance involves mechanisms such as national strikes, roadblocks, and the occupation of public or private sites, but also the constant construction of alternative purposes to restructure public policies in accordance with the rights and needs of rural communities (Aguilera et al., 2018).

In COORDOSAC are converging 54 organizational processes. The common aims are the construction of the farmer's autonomy on their territory, intended as food sovereignty and self-government at the local level. The objective of the departmental organization is to make the struggles of farmers visible. It works for the creation of Peasant Reserve Zones, legally recognized protected areas that seek to give the peasants the administration of a specific land<sup>20</sup>. COORDOSAC advocates for the implementation of the peace agreement, and the development of rural health with a territorial approach, which passes through the recognition of the traditional peasant knowledge. It promotes zero extractivism in the Amazon and denounces episodes of military violence against farmers. The activities are organized through working groups that develop periodical meetings, workshops with communities, and elaborate pronouncements and denounces on the media. AMSTRAC-CURC and ASOPORTALES are two of these 54 organizations part of COORDOSAC, acting in the municipalities respectively of Curillo and San José del Fragua. The leaders of the various municipal organization live in the communities when they are not threatened by armed actors, and they are responsible to convocate the assemblies, reporting their purposes, problems, and struggles at the national level, and bringing back to the territories the lessons learned and the strategies planned.

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<sup>20</sup> Following law 160 of 1994, Peasant Reserve Zones are the geographical areas selected by the institutions, "taking into account the regional agro-ecological and economic characteristics" (article 80) and also all "colonization zones and those where the existence of uncultivated lands predominates" (article 81).

ASOPORTALES was born more or less between 2013 and 2016, and it represents 42 Communal Action Boards<sup>21</sup>. They were convoked to take part in the peace process and taken from other local farmer movements as reference. Before connecting with COORDOSAC, who have helped the birth of this movement have been another municipal farmer association Piamonte Cauca, ASINTRACAMPIC, (Asociacion municipal campesina de trabajadores y trabajadoras de Piamonte Cauca). This association from Piamonte suggested the process of legalization of the movement, and counter-hegemonic strategies to resist militarization. In 2013 they organized the first “*resistance to the abuses of the state*” (Interview n.2, local leader). The strike of 2013 indeed brought together many movements and communities, then in San José some people came together to organize locally “*The idea that people could organize arose at that moment when I understood that [...] what happens to my friend, my neighbor, is as if it were happening to me [...] what affects the other affects me and that's why I'm going out to be part of the mobilizations*” (ibid.). If coca growers were the most affected by the eradication process of the government, also the other farmers or workers were suffering from the strategies of war against drugs. This made them organize to hinder the eradication processes where no substitution program has been implemented. After many confrontations that left many victims between both farmers defending the cultivations and soldiers that came to eradicate coca plantations, the movements organize non-violent counter strategies. Thanks to the great number of people gathering together, farmers started encircling soldiers while talking to them and presenting a counter-discourse. The objective was to “*make them understand that they are just as Colombians, as people of the town as we are, so what they are doing is being done wrong, so we managed to build around from all this a speech that convinced them and that they did, they understood our needs*” (ibid.).

AMSTRAC-CURC was founded after another women association from a community of the municipality of Curillo existing since 2010, where women organized to claim basic rights to the government. Then it grew until involving other communities and workers and in 2013 became a recognized farmer and workers movement. The objective of the association is to strengthen the implementation of the peace agreements, organize community action, monitor the respect of human rights, and bring assessorship in legal issues. The leader of the organization testify how the movement brought local demands to the attention of the government “*Through this organization, we have been able to demonstrate to the institutionality that as an organization we can claim from our territory and we have been able to protect the territory, we have been able to get closer to the government through the association*” (Interview n.14, local leader). As well as ASOPORTALES, AMSTRAC-CURC defends the implementation of the peace treaty and organizes to resist to governmental war against drugs “*What we do is build peace, not destroy that peace, so we seek a dialogue so that there is no confrontation between the peasants and the public force that comes to eradicate or fumigate*” (ibid.).

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<sup>21</sup> Communal Action Boards (Juntas de Accion Comunal) are civic organizations constituted by citizens belonging to a community, built from the exercise of participatory democracy in the management of community development. Recognized legally by the Political Constitution and protected as Community Action Organizations as victims of the conflict and subject to collective reparation.

These farmer's organizations also collaborate with environmental movements, such as the *Asociacion Ambiente y Sociedad*, in the fight against the massive presence of extractive industries and their environmental and social impacts. COORDOSAC organized in 2019 a great strike and several marches against Gran Tierra, an oil company operating in Caquetá, because of the contamination caused by an oil spill from a well in Piedmont. The strike ended with the closure of the well. The oil and mining sectors have been considered indeed the core of the departmental development as well as foreign investment and road infrastructure that permits exportations. ASOPORTALES and AMSTRAC-CURC denounce the presence of extractive industries in San José del Fragua and Curillo, which are contaminating the territory and causing social disruption. In particular, ASOPORTALES in the past protested against several oil companies "*There have been several: Anglo Gold Ashanti, Pacific fluvial, Gran Tierra*" and they were able to prohibit their entrance in the municipality "*because if they arrive and start intervening here, we know that they affect the water source from above or below, we know that if they intervene here they begin to dump toxic liquids that affect the surroundings or those that go down, that if they come to intervene here, they are going to emit gases that will affect many people in the region, so that is why we were able to get them out with those arguments*" (Interview 2).

The counter-discourse of farmers thus tries to build another symbolic story about the territory that contrasts the national narratives. The war on drugs depicts farmers as criminals, but they reacted by building a collective identity through a strong farmer movement, building with other social groups a common vision and a process of resistance.

#### **4. National hegemonic narratives**

This chapter aims to answer the sub-question: "Which are the hegemonic discourses in the policy narrative favoring frontier-making in the northern amazon?". It presents the results from the narrative policy analysis and from the interviews. The policy analysis is focused on the text of the last four national development plans (PND), covering the period going from 2006 to 2022. Each plan, which is presented by all presidents at the beginning of their mandate, lists the long-term national purposes, objectives, strategies, and general guidelines of economic, social, and environmental policy that will be adopted by the government. Each PND has also an investment plan for national public entities. Then, the National Planning Department approve the methodologies for the design, monitoring and evaluation of policies and plans listed in the PND as well as for the evaluation of projects financed. The work of the government during the mandate is then based on these plans.

The objective is to identify in these documents the narratives of development, green projects, and internal conflict, to understand how these narratives diverge from the local imaginary and how public policy and cartography have been used to convey hegemonic interests, particularly over the Amazon. The process of frontier-making is studied by looking at the policies implemented by the government which were shaped to help the territorial control of a dominant class. In particular, this chapter focuses on the legalized privatization processes that

in political ecology have been identified as instruments for local dispossession and control. The analysis involves the strategies listed in the PNDs corresponding to four categories: national drivers of development, conservation strategies, militarization strategies, and regional division. The first paragraph discusses the policies promoting a dominant discourse regarding development and growth and tries to understand the corresponding development cartography. In the second paragraph, the logic of the commodification of nature is questioned. After describing the strategies of carbon trade and conservation, the paragraph illustrates the accumulation logic behind the green narrative. Finally, the third paragraph presents the narrative of the war against drugs and describes its effect on the territorial reality of Caquetá.

#### **4.1 The narrative of development**

The governmental narrative of development is inextricably linked with the idea of growth. Chapter one of the PND “Community State, Development for all” of 2006 (República de Colombia, 2007), named “development”, highlighted how the national model of growth is based on capital accumulation. With this aim, the state declares to promote and defend local and foreign private investments. Growth locomotives is the definition used in the PND to define those sectors that are considered fundamental for the development of the nation and thus worth investing in. They are identified in the private capital, the development of infrastructure, and the hydrocarbons and mining sector. Commercial international relationships are based on generating incentives to attract national and foreign investors, and the FTA with North America is the central element of the governmental growth promise<sup>22</sup>. This goes together with the strengthening of infrastructures with the aim of helping the export trade of natural resources. This plan highlights the importance of the World Trade Organization for the great opportunity it gives to producers to increase their export. For what concerns hydrocarbons and mining, the goal was the perforation of 40 new hills and 30 new exploration and production contracts, with the aim of strengthening private investment in mine exploration and exploitation. Deforestation has been a direct consequence of policies favorable to megaprojects *“As president, Uribe reached demobilization and reinsertion agreements with the paramilitaries that implied: maintaining public order by integrating demobilized soldiers into the body of “cooperating soldiers”, opening the jungle to macro-projects (oil palm, Pan-American highway, Pacific pipeline) and guaranteeing the exploitation of wood for large companies”* (Molano, 2015).

The PND of 2010 “Prosperity for everyone” (República de Colombia, 2011) was realized under the government of Manuel Santos, previously Minister of Defense in 2006, during the second government of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez. It indicated the locomotives of growth in chapter three named “Sustainable growth and competitiveness”. The locomotives are here including again the mine and energy sector and the infrastructural sector as the main ones. However, unlike before, here the fields of innovation, agriculture, farming, and housing are also mentioned. Growth is based on the attraction of foreign capital to mobilize the economy.

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<sup>22</sup> FTA is the Trade Promotion Agreement between the Republic of Colombia and the United States of America signed in Washington on November 22 of 2006.



A new strategy of “Angels investors” is envisaged to reinforce the participation of privates in entrepreneurship processes, as well as Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), in order to channel private investment and management in public infrastructure. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in oil and mines is promoted, reporting that in 2009, almost 80% of FDI went to the mining-energy sector, a sector that was meant to grow. Foreign direct investment in the sector of mining is highlighted as the most important for ranking second in the country's exports<sup>23</sup>.

President Santos was reelected in 2014. PND “Everybody for a new country” for 2014-2018 (República de Colombia, 2015) is the second plan designed under his leadership. It is centered on the same drivers of growth as the previous one. The mining-energy sector will continue to be the first country's development engines “*through its contribution to economic growth, the productive apparatus, rural employment, and private investment*”. It stresses the need to incorporate new reserves that allow expanding energy production and exportation, through offshore exploration and production, the exploration and production of unconventional deposits, and the implementation of hydrocarbon recovery technologies in existing deposits. A list of investment priorities for the benefit of the mining sector identifies the areas of prior interest. The improvement of the infrastructure at the service of the energy and mining sector is also prioritized. The mining sector is presented as a driver of the country's sustainable development and a sector of public utility. Moreover, the constitution of “Strategic Mining Areas” that overlap with areas part of indigenous territories or natural reserves transformed conservation areas into territories with mining vocation (Palacio et al., 2014). PND 2018-2022 (República de Colombia, 2019) of president Duque, still uribist<sup>24</sup>, indicates the identification of strategic regions of “Priority for Internationalization”, focusing on accelerating the internationalization of regions that have an important foreign market to capitalize on. This foreign market is mostly identified with the inversion of the extractive industries. It explains indeed how foreign direct investment has been concentrated on the exploitation of natural resources. Therefore it aims to strengthen the mining-energy sector with the creation of conditions that promote the increase of exploration licenses. The goals for the mining and energy sector are quite ambitious. Coal production is meant to improve from 92 million tons in 2018 to 98 million tons in 2022, gold production from 21 tons to 27 tons, and drilled exploratory oil wells from 46 to 207.

What all these development plans have in common is the pursuit of economic growth through international and national capital attraction. In particular, national development is granted by constant growth, which the government aims to achieve through public policies promoting FDI, private investors, trade liberalization, and the natural resource extraction operated by the mining and oil industry. According to an economic study by Paus (2004 p.440) “*Trade liberalization and an open-arms approach to direct foreign investment were corner stones of the neoliberal reform package*”. However, these strategies did not change the economic condition of South American countries as they continue to participate with primary and

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<sup>23</sup> FDI in mining sector amounted to USD\$ 13,786 million in 2009, being coal, ferronickel, and gold the main resources extracted

<sup>24</sup> Iván Duque Márquez has been elected senator of the Uribe government in the period of 2014-2018 before running as candidate for the presidency in 2018 for the Democratic Centre party, which was founded in 2014 and led by the same Alvaro Uribe.

resource-based exports which have a limited impact on productivity growth (ibid.). The FTA with the US favored foreign investors and damaged local agriculture in Colombia because imported products were cheaper. Moreover, it is argued that FDI enters conflict zones in spite of civil war violence “*primary-sector FDI is inclined to enter conflict zones because firms operating in this sector are bound by natural resources or geography*” (Mihalache-O'keef and Vashchilko 2010; Driffield, Jones and Crotty 2013; in Maher, 2015).

During one of the assemblies in Curillo a farmer said the river they were living on was full of mercury. Another of the interviewees also said “*Now mining, mining also they say that it contaminates the rivers because since they use a certain type of mercury to extract the gold, then, that is the problem, that it contaminates, because that mercury, they say it contaminates a lot because people say that already some fishes sometimes they appear as with stains of that, based on that mercury... you not know, it will be true...*” (Interview n.10). Different evidence confirm the relationship between mercury contamination and gold mining in Amazonia (Malm 1998; Akagi et al. 1995; Palheta and Taylor 1995; Castilhos et al. 2015; in Oliverio-Verbel et al., 2016). A 2016 study that has been carried out in the Caquetá river shows that in this area the concentration levels of mercury in hair and fish are higher than in areas considered at risk due to mining contamination in Colombia. In particular, the mean concentration of mercury in hair is 17.3 µg/g (50 µg/g would be the amount that induces damage to the nervous system), with peaks of 41–50 µg/g in 2% of the population examined. At the same time, the statistics carried out on the fish samples speak of 37% having a T-Hg concentration higher than the maximum recommended by the World Health Organization (0.5 µg/g). This study also shows how the main victims of this contamination do not correspond to those who practice illegal mining or work in mines, but rather to the most vulnerable population such as children, women, and the indigenous population, who receive contamination mainly through ingestion. Interviewee 14 also denounces the contamination of local rivers “*concerning the exploitation of the territory there is that of illegal mining and what they extract is gold, well contamination of mercury yes, of course, it is already known that the Caquetá river is 80% contaminated and studies have already been done on those waters. And it is known that it is contaminated and well, not only the Caquetá River, but also the Yurayaco River, the Caquetá River, and some other streams that flow into the Caquetá River. So it is known that it is contaminated*”.

Indeed, in the municipality of Curillo and San José many extractive industries are still operating. Gran Tierra Energy, C&C Energy Group, Mompos oil company, and Trayectoria oil and gas are the oil companies actually exploring and producing oil in the municipality of San José del Fragua (ANH; ANLA, 2022)., following the Mining cadastre (CMC, 2022) there are 13 active mining contracts signed by Par Centro, International Mining & Infrastructures s.a., and M&M Minerales Marin SA (Annex I). Whereas in Curillo, the register of the National Agency of Hydrocarbons indicates the actual presence of the oil companies Frontera Energy, C&C ENERGIA (Barbados), Trayectoria oil and gas, and C&C Energy group (ANH, 2022). Then, the CMC indicates 2 temporary mining concessions to Par Centro (CMC, 2022). The UNODC also reported in 2020 three nuclei of alerts for an extension of 78 hectares of alluvial mining in water (UNODC, 2020). The presence of these companies has disruptive

effects on the environment, but also on the social tissue and the solidity of the movements “*In the cases that we have analyzed, one of the most common issues is the corruption of the organizational process, that is, of peasant and indigenous organizations, let's say that it is one of the main strategies of the sector or of the company, they know that for this they have to break the social fabric, they have to break the organization process, they have to pay one and pay the other, start playing, in many cases, the entire social structure has also been broken*” (Interview 1, political analyst).

# NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

& cartographic representation of the changing delimitation of the Amazon

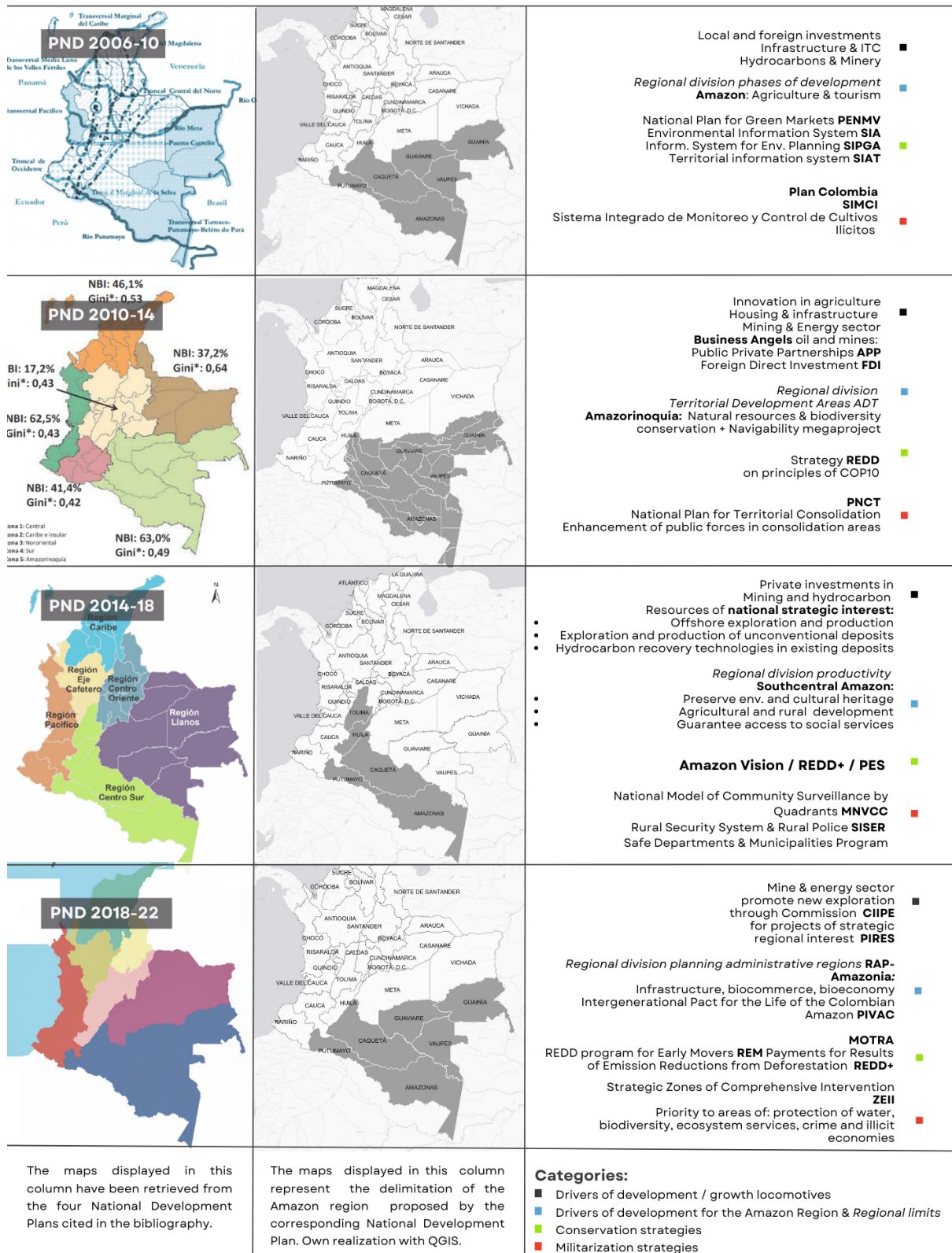


Figure 2: National Development strategies. (Souce: Author).

The national plans are also presenting a cartography that changes according to the changing economic interests in the Amazon region. In the first column of Figure 2, it is possible to see the main maps proposed by the government, retrieved from the texts of the National Development Plans (República de Colombia, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019). On the basis of these maps, the regional strategies are decided. The first map of the column represents a geographical representation of Colombia where its departments are divided into categories following the grade of development. It corresponds to the map proposed in PND 2006 (República de Colombia, 2007). The cartography shows a territorial division based on what every department could export. It also shows the main road infrastructure made according to these export needs. Four phases are identified: formation, take-off, expansion, and consolidation. Following this representation, Caquetá is in a take-off phase, while Amazonas is in a formation phase of endogenous<sup>25</sup> development. Then, local development in Caquetá should focus on its productive vocations in the agricultural sector, while in the Amazonas department, the protection of natural resources is central. However, when this Plan refers to Regional Internal Agendas for Productivity and Competitiveness, it proposes the classical regional division, which sees the Amazon corresponding to the departments of Amazonas, Caquetá, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaupés, and Putumayo. The second column of Figure 2 is composed by maps representing the Amazon region in the way it is presented by each PND. From this second column appears clearly how the limits of this region are changeable.

With PND 2010 the regional division changes with respect to the previous plan and turns to a division on the basis of territorial development areas (ADT), where development is measured by the level of improvement of production processes, and implemented through road infrastructure. The Amazon is now a great region called Amazorinoquia, where some departments such as Caquetá and Putumayo pertain both to the south region and the Amazorinoquia. The South region would be constituted by Cauca, part of Caquetá and Putumayo, Huila, Nariño and Tolima, while the Amazorinoquia would extend through half of Meta, Guaviare, Guainia, Vaupés, and part of Caquetá and Putumayo. Emphasis is placed on a megaproject that would consent to the navigability of the Magdalena, Caquetá, Putumayo, Guaviare, and Meta rivers. This changing cartography has been identified as a mechanism of frontier-making, to the extent that it helps to affirm a certain territorial configuration that is instrumental for certain relations of production. In particular, excluding some areas of the department of Caquetá from the Amazon region to include them in the Orinoquia is related to the intention of exploitation of that area *“Just as there is a strong inclination to prescribe that the Amazon should be a territory marked by conservation, there is also a strong tendency for the Orinoquia to be assigned a developmental vocation”*<sup>26</sup> (Palacio et al., 2014). The Amazon region changes again within the PND of 2014. Here the Center-South-Amazon region is made up of the departments of Tolima, Huila, Caquetá, Putumayo, and Amazonas. The departments of Vaupés, Guainia and Guaviare are part instead of the “Llanos” region.

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<sup>25</sup> The endogenous development theory was born in 1956 with Robert Solow who argued that the creation and diffusion of innovation in the production system, flexibility of production and technology, with the right institutional framework, are the drivers for the growth of local and regional production systems, integrated in the national context.

<sup>26</sup> Author’s translation from Spanish.

Following the denouncement of local movements, the consequence of excluding some departments from the Amazon region with PND of 2014 has been the opening to oil exploitation. This division into Center-South Amazon and region of Llanos, created “*two parallel realities, one in which cartography is adapted to extractive interests and another, in which people continue to live under the aegis of the Amazonian identity. This fictitious conversion is made by virtue, supposedly, of the "endogenous development of the regions", in which it is proposed as the main strategy to strengthen the extraction of minerals, oil and strengthen agro-industry*”<sup>27</sup>.” (Diaz Parra, 2015). These changes have been perceived as the imposition of one dominant perspective over other imaginaries of the territory: “*From a critical planning perspective one sees many imagined territories, each sector has its map, each imaginary has its idea of what the territory is for, what is expected of it and also depending on the agendas that the national power at that time, local therefore privilege, one or the other map is going to be imposed and that happens with all the territorial ordering instruments*” (Interview n.1).

## 4.2 The green narrative

The green narrative brings together the concepts of sustainability, conservation and green economy. Green economy linked the objective of growth and production to sustainable development, allowing finance to decide on natural values and properties. Following Hardin’s idea of the “tragedy of commons”<sup>28</sup>, nature is destroyed because it is a public good and nobody takes care of what is public. Therefore, the economy would solve the problem of environmental degradation giving the right value to ecosystem services without any need of stopping growth or consumption. This narrative fosters the privatization and territorialization of the Amazon territories.

In the PND “Estado Comunitario Desarrollo para todos” of 2006, when it comes to conservation, the Plan makes reference to the PENMV, the National Strategic Plan for Green Markets, with which there is an approximation to biocommerce and the evaluation of possible green markets like ecotourism, timber, and non-timber products selling or genetic resources. The carbon market was not yet an argument of discussion. The plan explains the aspiration for creating new natural parks, which seemed to be an objective related to conservation aims. However, in this Uribe government natural parks started to be conceded to private investors, revealing the main economic scope. Palacio (et al., 2010) discuss this Uribe policy saying that the territorial management of parks was separating nature and society. As a consequence of this, many tensions and political controversies over park areas rose in relation to this politics, in particular against fumigations. Moreover, he denounces the cronyism of environmental institutions, in particular of the CAR, the regional autonomous corporations (ibid.). PND of 2010 funds conservation strategies on the objectives of COP10 and introduces REDD mechanisms, commencing with the identification and characterization of ecosystem services. Then, in the PND of 2014 conservation strategies are based on green growth. Deforestation is a central topic of the plan and it justifies the necessity of REDD programs,

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<sup>27</sup> Author’s translation from spanish.

<sup>28</sup> Hardin, G. (1968). *The Tragedy of the Commons*.

green business is now a consolidated narrative. This leads to the reliance on schemes of Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) and highlights their importance in reducing CO2 emissions. In 2018, the definition applied by the PND to biodiversity as a “strategic asset” of the nation, to promote economic activities with sustainable use of natural capital, has been highly criticized for transforming biodiversity, and nature in general, into a commodified value, leaving behind all the cultural significance. To consolidate biodiversity as a strategic asset of the Nation, the economic activities that the plan promotes are bioeconomy and green markets such as PES (Payment for Ecosystem Services). Private entities such as Bancoldex, Findeter, and other financial entities are selected to define the guidelines for the design and implementation of lines of credit that promote low-carbon investments. The main strategy proposed by this development plan for the amazon region is the MOTRA, the Regional Territorial Planning Model for the Amazon. It complements the Amazon Vision program and is installed within the framework of the global REDD program for Early Movers (REM), Payments for Results of Emission Reductions from Deforestation (REDD+) and has resources from the German government, the United Kingdom, and Norway. The text of MOTRA talks about reactivating the aerial fumigation program. It would be implemented in areas with a high level of affectation, in which it is difficult to carry out other types of programs. Complementary eradication mechanisms are also foreseen, technological eradication as the program for the eradication of illicit crops through terrestrial fumigations "PECAT".

In COP16 (where COP stands for Conferences of the Parties under the UNFCCC) the Environmental Ministry of Colombia agreed to meet the net deforestation target in the Amazon by 2020, just alongside external financing. In COP21, president Santos required climate change funds to implement the peace agreement, linking the post-conflict to environmental consequences. The COP26 can be considered a continuation of the 2015 Paris agreement at COP21. COP26 dealt with the conundrum of carbon trading, which was first introduced in the Kyoto Protocol as a mechanism by which rich countries could hive off their carbon reduction to developing countries. In this landmark agreement, nations committed to holding global temperature rises “*well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels*” and “*pursuing efforts to limit heating to 1.5°C*” (UNFCCC, 2015). By 2000 Colombia became a “*defender of carbon markets and other market-based mechanisms despite initial opposition*” (Bustos, 2018). International green mechanisms became the source of financing sustainable development by opening to the commodification of natural areas, particularly in protected areas, and advocating for more funds and participation from the international parties. In the context of COP26, Colombia presented its Long Term Climate Strategy for 2050, and the relative strategies of climate change effects mitigation. REDD+ projects and the carbon trade market were indicated as the main measures, besides voluntary agreements with private sectors, Visión Amazonía, and the ETS program, a program of Greenhouse Gas Tradable Emission Quotas (MADS, 2021). President Duque also committed to declaring 30% of the national territory as protected areas by 2022, consistent with previously adopted measures (Schembri, 2022). Indeed, most of the overall international funding from 2013 to 2015, both from multilateral and bilateral funders, have been invested in support for protected area creation, management, and financing (Strelneck and Vilela, 2017) “*All the protection, the*

*international and national policy, well, of protection of the Amazon, became a policy of control of deforestation, and well, that leaves aside a lot of other important elements for the protection of the Amazon that are closely related for example with the oil sector”* (Interview n.1).

Bocarejo & Ojeda (2016) with a case study of conservation plans in the Tayrona National Park in the north of Colombia, demonstrated how the creation of protected areas has resulted in the criminalization of local inhabitants and how ecotourism caused their dispossession. Hein (et al., 2020) have also linked the processes of territorialization and dispossession to the spread of market-based conservation initiatives in Caquetá. He talks about green territorialization to define the process of demarcation of boundaries in the name of conservation, often related to state or private appropriation of the land as a basic condition for green growth. This kind of green project crafts the frontier displacing local farmers and indigenous groups from protected areas, *“replacing customary land tenure regimes”* for the profit of international companies (Fairhead et al., 2012, in Hein et al., 2020). Land appropriation is nowadays operated in the name of sustainable development and conservation, and neoliberal policies are devoted to allowing *“new forms of ‘green grabs’ of territories for environmental purposes”* (Fairhead et al., 2012, in Schmink et al., 2019). The paradox of the green economy relies on the intrinsic contradiction of conserving by producing capital. This paradox becomes evident when answering the question of how development is conceived and for who. Sustainable development was the base of the debate in Rio in 1992, it was proposed as a way of connecting economic development, social equity, and respect for future generations and the environment (Kenis & Lievens, 2015). Then, the *“green economy emerged, and the concept of sustainability became corrupted”* (Leff, 2021). It is through this promise of green growth that new areas are introduced into the market domain and commodified. As this commodification responds to capital expansion, and capital is redistributed unequally in global value chains, the advantages of this new accumulation favor colonial mechanisms of the old economic dominant structure, and *“deepens the differences between rich and poor countries under the principles of sustainable development”* (Leff, 2021).

The carbon market is one of the main international strategies for the protection of the Amazon supported in the last twenty years (Strelneck and Vilela, 2017; Hoover El Rashidy, 2021). This global green market is ruled by mechanisms related to finance and favoring global dynamics of accumulation. The critical point is the mechanism of evaluation of ecosystem prices, a common problem of all strategies of payment for ecosystem services. Today there is no imposition on the price of carbon, it is calculated around the target of decarbonization decided in the Paris agreement and the level of emissions in the atmosphere. Price is given per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub>. The Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2012 advocated a carbon price of \$ 150, whereas according to a World Bank report, the majority of prices of CO<sub>2</sub> in 2014 were under \$35 per tonne (Kenis & Lievens, 2015). Carbon dioxide has the same impact on the atmosphere independently of where it is emitted. However, it is cheaper to cut emissions in a developing country rather than in a developed one. Governments or companies from developed countries could pay for projects of forest



preservation or reducing stored carbon e.g. solar panels in developing countries to compensate for the impact of some of their emissions with 'carbon credits'. In this way, rich countries lower the economic burden of cutting carbon and poor countries are said to gain access to finance.

In his article *Financialisation, commodification and carbon* (2012) Lohmann describes how the carbon market is closely connected to finance and its mechanisms, by illustrating which are the main investors interested in this sector. The mechanism of price evaluation reveals strict state-corporate relationships as emissions equivalences are decided on the basis of the evaluation of yearly emissions made by private companies or corporations that provide the right expertise. But these same are buyers and sellers of carbon equivalents, thus interested in the multiplication of pollution credits. Who gains the most is finance, which can open a new sector of investments. The list of buyers of carbon credits is indeed full of financial speculators such as "*Barclays Capital, Deutsche Bank, BNP Paribas Fortis, Kommunalkredit, Sumitomo Bank and [...] Goldman Sachs*" (Lohmann, 2012). Market-based conservation strategies such as REDD and Amazon Vision need more areas to enclose where to expand and produce gainings. This is what has been called "green territorialization" a process happening mostly in frontier territories, where the state or private actors assume the domain of an area that was not under his control, replace land tenure regimes and establish its natural value (Hein et al., 2020). In the frontier territories of the Amazon, where lands are still considered marginal, green territorialization is summed to the other mechanisms of territorial accumulation and dispossession resulting from the expansion of the extractive frontier, both for what concerns oil mine and agro extractivism, but also for coca cultivation and narcotraffic. Even if the flourishing of illegal economies has been related to the absence of the state, the presence of extractive industries, the boost of conservation and securitization strategies, and the naming of more and more protected areas in this disputed landscape demonstrate on the contrary a coercive presence of the national government. In fact, the first pillar (focus objective) of the Amazon Vision program focuses on the enhancement of state control by law enforcement, surveillance, and forest zoning "*Initial results mentioned in the current work program include additional operations involving environmental authorities and Colombia's armed forces to control deforestation in the provinces of Caquetá and Guaviare*" (Hein et al., 2020). The control of deforestation then became militarization and aerial sprinkling with glyphosate, measures that had serious impacts on the environment and on human health.

Green neoliberal policies include privatizing natural resources, eco-labeling schemes, and emission trading systems. The ecosystem services market and the REDD programs (Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and Desertification) are part of a strategy through which "*the international financial and environmental organisms, together with governments of developed countries and transnational enterprises, pretend to reduce the emissions from deforestation and desertification by assigning economic value to the conservation of forests*" and this corresponds to a new equilibrium assessment to maintain the old global land grabbing (Thaler et al., 2019). On the site of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) green economy is referred to as a "*low carbon, resource efficient and*

*socially inclusive*” economy, where growth has to be achieved through reduced carbon emissions and pollution, and more resource efficiency. The World Bank is one of the main international donors administrating conservation funds in the Amazon. However, its work has been harshly criticized for the inconsistency of past investments. In particular, the IFC private sector loans were found to support unsustainable sectors such as oil, mining, and agribusiness, causing GHG emissions that they are committing to reduce (Garcia, 2011). In 2006, Greenpeace denounced a loan that IFC granted to soya producers in Brazil; in 2009, the same NGO denounced again IFC and private banks for a loan granted to beef and leather producers (ibid.). In political economy green economy is defined as a mechanism of the modern neoliberal economy to make a profit from sustainable development, allowing the economy to expand its domain by transforming nature into a commodity (Leff, 2021). The theory of conservation and control in political ecology reveals how conservation in neoliberal policies resulted to be an instrument of the hegemonic power to control local communities, through enclosures and restrictions, which are transforming the lives of regional producers (Robbins, 2012). The work of Amador-Jiménez & Millner, (2021) shows how conservation strategies in the Colombian Amazon led to increased militarization of the protected areas, and also how this militarization is linked instead to environmental degradation and to the stigmatization of local inhabitants. In fact, conservation became the prior reason to promote the war against drugs, operated through aerial fumigations and causing massive contamination of the region. One explicit objective of conservation policies in Colombia has been to ensure private investment and the maintenance of the entrepreneurial hegemony. The militarization of natural parks was then conceived as the first phase for their subsequent privatization and for the capitalization of touristic services in the hands of private owners (Palacio, 2010). Many green economy strategies applied in the area have been used to reproduce colonization and exploitation systems.

Other political ecologies have described the failure of environmental policies and conservation strategies in the Colombian Amazon and particularly in Caquetá. Germán Palacio has analyzed the role of the Uribe administration in favoring business hegemony and militarization of this region through the “Democratic Security” brought by *Plan Colombia*<sup>29</sup> (Palacio, 2010), while the security of the inversions was guaranteed by police forces, the subsoil has been declared property of the Nation, opening up all the possibilities for oil exploration and exploitation. This policy was followed by subsequent governments, whose military expenditures did not decrease. After Plan Colombia, the “National Plan of Territorial Consolidation” (PNCT) in 2006 and the “Special Plans of integral intervention” in 2018 were also meant as strategies for military and police intervention to control the territory (PND 2006, 2018). This security, guaranteed by the Ministry of Defense, was not only conceived as a fight against illicit traffic but also with the objective of making possible inversions in areas considered “strategic assets”, as it is specified in the development plan of the last government (PND, 2018). To conclude, the commodification of nature also has an impact on the collective imaginary of people and communities. Giving a price to nature leads to forgetting the immaterial value of the human relationship with the land, and the risk is to cancel all the

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<sup>29</sup> Plan Colombia has been a strategy built in 1999 in cooperation with the USA for the implementation of the government's agenda to strengthen the internal fight against drugs (PND 2006).

cultural meanings and knowledge behind this relationship “*there is a great movement of resources, of NGOs, of interventions on the territory that has also been transforming the ways in which communities relate to nature, from one moment to the next, the jungle is no longer important because, man, because I grew up there, because I like the sound of the birds [...] the mountain is no longer valuable for being a mountain but for the carbon, it can capture, let's say that, that image of the Amazon as the lungs of the world and such is the one that is it is reinforcing*” (Interview 1).

### **4.3 The war narrative**

The war narrative is a discourse aimed at building consensus around the necessity of solving conflicts with armed control. The strategy of the war on drugs in Colombia inherits the same war narrative used in the USA against terrorism, where the notion was first used in 1971 by president Nixon to refer to drugs as a public enemy.

Plan Colombia is the most controversial of the military strategies adopted by the state, it was carried on by five governments, from 2000 until 2015. The National Development Plan (PND) of 2006-2010 is the second one of a government led by president Alvaro Uribe Vélez, the protagonist of the scandal of para politics because of his connection with paramilitary groups and responsibilities in false positives, and the first Colombian president to be detained<sup>30</sup>. Uribe has been president of Colombia twice, from 2002 until 2010. Seven of the ten presidents of the Senate between 2002 and 2012 have also been investigated by the Supreme Court of Justice for presumed connections with paramilitaries, and between the members of the 2002-2010 Congress that have been investigated for nexuses with paramilitaries, the eighty percent were of the uribist coalition (CNMH, 2013). Palacio (et al., 2010) describe how the strategies of the politics of the Uribe government, (from 2002 until 2007) were founded on three basic elements, National Security, Entrepreneurship Hegemony, and Community State. Moreover, international relationships were centered on the RIA, Antiterrorists International Relations, a scheme structured on the alliance with the US to combat what was called terrorism. Chapter two of PND 2006 is dedicated to explaining the politics of defense and Democratic Security, and the allocation of huge resources to strengthen the army. The troop strength of the Public Force evolved from 278,796 soldiers in 2002 to 378,334 in 2006. With plan Colombia, after the fumigation of more than seven hundred thousand hectares, this government continues with the strategy in cooperation with the USA. It improves thanks to the help of information from the Colombian Drug Information System through the financial support of the Integrated System for Monitoring and Control of Illicit Crops (Simci). In the document, organized crime is an indistinct actor and there is no clear distinction between guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and narcos.

The PND of 2010 begins highlighting the severe problem of national public order, presenting the PNCT as a solution, the national plan for territorial consolidation. After Uribe, his

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<sup>30</sup> The Supreme Court of Justice decided his pretrial home detention in 2020 for the crimes of procedural fraud and bribery of witnesses. The detention lasted two months but the criminal case is still open and the process ongoing.

minister of defense Manuel Santos became president for two mandates, from 2010 to 2018. The first Santos government was a continuation of the Uribe era, he was indeed his pupil until the peace agreement of 2016, which was far from being an objective of uribist politics. The plan identified some consolidation areas where to improve police forces and controls. The strategy of eradicating illicit crops continued with the implementation of Plan Colombia, thus with aerial fumigations and manual eradication. The narrative is again based on the prevention and fight against threats against democracy, security, and national defense represented by terrorism. The PND of 2014-2018 confirms indeed the necessity of following the National Security strategy. However, here the focus is posed on illicit crops in collective territories (indigenous reservations and Afro community councils), natural parks, and frontier areas. Thus the emphasis is on strengthening the Integrated Rural Security System (Siser), and the empowerment of Police in the regions within the “Safe Departments and Municipalities Program”. However, in 2016, at the end of the Plan Colombia implementation, Santos diverged from the National security strategy and signed a peace agreement with the FARC-EP guerrilla.

The development plan for 2018-2022 “Pact for Colombia, pact for equity” is realized by the government of president Iván Duque Márquez. He is a supporter of the uribism from the uribist party Democratic Centre<sup>31</sup>. His government became thus responsible for following the implementation of the peace agreement, however, he hindered the process on different occasions. He tried to discredit and suppress the JEP and the number of former guerrilla members killed during his government, as well as social leaders, was dramatic. In 2016 the Indepaz reported 114 homicides to social leaders. In 2018 they were 261. In 2021, 12 social leaders were killed, plus another 43 former members of the FARC-EP (OCHA, 2021). So far, in 2022, Indepaz reports the death of 158 social leaders and 36 ex FARC-EP (OCHA, 2022). This national plan begins with a chapter about legality, where it declares the creation of Strategic Zones of Comprehensive Intervention (ZEII) for territories that are “relevant to national security”. The relevance is identified in the protection of water, biodiversity and the environment, “strategic assets” of the Nation, and those territories that are most affected by crime and illicit economies. Military and police intervention strategy in the Strategic Zones is strengthened, and it talks about a Comprehensive Environmental Protection Force. ZEII should be coordinated with two other important processes coming as a heritage of the peace agreement of 2016, PDET and PNIS.

PDET are Development Programs with a Territorial Approach and are a planning instrument to implement sectoral plans and programs within the Comprehensive Rural Reform (point one of the peace agreement) in the 16 subregions that group the 170 prioritized municipalities. In Caquetá there are 16 municipalities, all of them were selected as prioritized for PDET, including the municipalities of the present research, Curillo, and San José del Fragua. Curillo and San José del Fragua are also areas of PNIS implementation. In Caquetá PNIS is implemented in 9 municipalities, where 12,951 families were linked. In San José de Fragua the implementation already began, but not in Curillo. The perception about these

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<sup>31</sup> The government orientation changed only recently with the election of 2022. The 19th of June president Gustavo Petro gained the presidency, and the “ Uribe era” seems to have come to an end.

programs is that they are badly implemented or not implemented at all. The claims of communities and their legal instruments as the public or previous consultation<sup>32</sup> are depicted as problems for development. *“One of the great challenges of the sector is the relationship with the communities; proof of this is the realization of multiple popular consultations that are opposed to carrying out activities in the mining-energy sector”* (PND 2018). This helps to trace the mechanisms through which capital accumulation of private investors and local elites has been institutionalized. It also highlights how the main presence of the state in the Amazon region has been represented by military measures more than any others. Indeed also the projects meant for conservation are built with the scope of looking for territories to protect, where protection has been synonymous with militarization. *“From the perspective of the national government there is no contradiction, that is, oil and the protection of the Amazon are not contradictory issues, in fact, they can go hand in hand because the industries can provide not only resources but also projects, [...] when one sees the benefit plan for the communities, everything has to do with projects of community forestry, then photovoltaic energy alternatives, etc., then these two models seem to go hand in hand, and everything below is wrong.”* (Interview n.1).

The violent history of the frontier can be seen as a stratification of wars. It is possible to see a fil rouge from the first struggles and claims of syndicates of workers and farmers repressed with the army and the war against the communist threat, until the most recent oppressing measures of the war against drugs. The dynamics of coercive response have always been preferred to more structural alternatives. The Amazon is that place considered as the frontier space *“where the center can solve its problems without having to make structural economic, social, or political changes”*. (Ramirez, 2001). Various peace agreements that have taken place have brought to the table the issue of comprehensive agrarian reform. In the agreements of La Uribe of 1984, point eight was saying that the government would *“Vigorously push forward the implementation of an agrarian reform policy recognizing that land problems are present in current social conflicts, and other actions of State agencies aimed at permanently expanding the services of the peasantry to improve the quality of their life”* (Comisión de Paz, 1984). After this peace agreement followed the UP massacre. The first point of the last peace agreement of 2016 in La Havana does not differ a lot, apart from the fact that it is more detailed and more precise in describing how this reform should be implemented. The first sentence of the agreement is indeed *“Within the context of this Agreement to End the Armed Conflict, the Comprehensive Rural Reform (Reforma Rural Integral), lays the foundation for the structural transformation of the countryside, creates conditions for the well-being of the rural population -men and women- thereby contributing to the building of a stable and long-lasting peace.”* But history seems doomed to repeat itself. Former FARC-EP guerrilla

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<sup>32</sup> The right to Prior Consultation is a right recognized by the ILO 169 Convention to indigenous people and ratified in Colombia in 2006 by the Constitutional Court. It is the right of indigenous or native peoples to be consulted in advance on legislative or administrative measures that directly affect their collective rights, on their physical existence, cultural identity, quality of life or development.

Popular consultation is the institution through which a general question on a matter of national, departmental, municipal, district, or local importance is submitted by the President of the Republic, the governor, or the mayor, for the consideration of the communities so that they can make a formal pronouncement on the matter. It was recognized by law 134 of 1994. Then, the law of 2015 indicated that not only mayors can promote consultations but also citizens through promoting committees.

members who signed the agreement and demobilized have been killed systematically in the last six years. Even though the institutional mechanisms and public structures necessary for the fulfillment of the agreement have been built up, to this day farmers denounce the lack of willingness of the government to respect it. In some cases, eradications have been denounced where the implementation of the previous phase of substitution described by the PNIS did not take place. Fumigations have also been said to be part of a policy of displacement and impoverishment of the territory, with the objective of silencing the farmer movements, more than a policy made for controlling narcotraffic (Ximena Lombana 2015; in Diaz Parra, 2015). Although this kind of intervention was causing health problems and more direct violence, in terms of farmers killed and displaced, everything was legitimated in the name of security and growth. Hence, while rising road infrastructures and strengthened police control around the areas of investment brought rising capital for entrepreneurs and land owners, this was causing in some rural areas at the margin of the main economy recrudescence of the violence. The legitimation of this kind of policy is still related to the conception of these territories as peripheral. Serje (2011) notices that this legitimacy is intrinsic to a modern order that defines as disorder what lies outside of its limits, on what is called frontier. Hence the population inhabiting the frontier zone was also categorized on the basis of a western imaginary “*there is a categorization of the population that is at the root of its zonification: the “Indios” and displaced mestizo farmers [...] that in the Frontier will always be called “colonos”*” (Serje, 2011, p.158”).

*Colono* became a discriminatory category, as people outside the law, as well as *cocalero*, for the coca economy, was in the hands of narcotraffic, and farmer movements were said to be fomented by the guerrilla. As part of the policy of Plan Colombia, *colonos* were seen as dangerous too, not distinguished from guerrilla members, and killed as *guerrilleros*. The war against terrorism has meant an increased presence of police and military forces in areas designated as Strategic Zones of Comprehensive Intervention (ZEII), that, united with the criminalization of farmers, brought an unjustified massacre of civilians in rural areas. Asked about the effects of militarization in San José, the local leader answered “*That was also a terrible thing, at least there, in that region, they had a lot of what were called false positives, they murdered peasants without, as we say, without saying a word, simply because they wanted to present results, so guerrillas killed in combat, and they murdered them, they took them out of the house, [saying] “no, we murdered a guerrilla in a confrontation with the 49th front”, one would go to see the reality and he was one's neighbor, that was what they did, the militarization gave for that*” (Interview 2).

Moreover, the work of the Comision de la Verdad (2022) reports that the army and the paramilitary groups collaborated to fight the guerrilla forces in this area, which brought more violence and dispossession. I was told that the general of the army was allied with the Sinaloa<sup>33</sup> paramilitary group, and this is why many social leaders were threatened and had to leave. The army used to blame farmers or leaders of social movements from these areas for being informants or helping guerrillas without proof and detaining them. The social leader

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<sup>33</sup> The Sinaloa cartel is a narcotraffic group from Mexico that today controls part of Caquetá production. It is also present in other department as the north of Antioquia or Putumayo.

(interviewee 14) told me how she was once detained with the secretary of her cooperative as she was trying to organize women from her community to sell products together. The secretary was detained for 3 months, then they released him but started to sell letters saying he was their informant until the guerrilla killed him. The farmer movements and cocalero movements have been, on the contrary, a reaction against the lack of guarantees from the government, which was maintaining them in a condition of dependence on illegal powers deeply rooted in the region, being them a very distinct actor “*I am a peasant that takes tools, not arms (...) the illegality comes when it occurs to you being part of an armed group in the margin of the law, but I never belonged to that wing of power that expresses itself in that way*” (Interview 2). The coca economy is a prime resource in Caquetá. Despite being one of the first causes of the massive presence of guerrillas and paramilitary groups, it is thanks to this market that local communities of farmers could improve and implement some infrastructural development in their marginalized territory. The perceived abandonment of the state towards this region led many displaced people, without properties or capital, to see in the coca cultivation their only resilience opportunity. It is through their own savings that most of the roads or schools were built, sometimes through communitarian work, sometimes with the symbolic help of little financing from the municipal or regional government (Cruz Olivera et al., 2020). Despite the consciousness of the addiction that the coca plant causes, sometimes it is the only possible option. Farmers are often obliged by armed actors to cultivate, and substitution programs that they have been asking the state, in order to change their production, are not implemented.

The response of the government in opposition to this growing market has been a strategy of eradication based on aerial fumigations of glyphosate financed by the US (Palacio, 2010). The first decision about the use of glyphosate was taken in 1992 by the CNE (National Council on Drugs) and applied to the national plan of the fight against drugs 1998-2002. The fumigation continued until 2015 when the IACR (International Agency for Cancer Research) declared glyphosate as a potential cancer-causing agent, and the Ministry of Health solicited the CNE to suspend its use for the eradication of illicit crops. During all those years, people have been suffering from illnesses, malformations in newborns, and cancers related to the fumigations (ibid.). Farmers also had to deal with the damage that the fumigations caused to agriculture and to the ecosystem, which instead of resulting in a reduction of cultivated hectares, led more smallholder farmers to shift to coca, as it was the crop that resulted to be the least affected by glyphosate (Cruz Olivera et al., 2020).

The connection between farmers and coca led to a stigmatization of the entire local population which was seen as strongly intertwined with the guerrilla of FARC-EP (Cruz Olivera et al., 2020). Structural and racialized violence is founded on the subordination of identities to one dominant class of people, according to a pyramidal categorization of the population. It finds its justification in political discourses stigmatizing indigenous and Afro populations as unproductive populations (Hein et al., 2020) and farmers as *colonos* and *cocaleros*, thus criminals (Acosta García & Fold 2022). For Hennessy (1978, in Ioris, 2022) “*frontiers have encouraged dichotomies, as they invite Manichean schemes of thought*”. In political discourse, the frontier is associated with new opportunities for investment and

attraction of capital, but also with the opportunity for migrants to recreate new means of subsistence. In fact, Amador-Jiménez & Millner (2021) explain how between the 1960s and 1970s, the figure of the *colonos* (settlers) was celebrated for being the boost of the national agricultural production. As of 1981 the *colono* role was formally recognized and their land occupation was promoted by governmental strategies and institutions such as Caja Agraria and Incora (Diaz Parra, 2015). Today the same state is trying to remove them from the territories where it had helped them settle. The strategies of dispossession have been individuated in land concession to extractive industries (Diaz Parra, 2015), legitimization of narcotraffic (Comision de la Verdad, 2022), and conservation projects. A research by Schmink (2019) in the Brazilian Amazon demonstrates how public policies capable of reducing carbon emissions respond to a new mechanism of capital accumulation in the global market, which has enriched local elites by reaffirming inequalities in the population.

The effects of the “war against drugs” policy have been disastrous. Glyphosate was declared as possibly carcinogenic in 2015 by the WHO, but already in 2001, the Consejo Nacional de Estupefacientes (CNE) opened a procedure to attend to the multiple complaints against the fumigations caused by the “Glyphosate aerial spraying program to eradicate illicit crops” (PECIG), almost ten years after its creation in 1992 (Dejusticia, 2022). For a period of more than ten years, people in Caquetá saw fumigations destroying fields and woods, killing their animals and sickening them and their kids *“That was like from 1998 more or less until 2008, more or less until 2008, so, yes it was more or less ten years, all the summers, and the summers around here in our region are twice a year (...) it would come summer and it was our sadness because the planes were coming, they did arrive and that's when they screwed up everything, the water, the forests, the pastures, everything, even the animals were also noticeable affectation”* (Interview 2). The leader of the local farmer movement from San José del Fragua also explains to have tried to notify the institutions about the health effects many times without being heard: *“We have a case of a girl from here in our region that we blamed on the issue of glyphosate, she was born with the deformity that she does not have one hand (...) for example, we suffered effects in terms of skin, because the waters being contaminated and being there no other sources, because they unceremoniously discharged those bombardments even above the streams of the water source and that made that when one went to have a bath, spots would begin to appear on one's body, bubbling and well, some ulcerations some stuff that was precisely because of that, the issue is that we put a lot of, well, many objections to that, saying look, the population is being affected by these situations, by these affectations, look what is happening, but never, we were never really listened to, never”* (Interview 2).

Everybody remembers the fumigations very well. An old woman from Dos Quebradas said *“Well, the wind brings any affectation on it, that's bad, those fumigations that they do, because I tell you, for me, the most impactuous thing has been for the plants and for the people when they started to fumigate the coca, previously one watered his corn calmly and it grew, now if you doesn't plant it, it's not that it grows very well, the animals are also affected more... so I say well the contamination, they spread it there but the wind takes it who knows where”* (Interview 4). Also Interviewee 15 is a witness of the health damages caused by



fumigations *“Fumigations caused diseases. There was a loss of pregnancies, I even know about some people, a woman who died on... she was pregnant and she died from having directly received fumigation on her body while she was at home. There is also a girl who is... has been affected, she was very young during the time they fumigated, she let herself be washed by the rain from the planes, and up to now, she has... she has had health problems because now she is a young woman. She is already 15 years old, but her face was disfigured and up to now the government has not been able to solve this problem of this young woman, so we know that yes, it affected”*.

Besides the effects on human health, also woods and crops were killed by fumigations, and farmers were strongly affected or left without resources. *“Pastrana's fumigations left us on the street. We were left with nothing, with nothing”* (Interview 6); *“even if there is not a direct discharge, what we call here on our lands, the breeze from it, the wind carries particles of it and discharges them on the other crops and the concentrate of that is so strong, that at once the crops, that is immediate that you see how a banana tree, for example, begins to wither, the production itself rots, because you look at the real putrefy, the decomposition of that”* (Interview 2); *“For the glyphosate many plants died, they are just now starting to recover, everything was destroyed”* (Interview 12). Fumigations also brought even more people to turn to coca as it was paradoxically the more resistant crop and it did not undermine the power of narcotraffic, contrary to what the figures of the governments have presented. *“This really did not affect the narcotraffic at all, because a little or a lot it continued to produce, for what reason? a farm where they did the spraying, there were places on the farm where you could continue cultivating, there were bushes, while for the agricultural issue itself yes, that would put an end to everything”* (Interview 2).

After years of protests, in 2014, the Constitutional Court selected a Tutela from N6vita, Choc6, that was asking for respect for the rights of ethnic groups to the Prior Consultation about the fumigations, and ordered the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development to carry out scientific studies to establish the impact of glyphosate on the environment and people's health. After the declarations of the WHO classifying glyphosate as probably carcinogenic to humans, the Ministry of Health suggested the suspension of the PECIG. However, the National Narcotics Council and the ANLA authorized in 2016 a pilot plan of the “Program for the Eradication of Illicit Crops through Ground Spraying with Glyphosate” (PECAT). Then, with the peace agreement with FARC-EP, *“Subpoint 4.1. establishes the Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS), which contains differential criminal treatment and prioritizes eradication methods”* (Dejusticia, 2022). The PNIS program was created in 2017 (Decreto 896 de 2017), as well as the Development Programs with Territorial Focus PDET (Decreto 893 de 2017). The PECIG has not been renovated, but the implementation of PNIS and PDET is discussed.

PDET has been built with the participation of local movements and communities, prioritizing the intervention indicated by the population, and prioritizing the rural areas rather than the urban nucleus. However, in the assemblies where I participated, people were denouncing the bad inversion of the funds, or their redirection to other public works that were not those

prioritized by the communities. In an assembly in Pradera, on the 9th of June, the leader was checking the compliance of the prioritized interventions that they participated to select with the municipality of Curillo. Members from the communities of Palizada, Pradera, and Fidelicia were present. Almost all the points they were listing had not yet been implemented. For example, point 2 of pillar 3 is to build health posts, point 8 is related to recognizing traditional medicine and midwifery, and point 13 of pillar 9 is about a health place to build in la Novia, but the municipality did not implement any of these programs. They started to build an antenna for the mobile phone line, but the work was left undone. PDET development is not clear, results are not public, therefore it is impossible to know what has been implemented or not. Following ER, the municipality released reports where the intervention in the territory was celebrated by the national government. The mayoress put up an antenna, but it was not what the community requested, plus, it does not work. They say that the mayoress is just investing in the municipality but not in the rural area. Another farmer in La Novia, says that they had selected the bridge of the Berjel school as prioritized work that has to be done, part of the nucleus of Puerto Valdivia. They did some technical studies, but they did not come back to change it. *“I am part of the municipal group for the PDET implementation and the project to bring a potabilization plant for water was approved for the inspection of Puerto Valdivia and Salaminas, but the municipal administration, in the mandate of María Rivera, diverted those projects. It was not what our group had approved, rather it was her decision with the support of her assembly. They are investing the money, it is in a, in the diversion of the Caquetá river so that the municipality of Curillo is not left without water, because this is also essential, but it is something that she should not have done without socializing with the rest of the group because the group is made by the delegates of the farmers and the PDETs were created with the initiatives of the farmers, directly for the PNIS families, and this administration is investing in projects located mostly in the urban area, but if we talk about PNIS families, PNIS families live in the countryside, then, that is what I say that you have to investigate”* (Interview 14).

Point four of the Agreement defined the way in which the State should intervene in areas with crops for illicit use. The Constitutional Court in Order 387 of 2019 decided subsequently a hierarchical order: substitution, manual eradication, and the last option aerial fumigation. However, forced manual eradication has been implemented in the areas under analysis, despite the fact that almost all municipalities are part of the PNIS substitution program. Many of the people I talked to were *raspachines* (coca pickers) or had little plots of coca cultivation, thus many signed an individual agreement of substitution. In many cases, people were forced by illegal armed actors to follow coca cultivation under threat. Many of them hence were forced to displace. In the communities that I passed through, there were a lot of abandoned houses. For others, it was a necessity after the non-fulfillment of the substitution measures. Local leader ER told me that the first phase for PNIS would be 12 million in 12 months for uprooting the coca crops, and the second would have been 9 million for productive projects, but it has not arrived. The third would have been 10 million for a long-term project and it has not arrived, *“The government answers that there is no money and they stayed in the first phase or they delivered the chickens to someone and that's it.”* (Interview 14). This was for those who had crops. According to the agreement, the collectors

had to receive one million monthly for 12 months in which they had to do community work and study SENA programs. The SENA programs were few and lessons were not given regularly.

Farmers denounce the lack of the subsidies promised and the misdirection of funds destined for territorial development. Some people never received them. Some of them received these millions from the first phase, but they are still waiting for phases 2 and 3 and the implementation of the substitution. What should have come later was food security programs, and the implementation of familiar vegetable gardens that they traded for chickens and purina. The incentives were not arranged with the families and in the end, they delivered something different to each family. Moreover, not all the families were in the census and those who did not sign the day of the individual agreement, which was made in January 2018, could not turn to it later on. Farmers were also worried because in the context of a congress with the UN they were told that all the international funds had already been inverted and used to pay for the substitution programs. One farmer who signed the individual contract for substitution was telling me about the difficulty of maintaining the family with the present prices and costs. He had tried planting cassava but he lost in the production because, in the end, he did not find a buyer. He now works in milk production as the Nestlé company always buys from farmers of all the region with a well-rooted system of recollection. Maybe cattle could be an alternative but the number of cows they gave is so limited that one cannot even buy food for all day. And that is the reason why, he said, many people are going back to planting coca. Whether it was intended or not, in the end, the war against drugs and terrorism resulted in war against farmers. They are victims of systematic violence generated by the non-recognition of their identity (Serje, 2011). The reaction against this stigmatization is just what brought farmers to the appropriation of the label of “cocaleros” to react to this oppression (Ramirez, 2011). But they firmly took distance from the guerrilla label that it was given to them *“there was a guerrilla delegate who came there to tell us: we have come to support you, and we said: no, this is a popular initiative, this is something that was born from us without advice from anyone and as such we are going to make it respected, and as such we are going to hold it, then the delegate simply withdrew and never came back”* (Interview 2).

The stigmatization is still ongoing. During COVID-19 for example, they were again the center of control measures, also being pointed at as the responsible for the deforestation rising trend (Amador-Jimenez & Millner, 2021). Then, false positives are still a reality. When I asked about when the executions of farmers declared guerrilla members ended, the answer was that *“Really, it is still happening, there are some places where the army still... Well, I don't know if they haven't given training to the troops that the weapons of the republic are not meant to kill defenseless civilians and there are still regions that apply that law. Also in San José, not long ago this year, a peasant was murdered and he was killed in combat, they presented him as a guerrilla fighter”* (Interview n.2). Cultivating coca still causes deaths at the hands of the army. However, paradoxically, Ramirez (2011) highlights how it has been precisely the illegality of the coca market, and cocalero protests that led farmers of these regions to be considered by the institutional power and included in the governmental agendas.

The war narrative have legitimized militarization, armed control and dispossession. Through a process of subject-making, farmers have been consolidated in the common imaginary as criminals. However, farmers movements fight for their own rights. They repeatedly asked for substitution programs of the coca crops, to several governments that were regularly not successful in the implementation of these programs.

## **5. Farmer's resistance**

This chapter tries to describe the actual praxis of resistance of people living on the frontier through their own experiences, and present their counter-discourse and epistemology. Resistance is intended here as the capacity of gathering together to react against oppression, but also as the capacity of building relations to survive in a damaged environment. The chapter analyzes both the functioning of the network of farmer's organizations and the connection between farmers and plants. The first paragraph introduces the figure of local farmers through the narration of the life path of the people interviewed. Then, the second paragraph presents the traditional knowledge about medical plants. This knowledge provides the inhabitants with some tools to cooperate with the environment, resulting from a long experience of coexistence and dialogue between humans and plants. Traditional knowledge, besides being an instrument of resilience, speaks about the local ontology and the relationship between humans and nature. Local movements and their collaboration depend on collective identification with a certain political ontology. This common ontology is based on the defense of these entanglements between humans and other living beings (Escobar, 2020). The topic of the last paragraph of the chapter is about the farmer struggle and their counter-hegemonic process.

### **5.1 Farmers of the frontier**

From Florencia to Curillo there is 99 km. You can reach Curillo more or less within two hours with a collective taxi or a bus, there is a brand new road passing through Morelia, Belen de los Andaquies, and San José del Fragua, which is more or less halfway. Old farmers told me how they had to ride on their mules before the road was paved. Everybody also remembers the huge Ceiba tree standing on the margin of this road, that now is laying, decaying on the pasture. I was told that the tree died because its roots got rotted, and this happened because of the series of murders that paramilitaries have made under its branches. There was a period, not many years ago, when the road was controlled by paramilitaries and if you had to take the road you could not know if you would have arrived at your destination. Today it is a busy road, you can still see someone upon a horse or a mule, but it is mostly crossed by cattle transport trucks, big jeeps with blacked-out windows and *chivas*, typical Colombian buses without glasses, and generally hand-painted. Going to Curillo it is possible to see the limit of the cordillera on the right side, where the hills begin to elevate, still full of trees, and the starting of the lowlands, kilometers of pasture, with tufts of Canangucha palms. The road takes you directly to the harbor that overlooks the Caquetá river. A yellow metal bridge brings you to the pier, from where all the fluvial transports head into the net of rivers reaching Puerto Asis in Putumayo, or also Perú or Ecuador. Some of the farmers I talked to

are afro, some of them are indigenous, and others are mestizos. Some of them were cultivating coca, some have worked with it, and others never touched it. Some were living there since they were born, and others came from Huila or the Pacific coast. All were sharing the same life, and participating in different but related movements. Working or fishing together, going hunting, sharing coffee. Sharing and living in the same territory build communities with a common imaginary and shared knowledge. The indigenous inheritance is intertwined with afro legends, and farmer knowledge is built upon a shared epistemology where all these visions can fit. That unique and criminalized identity that appears in international policies and national programs, is instead a continuously changing identity built on the everyday life, and everyday struggle, of people inhabiting rural areas in disputed territories.

The main organizations present on the territory are ASMTRAC-CURC, ASOPORTALES, FENSUAGRO, ANSOR, the national association of farmer reserves (ZRC), COORDOSAC and ASINTRACAMPIC (Interviews 14,15, and field notes). Interviewee n.2 is a leader of ASOPORTALES. He was born in El Parà, on the oriental cordillera above the town of Florencia. His parents moved from their house because of the Violence. His mother was from Cundinamarca, and the father from Huila, they met on the road to Garzòn in the high Orteguzaza, then they settled down in Caquetá. He moved from el Parà to Yurayako twenty years ago. After a period working in Florencia as a disco bouncer, when the paramilitary incursion made it impossible to work there, he moved again to the countryside to work with agriculture and cattle. Yurayako is in the municipality of San José del Fragua, on the cordillera too. Here people commercialize plantain, cassava, panelera cane, chontaduro, corn, sometimes beans. In the home gardens, where people grow what they use for their daily nutrition, there are much more varieties *“if there is a way to show diversity in a crop on a farm, is to visit the home garden, there you can find what is cilantro, onion, tomato, string bean, well, all those little things like that”* (ED). Then also wood extraction brings work, as well as cattle and coca. Some of the farmers are also beekeepers but for a little production of honey which is not commercialized.

Interviewee 14 is the founder of AMSTRAC-CURC. She is a farmer and a social leader. The life of social leaders is constantly at risk, accused by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the army to be part of the group they were fighting against. *“Well, yes, I did receive threats, not only one but many, of course, because in 2007 the threat was directly from the [...] (paramilitary) battalion, for defending the farmers, so they, for them, if one defended the farmers, they immediately thought he was a guerrilla member, for them I always had been a militia woman from the 49th Front, when things were not like that, I was threatened and even photos of myself were posted in the battalions at the police stations.”* Communities of the frontier are sharing the same difficulties, threats from illegal actors, lack of access to health services, a polluted environment, and difficult economic conditions as they do not receive an affordable price for their products. The main difficulties in San José are similar to those of the majority of the rural municipalities in Caquetá *“what is sui generis is the issue of fumigation, what is sui generis is the issue of forced eradication on behalf of the state itself, what is sui generis, something happening now is also the issue of the appearance of other actors that are not the*

*state itself, well, that they want to subdue the families on this issue, that they concentrate or dedicate themselves only to the cultivation for them, no more”* (Interview 2). That is why quite all the municipalities of Caquetá were selected for the PDET program. Coca is called “*la mata que mata*”, the plant that kills. Even if there is the awareness of being in illegality, and that the plant causes addiction and death, the election is between illegality or displacement. Moreover, the cocalero movement has always been asking for substitution programs “*as a sign of good faith and as a basis for potential partnership with the government*”. (Ramirez, 2011).

Fumigations also left the soil less productive, the soil needs a lot of time to recover, and then its nutritional properties are compromised “*In these territories where the fumigations occur, the vegetation appears to be re-emerging but very weak, the same development is not noticeable, you can notice that they do not have the same leafiness*” (Interview n.2). With the fumigation, the marches started, and it was something that raised protests from many departments. After years of fumigation, starting with the marches, with the need to get together to make their voice be heard, many associations were born. ASOPORTALES was born in this context, its members are farmers, cocaleros, mestizos, and people from the settlement of Yurayako. It is enriched by a composite social fabric, because, the fight for better conditions for farmers was something affecting all the community: “*The idea that people organize there arose to me at that moment when I understood my personal problems, and from there I say what happens to my friend, my neighbor, my friend, my neighbor is as if it were happening to me, that's why it hurts me, because that made me understand that what affects the other affects me and that's why I'm part of those who go out, I am part of the mobilizations, because to solve your problem I know I'm solving mine too, so that's what makes me be there, and that's why I gave myself so fully to those things like that, right? [...] It was more or less between 2013 and 2016 because we in 2013 was when, when we did the first, as the first resistance to the abuses of the state because since the people sat down it was only in a timid way to see that they arrived and acted but the common citizen did nothing*” (Interview n.2).

He then talks about how they were able to build a net of people who were all part of the same social movement, and who physically come and non-violently contrast the eradication forces. Even if fumigations were suspended by the CNE, manual eradication is still ongoing and still causing confrontations between farmers and the army. The farmers started to occupy the lands together, stopping the police by talking to them and circling around them “*the marches were held, but really it was against the entire state structure, to say like, we don't want more violence, to say like we don't want more outrages, to say like we want them to listen to us, but that a group really would come to retain people from the public force to tell them: you are not well regarded here because you come to harm us, that had not been done before*” (Interview 2). Through this, they were able to reach dialogues and reduce killings. Many of them could enter the substitution programs foreseen by the peace agreement (PNIS), but as long as the substitution program does not work, and funds are lost in corruption, there are not many other solutions than to go back to coca. Accessing the market is still one of the major difficulties: “*Well, that is really why the issue of illicit crops has prevailed, because there may be the*

*possibility of accessing the markets, but the issue is that prices are not sustainable or supportable because transport, inputs, tools are too expensive, so when one dedicates oneself to producing what is agriculture, the final result is that when one has already done all the accounts of expenses and costs and all that stuff, one realizes that it does not give practically even half of what has invested, because that is where the disenchantment of the products comes from and they say, no, let's start planting coca, which is what really leaves more or a little more than the expenses that have been invested in that” (Interview n.2).*

What is reported during interview n.2 about San José is similar to what has been said about Curillo in interview n.10: *“The problem, you know what it is, is that here the price of agriculture is very, very low, very low, because here sometimes you harvested the corn and the load of corn [...] it wasn't enough for one to rectify all the debts he had committed, the ones he had done to seed it, so that's the problem, one of the most important difficulties, now it barely has caught a little price, but for us is the same because those articles, what is the family food basket has risen a lot, prices are very high, so it's all the same, they raised the prices to agriculture a little, but they also increased the cost for the family basket.”* (Interview n.10). The interviewee is part of another organization, Facuri. It is an afro organization that brings together people from a few communities of the Curillo municipality. He brought me into a path in the woods, a straight line of one kilometer of cement entering this muddy forest where the rubber boots sank to their knees. Before this path was built it was way more difficult to enter for people living in the internal part *“when it was not there it was the same way but in the mud, those poor little animals, muddy, loaded with gasoline, because what they enter is gasoline [...] There are houses around here too. It's that where there are no houses it's as far as I tell you that this goes, which is the “vega”, look at there, if you go up to the hill there start to have houses, but there, they work only with coca. There is only one man who does not have coca in there”* (Interview n.10). I then asked if they had problems with fumigations, and he said that they had a lot of fumigation and today they are carrying on with the eradication program *“now that they have come these days to eradicate them manually. So that's the problem with that one.”* (Interview n.10). Doing with his machete a cut on the bark of a giant Ficus tree, he told me about a man he met there in the region, who was able to treat snake bites with the Higueron lymph.

Interviewee n.4 came from Nariño looking for more productive lands. She is not only a healer but also a midwife. The hospital is quite far from the communities. You have to take a boat (if you have one) until Curillo, which is more or less two hours, or you have to wait for the boat that passes twice a day. Some families also do not live above the river, but far from the coast inside the forest. Thus there are some women who learned to help others to give birth. Interviewee n.4 is healer and midwife, learned this specific medical knowledge from her daughter-in-law, who was a nurse. Then she helped dozens of women to give birth. She accompanies me through her garden, full of medical plants and vegetables, Moringa, Flower of the Dead, Valerian, and Noni trees. Interviewee n.12 is indigenous, her mother was Inga, and she learned from her about plants and healing practices. Her mother, she said, lived until she had 116 years. One day before leaving the body, she asked for her favorite meal, then she fell asleep. Her knowledge does not only concern medical plants, she knows a lot about the

whole forest and how to talk with the spirits of nature. Interviewee 6 was born in Valparaíso Caquetá. He lived three years next to a river called the Guayas river, was raised in Rionegro Caquetá, and started working there as a farmer at the age of 11. He has been living in this region for 36 years and saw deforestation advancing. He learned healing practices from an indigenous doctor and brought me through a little corridor of wood in the limits between one property and another. There he had seeded and transplanted medicinal plants for common usage.

## 5.2 Interdependency between beings

Haraway's "Staying with the trouble" and her ecological studies are meant to encourage the reflection about possible alternatives by imagining landscapes and territories as an entangle of living beings which collaborate and live together in a post-capitalist era and in a damaged territory (Haraway, 2016). Interdependency is likewise what happens in Caquetá between local communities and medical plants. This paragraph describes how farmers are living and communicating with plants.

*“Every tree has its good energy and every tree has its bad energy (...) The Oyocu is a liana, quite all the liana are similar, it has a spirit, as the yajé, these two plants have spirits so if you look for them in the mountain, you should be very lucky to find them, unless, you can spend days looking for them (...) Every plant of the universe has its spirit because they are living beings, one does not know but I know that they have. My grandmother used to say, when we were working in the stubble, if you were bitten by a wasp or a snake, she used to say, it’s because you did not beg permission for what you were doing. Because even if they are plants they feel. Can’t you see that if you cut them they start to grow again? is not that because they don’t bleed, don’t scream, but they feel. So every time you cut them or enter the forest, ask their permission because every one of them has a mother and it is mother nature. They have a guardian, everything has their spirit looking after them, the animals, the plants, fishes, the rivers, they have their spirits, that you don’t know them it is different, but that they exist, they do exist ”* (Interview 12). As her mother was indigenous, she respects some specific codes for interacting with non-humans and refers to symbols that pertain to the Inga tradition. She is catholic, like the rest of the interviewees, but she conciliates traditional knowledge and ontology with Christian theology.

*“When I go to collect them, I always speak to them. I always ask for their permission. I never come just to pick, because they feel. And they feel the energy that one has. Because they are plants, that does not mean that they do not feel, but if one speaks to them if you caress her, and every day you greet her, she is going to be a very kind plant and very leafy. Many people ask me, how do you do for having all that rue plant that you have, what do you give her? My answer is love (...) They feel, they are of the nature, if you talk to them, if you caress them, you greet them, you have this sharing with them, they feel this energy because it is an interchange”* (Interview 12). Her interchange with plants follows some specific rules. In particular, there is a taboo that is common to different cultures, according to which women that are in their menstrual period cannot touch any plant. *“You have to be healthy, why do you*



*have to take them when you are ill, to transmit this illness. take a plant when you have your period it is something that you shouldn't do*" (Interview 12). This is a rule that also farmers know *"It is recommended that when women are on their periods they do not touch any kind of plants"* (Interview n.14).

Another witness of the local intertwining of human and non-human beings is the story that interviewee 5, a local farmer and social leader, told me about an animal that he wounded during a hunting session with his father. *"What was bothering me, it was a spirit. The mother of nature, the mother of the mountain, because what happened is that we get used to hunting over there. In these times, when the meat is fat, we were used to go hunting, and it turns out that once we went with my dad, an uncle, a brother of mine, and another man, and we went through the mountains. When I was there, like from here to that lemon tree, there was a tree called Soliman, it is a tree that grows quite tall [...] when we see an animal, I mean I looked as if I were looking at a cow that came and stopped, it insisted there, and when it stretched, I shot to it. For us it was a tapir. And that animal left and when we followed it over there, "plum", it went into a hole. And it turns out that, already involved in this, I grabbed the shotgun and we left and it was at ten in the morning, and we hit the trail of that animal, and we found its trail fresh, its fresh blood, pools of blood, and so we said, if we found that fresh blood, it should be nearby, it is very close, we were going up to the edge and nothing, and at the end I was taken by a lazyness, a sleepyness, that I wanted just to sleep, and dad scolded me because I lagged behind, and so on, until we reached a river like at three in the afternoon, that animal was arrived at the ravine and a large river was going down there, that was going into the small one, it fell into that river and I don't know where it had gone, we couldn't find the trail anywhere, and that's where there was a big pool and there was a cave that was there, our hunt went over up to there, and from there onwards I continued with a problem, I would fall asleep, and I would look at that animal, I used to dream it every night, [I was dreaming] that we killed, it we peeled it and when it was peeled that animal ran away, and I was going out to run away too [...] that lasted me for about 20 days or more, I was already reduced to my bones, when they took me there, and that man cured me with prayers and with a plant."* He individuated in that wounded animal a guardian spirit of nature. He was then cured by an indigenous healer, but almost all people living in the Amazon share an ontology where natural elements or beings are watched over by spirits that manifest themselves in the shape of animals, plants, or natural elements. In these ontologies, connivance is generally ensured by mutual respect (Descolá, 2013). When respect fails, the role of the spirits of nature is to punish the mistakes. These spirits take two forms, a positive and a negative one, helping to heal but also provoking illnesses. Speaking about the spirit of the wood from Buryat cosmology, Descolá describes how this dualism is characteristic among Amerindians, *"In the Buryat language the spirit of the woods is known as "Rich-Forest" and it may take two forms. One is positive, provides games for humans, and wards off their sicknesses. The other, [...] in contrast disseminates misfortune and death and spends its time hunting down human souls and devouring them [...] The ambivalence of Rich-Forest (which is equally characteristic of the configurations of "masters of forest" among Amerindians) forces humans to take multiple precautions in their relations with the wild animals for which this double figure acts as a guardian."* (ibid.).

Guardian spirits are not only animals but also plants. Showing respect and asking permission for plants to cut their leaves and branches is a fundamental rule for territorial cooperation. *“The Sauco (elderberry) is used for bronchial problems and coughs, so the flowers are used for coughs. That plant is jealous, if you look at that plant that it's there, pretty, and of curiosity, you go and cut the branches and throw them away, then you will break out in allergies. [...] that's what experienced a woman here in Florencia, it happened to her, that there was a plant that had a branch fallen into the street, and she said tomorrow I will cut it, then I said to her, but you shall ask her for permission, but she thought that I was saying so just for joking. The next day, when she was working as a cleaner at the drugstore, when I looked at her scratching and scratching her eyes, and I told her, what happened to you? [...] since when did the itch start? she said, well, since yesterday when I've been cleaning the patio. So I said to her, I am sure that you cut the elderberry plant. She said yes because there was a branch that was ugly, half fallen. I cut it into pieces and threw it away, then I told her, oh, well, why would you throw it away? If you had brought it for consumption nothing would have happened to you [...] so I said to her look, if you want to recuperate from that allergy, you should go to the plant, touch her and say to her that you are not going to throw its leaves, and ask her to gift you with leaves for when you need them for the health. Ask forgiveness from the plant. [...] And she did it and the following day I asked her how are you doing miss Maria, and she said no, look that it calmed my suffering. [...] I said to her yes, this plant is very jealous. When this plant knows that you are going to use it for medicine, nothing happens, but not if you cut it for cutting it, I told her, it is this, the problem is when you offend her.”* (Interview 14).

What results from the interviews is that nature into the local vision can be seen as a subject. It manifests itself in multiple natures, it communicates and influence human's lives as well as human beings can be harmful, and then punished for their uncorrect behaviour. It is from this identification with the territory that resistance is built, as this idea of interdependency between humans and nature is opposed to the modern intent of reification. The interdependence described also testify the sharing of a relational ontology that is based on inter-species cooperation.

### **5.3 Political identity**

This space of frontier has been home to different kinds of immigration sometimes as the result of governmental strategies for colonization, sometimes for unintended consequences of the conflict. During the fifties and sixties, settlers were financed directly by programs of the Incora and the Caja Agraria<sup>34</sup> (Agrarian Bank) to occupy these areas (Ciro, 2013). The Caquetá forests were also seen as a refuge by marginalized populations for their remoteness, attracting afro from *palenques*<sup>35</sup>, indigenous families, and displaced people, but also numerous guerrillas (Serje, 2011). National funds of the Agrarian Bank were not followed by

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<sup>34</sup> Caja Agraria was a state bank created in 1931 with the objective of guaranteeing credit operations to farmers, while the Incora was founded in 1961 as a public entity of the Ministry of Agriculture with the similar aim of implementing the access to rural properties. Both disappeared in the nineties.

<sup>35</sup> Place populated by african people who escaped from the slave regime during the colonial period.

proper developmental strategies such as other public services or integration into the national market. This brought many farmers, already settled in the area, to embrace the illegal market established by the narcotraffic as the only alternative to resilience. Then, fumigations began, and farmers saw their source of livelihood eradicated by the government, as rising violence and contamination because of governmental strategies. People thus started to organize the protest. The questioning of state hegemony and political repression is what gave birth to the farmer armed resistance of the fifties when the bloody political violence against liberals and communists broke out (Acosta Garcia & Fold, 2022). The organization of syndicates in Caquetá began in the sixties when farmers were already seen as *guerrilleros* for their form of organization and opposition to governmental abandonment and stigmatization. At the end of the nineties, they organized historical civil strikes and marches. In those marches, they started to recognize themselves as *cocaleros*, taking possession of the term used by the state to classify and repress them. The everyday struggle of farmers thus became a hindrance to the social and ideological control of political structures and of landlords (Robbins, 2012). *“These social struggles for democracy mobilize the construction of a new political order and a new productive paradigm [...] many of them are reinventing their traditional practices of natural resources use, expressing demands for the self-determination of their life-worlds and livelihoods and the self-management of their productive processes”* (Leff, 2021).

COORDOSAC, FENSUAGRO, COCCAM, and other farmer organizations are today dialoguing with the government with the purpose of making a new Agrarian Reform<sup>36</sup>. *“Peluso (2018) argues that frontiers are not only spaces claimed by state domains of authority but can also be relational spaces that are able to be simultaneously inside and outside of state power”* (Acosta Garcia and Fold, 2022). This terrain of wild and unknown is likewise a space of interconnections and solidarity, where mutual aid is the solution to difficult living conditions and structural violence. The grounding is to consider the frontier not only as a space of contrasts, as suggests the Manichean distinction of wild versus domesticated, but rather as a transboundary context of diversity and multiculturalism (Palacio et al., 2010) and a place of entanglements. Referring to Colombian social movements, Aguilera (2018) highlights their counter-hegemonic use of the law and their capacity of building new narratives and uses of the public space (Aguilera, 2018). The ILO 169 Convention ratified in Colombia by Law 191 recognized the collective identities of its ethnic population as well as special rights of autonomy for indigenous, black, afro, *raizal*<sup>37</sup>, *palenqueros* (from palenques) and rom minorities, due to their ancestral connection with the territory. No legal right has been recognized yet to farmers based on their status, although they also constituted themselves into communities of mutual cooperation and their components often pertain to various ethnic groups. The new government just recently presented a new project for a legislative act to recognize farmers as a subject of rights (MADR, 2022). Being or not subject of rights for farmers, and being or not part of the Amazon for the department of Caquetá, has political implications with respect to developmental and conservationist strategies implemented by the national government and financed by international donors. Local movements thus aim at the recognition of the farmer

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<sup>36</sup> Cfr. Duran Chaparro et al., 2022.

<sup>37</sup> People from the islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina in Colombia.

as a subject of law. They ask for the real implementation of the peace agreements, and agrarian reform. The document that lists the mandates to the state of the national strike of 2014 is a guideline for understanding the alternative proposed by farmers and social movements.

Following Escobar (2020), common struggles for the defense of life, and the desire of building anti-system alternatives, are the elements that give birth to a political ontology that comes up from below, and from the left. Radical interdependency is also what results from the interconnection between different practices of social fights against capitalist economic systems and neoliberal strategies of development. Escobar sustains that counter-hegemonic experiences are connected by a common ontological framework of relationality and cooperation. Local environmental and social fights comprise a wide range of collectivities, indigenous, afro, and farmers, that share the same struggle for the pluriverse, being the pluriverse “*a world where many worlds can fit*” (Escobar, 2014). At the same time, they are characterized by a form of cooperation and they devote themselves to the defense of ecological relationships. The collective tissue drawing an alternative path is made by a mixture of realities that are interacting together and building political opposition, where the black movement shares with the feminist and the indigenous or environmental one common ground of relational politics in opposition to the modernist politics. In the Amazon, different realities are coexisting and share the same space. This results in an intertwining of identities and lives, whose categorization or definition would always generate conflict. Local communities are indigenous, farmers, and afro at the same time, sharing a syncretic ontology resulting from their interconnected reality. The identity of farmers is composed, as it results from conceptual and physical dynamics of clashes and encounters, and so also is their ontology. Going beyond the fleeting definition of indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge, and discussing sharp identity limits, means opening the path for conceiving the local knowledge arising from the coexistence of people and living beings in the same place and time. This brings to a reflection on the role of local identities and their political and cultural ontologies in the reconceptualization of the landscape (Escobar, 2020). The environmental and ontological conflict creates the terrain for the counter-hegemonic struggle of locally rooted movements, that configure themselves in rupture with the modern, liberal, dominant world system. “*The field of political ontology actually focuses on the analysis of environmental conflicts as ontological conflicts involving contrasting configurations of the human/nonhuman relation*” (Escobar, 2020).

## 6. Conclusion

As Anibal Quijano postulated, in the context of colonization of power<sup>38</sup>, the definitions and the context-making of literature and policies have the power of deciding geographies. Looking at the historical and political context it is possible to see how the Amazon has been

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<sup>38</sup> With colonization of power, Quijano (2000) refers to the modern global economic system, which have been structuring on colonial relationships supporting capitalism and Eurocentrism.

historically referred to as a territory to domesticize (Quijano, 1997, in Serje, 2011). The same happened with the description of its inhabitants. Both the policies and plans analyzed outline and identify some sharp definitions about who is the farmer, the indigenous, or the *colono*, or what is Amazon and what is not. These categories have been then deployed in the target destination of public projects and funds, besides having legal implications. At the same time, the governmental narrative fosters privatization and unbridled extractivism, both causing the dispossession of local inhabitants.

The hegemonic discourses about development, sustainability, and security appear as paradoxes when confronted with the imaginary of local communities: the paradox of growth, which promises development but causes violence and contamination; the paradox of conservation programs that are financing poisoning aerial fumigations; and the paradox of declaring war on local inhabitants to bring peace. The counter-discourse of farmer movements explains how there is a discrepancy between the declared objective of certain policies and their effects. The policy narrative of development, green economy, and carbon trade, all sum to constitute a path for the business-as-usual scenario that has been proven to be unequal and unsustainable. The unregulated market trade, the power of foreign investment, and the growing privatization of land did not bring better conditions for local inhabitants. The main reason relies on the fact that national policies have been shaped to reinforce and maintain the consensus over the dominance of certain hegemonic groups. The influence of western epistemology on political plans means that the objective of the economic strategies has been capital accumulation and not wealth or well-being. At the local level, farmers experience several difficulties in accessing the market, moving on from a subsistence economy, and surviving in a contaminated and violent environment.

Neoliberal strategies have created the preconditions for growing poverty and inequality, and these preconditions are the terrain of struggle where counter-hegemonic processes are rising. It is known how exploitative economic relationships often determined the insurgence of a “*cooperative, rational, risk-averse, authority resisting peasant*” (Scott, 1985, in Robbins, 2012). Different organizations of Caquetá align themselves against the extractivist economy and the environmental disasters that the capitalist system causes. These organizations coming from civil society, farmers, environmentalists, indigenous and afro movements, advocate for a different way of living with the environment and territory. As capitalism and its resource-dependent economy are driving the earth to climate collapse, there is a need to overcome developmentalism and the capitalistic struggle for exploitation. Thus the first step to constructing a counter-hegemonic project is to build a counter-discourse that unveils paradoxes and contradictions of the capitalistic system.

These bottom-up movements propose a shift of worldview, from materialistic to post-materialistic values, to live with nature as local traditions teach to live, with cooperation, dialogue, and mutual respect. All these movements share the same epistemology, based on a radical interdependence between all living beings. Even if the policy narrative depicts the farmer as a criminal and indicates their presence as potentially destructive to nature, the traditional knowledge shared by farmers testifies to their radical relationality. Radical

relationality and cooperation between beings, movements, and communities in the northern Colombian Amazon are central to challenging the hegemonic narrative from below. One of the basic premises of political ontology is indeed the sharing of a relational ontology that recognizes nature as a subjective being, in opposition to the western dualistic ontology which separates subjects and objects, and nature and human beings. Thus, the local coalition of farmers, indigenous, afro, workers, and other subordinated collectivities constitute the base for a counter-hegemonic project shared at an international level. It represents the action from below that erodes the dominant imaginary and works to build its own transformative alternative.

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## List of acronyms

**ASMTRAC-CURC** Asociación Municipal de Trabajadores Campesinas y Campesinos de Curillo, Caquetá

**ANLA** Agencia Nacional de Licencias Ambientales

**ANH** Agencia Nacional de Hidrocarburos

**ANT** Agencia Nacional de Tierras

**ASINTRACAMPIC** Asociación municipal campesina de trabajadoras y trabajadores de Piamonte Cauca

**ASOPORTALES** Asociación de Trabajadores Campesinos y Campesinas Portales del Fragua

**CMC** Catastro Minero Colombiano

**CNE** Consejo Nacional de Estupefacientes

**COORDOSAC** Coordinadora Departamental de Organizaciones Sociales, Ambientales y Campesinas del Caquetá

**DNP** Departamento Nacional de Planeación

**DRI** Desarrollo Rural Integrado

**FARC-EP** Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia Ejército Popular

**GEF** Global Environment Facility

**GHG** Greenhouse gasses

**IDEAM** Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales

**IGAC** Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi

**IFC** International Finance Corporation

**ILO** International Labour Organization

**INCORA** Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria

**JEP** Justicia Especial para la Paz

**MOTRA** Modelo de Ordenamiento Territorial Regional para la Amazonia Colombiana

**OEA** Organización de los Estados Americanos

**OECD** Organización de Cooperación y Desarrollo Económico

**ONIC** Organización Nacional de pueblos Indígenas de Colombia

**ONU** Organización de las Naciones Unidas

**PATR** Plan de Acción para la Transformación Regional

**PECIG** Programa de Erradicación de Cultivos Ilícitos mediante aspersión aérea con Glifosato

**PISDA** Planes Integrales Comunitarios y Municipales de Sustitución y Desarrollo Alternativo

**PNNC** Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia

**PNN** Parques Nacionales Naturales

**PDET** Planes de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial

**PNIS** Plan Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos

**PSA** Pagos por Servicios Ambientales

**PES** Payment for Ecosystem Services

**PND** Plan Nacional de Desarrollo  
**PNCT** Plan Nacional de Consolidación Territorial  
**RIA** Relaciones Internacionales Antiterroristas  
**SCI** Dirección de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos  
**SPNN** Sistema de Parques Nacionales Naturales de Colombia  
**SINA** Sistema Nacional Ambiental  
**TLC** Tratado de Libre Comercio  
**UN** United Nations  
**UNDP** United Nations Development Program  
**UNEP** United Nations Environmental Program  
**UNFCCC** United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change  
**UNODC** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime  
**UP** Union Patriótica  
**ZEII** Zonas Estratégicas de Intervención Integral  
**ZME** Zonas de Manejo Especial  
**ZRF** Zonas de Reserva Forestal

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1. Politologist, environmental activist, woman
2. Farmer, social leader, man
3. Farmer, healer, woman
4. Farmer, healer, woman
5. Farmer, healer, man
6. Farmer, man
7. Healer, woman
8. Farmer, bonesetter, man
9. Farmer, healer, man
10. Farmer, man
11. Worker, woman
12. Healer, woman, indigenous
13. Nurse, woman
14. Farmer, social leader, woman

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<sup>39</sup> All interviews have been translated by the author from Spanish.

## Annexes

### Annex 1: Analysis of actual presence of mining and oil companies in Curillo and San José del Fragua.

#### 1. Curillo. Hydrocarbon lots.

	Fuente ANH				Fuente ANLA
<b>MUNICIPALITY</b>	Curillo	Curillo	Curillo	Curillo	Curillo, San Jose del Fragua, Albania, Belen de los andaquies, Morelia
<b>CONTRACT TYPE / NAME</b>	TECHNICAL EVALUATION ANH / CAG5	EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION / CAG6	AVAILABLE AREA / VSM 41	AVAILABLE AREA / PUT 40	PERFORACIÓN EXPLORATORY DRILLING IN THE ANDAQUIES AREA
<b>CONTRACT ID / EXPEDIENTE</b>	0256 ID	0257 ID	0566 ID	0626 ID	LAM5333
<b>RESERVOIR TYPE</b>	Conventional	Conventional	No information found	No information found	No information found
<b>AREA HA</b>	372,035.98 HA	48,177.00 HA	23,917.50 HA	68,464.87 HA	
<b>COMPANIES / NATURAL PERSONS</b>	FRONTERA ENERGY COLOMBIA CORP	FRONTERA ENERGY COLOMBIA CORP	ANH	ANH	GRUPO C&C ENERGIA (BARBADOS) SUCURSAL COLOMBIA
<b>FIRM DATE</b>	14/3/2011	14/3/2011	18/05/2017	18/5/2017	4/9/2011

Source: Author with data from ANH; ANLA, 2022.

#### 2. San José del Fragua. Hydrocarbon lots.

	Fuente ANH			Fuente ANLA			
<b>MUNICIPALITY</b>	San Jose del Fragua, Albania, Belen de los andaquies	San Jose del Fragua	San jose del Fragua	Curillo, San Jose del Fragua, Albania, Belen de los andaquies, Morelia	San Jose del Fragua, Belen de los andaquies	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua
<b>CONTRACT TYPE / NAME</b>	AREA DISPONIBOLE / PUT 39	EXPLORACION Y PRODUCCION / YD PUT 1	PRODUCCION / GUAYUYACO (SANTANA ADY)	PERFORACIÓN EXPLORATORIA EN EL ÁREA ANDAQUIES	PERFORACION EXPLORATORIA DEL AREA DE INTERES GEOLOGICO ESPECIFICA MANDARINA	AREA DE PERFORACION EXPLORATORIA TOPOYACO NORTE	AREA DE PERFORACION EXPLORATORIA TOPOYACO
<b>CONTRACT ID / EXPEDIENTE</b>	0625 ID	0352 ID	0049 ID	LAM5333	LAM3324	LAM4945	LAM4353
<b>RESERVOIR TYPE</b>		Convencional					
<b>AREA HA</b>	45,087.717951 HA	2354.3071 HA	20,648.43 HA				
<b>COMPANIES / NATURAL PERSONS</b>	ANH	MOMPOS OIL COMPANY INC.	GRAN TIERRA ENERGY COLOMBIA, LLC, asociacion con Ecopetrol	GRUPO C&C ENERGIA (BARBADOS) SUCURSAL COLOMBIA	C&C ENERGY GROUP S.A.	TRAYECTORIA OIL AND GAS SUCURSAL COLOMBIA	TRAYECTORIA OIL AND GAS SUCURSAL COLOMBIA
<b>FIRM DATE</b>	18/5/2017	30/9/2014	29/11/2002	4/9/2011	24/11/2005	29/3/2011	4/6/2009

Source: Author with data from ANH; ANLA, 2022.

### 3. Curillo. Mining contracts of temporary authorization.

<b>MUNICIPALITIES</b>	Curillo, San Jose del Fragua	Curillo, Piamonte, San Jose del Fragua
<b>LEGAL STATUS</b>	TEMPORARY AUTHORISATION / GRANTED APPLICATION- FIRM CONTRACT	TEMPORARY AUTHORISATION / GRANTED APPLICATION- FIRM CONTRACT
<b>FILE CODE</b>	PEG-08381	PC3-12091
<b>MATERIALS</b>	Construction Materials	Construction Materials
<b>ÁREA HA / M2</b>	1270776.85784 m2	266523.97649 m2
<b>SOLICITANTES COMPAÑÍAS / PERSONAS NATURALES / GRUPO DE TRABAJO</b>	PAR CENTRO/ CONSORCIO ANDINO 049	PAR CENTRO/ MUNICIPIO DE CURILLO
<b>APPLICATION DATE</b>	16/05/2014	03/03/2014

Source: Author with data from CMC, 2022.

### 4. San José del Fragua. Mining contracts under concession.

<b>MUNICIPALITIES</b>	San Jose del Fragua, Acevedo, Belén, Piamonte	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua, Piamonte	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua, Albania	San Jose del Fragua, Albania	San Jose del Fragua, Belen de los andaquies	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua
<b>LEGAL STATUS</b>	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO	CONTRATO DE CONCESION (L 685) SOLICITUD VIGENTE - EN CURSO
<b>FILE CODE</b>	TAO-11441	SCD-08421	PAO-08011	RLG-08181	RF9-08351	PGN-08051	PC7-08071	PAK-08391	SEF-08281	UCB-08121	RB1-08551	PED-09311	PGL-14401
<b>AREA M2</b>	99059928,13027 m2	5902536.3293 m2	1949999,99571 m2	51310954.0645 m2	4572906,26486 m2	2158136.50123 m2	2620037.72588 M2	11546340.48137 m2	3958993.0908m2	1491400.0342 m2	5317511.84863 m2	1248306.06306 m2	3831412.29892 m2
<b>MATERIALS</b>		ESMERALDAS EN BRUTO, SIN LABRAR, MINERALES DE ORO, MINERALES DE COBRE, PIEDRAS PRECIOSAS SEMIPRECIOSAS SIN TALLAR	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	ARENAS Y GRAVAS NATURALES Y SILICEAS, MINERALES DE ORO Y PLATINO, ESMERALDAS, MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION MINERALES DE COBRE	CARBON TERMICO, CARBON COQUIZABLE O METALURGICO, MINERALES DE COBRE Y SUS CONCENTRADOS	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MINERALES DE COBRE Y SUS CONCENTRADOS, MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION, MINERALES DE ORO Y PLATINO, Y SUS CONCENTRADOS, CARBON TERMICO	MINERALES DE COBRE Y SUS CONCENTRADOS, MICA EN BRUTO O EN CRISTALES IRREGULARES		PIEDRAS PRECIOSAS NCP SIN TALLAR, PIEDRAS SEMIPRECIOSAS NCP SIN TALLAR, PIRITAS DE HIERRO TOSTAR, DESBASTADAS EN BRUTO,	ESMERALDAS EN BRUTO, SIN LABRAR O SIMPLEMENTE ASERRADAS SIN TALLAR, DESBASTADAS EN BRUTO,
<b>COMPANIES/ NATURAL PERSONS</b>	Natural persons / PAR CENTRO	Natural persons / PAR CENTRO	Natural persons / PAR CENTRO	PAR CENTRO/ M&M MINERALES MARIN SAS	PAR CENTRO	Natural persons / PAR CENTRO	Natural persons / PAR CENTRO	Natural persons / PAR CENTRO	PAR CENTRO/ M&M MINERALES MARIN SAS	Natural persons / PAR CENTRO	Natural persons / PAR CENTRO	PAR CENTRO/ SYNERGY INTERNATIONAL MINING AND INFRASTRUCTURE SAS- SIMI SAS	Natural persons / PAR CENTRO
<b>APPLICATION DATE</b>	24-01-2018	13-03-2017	24-01-2014	16-12-2016	09/06/2016	23/07/2014	07/03/2014	20/01/2014	15/05/2017	11/03/2019	01/02/2016	13/05/2014	21/07/2014

Source: Author with data from CMC, 2022

Materials of contract L685/ TAO11441 are listed below:

SANDSTONE, NATURAL ASPHALT OR ASPHALTITES, CALCITE (MIG), QUARTZ OR SILICA, NATURAL AND SILICA SANDS AND GRAVEL, KAOLIN, THERMAL COAL, CRUSHED OR GROUND MINERAL COAL, ALUMINUM MINERALS, NATURAL PLASTER; ANHYDRITE, GYPSUM (MIG), ROUGH EMERALDS, UNWORKED OR SIMPLY SAWN OR BUBBLED, INDUSTRIAL DIAMONDS, UNWORKED OR SIMPLY SAWN, CLOVED OR BUBBLED, INDUSTRIAL EARTH, IRON ORES, NATURAL GRAVEL, INDUSTRIAL SANDS FLUORITE, DIAMONDS, INDUSTRIAL INDUSTRIAL, UNWORKED OR SIMPLY SAWN, CLOVED OR RUBBED AND OTHER PRECIOUS AND SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES UNWORKED OR SIMPLY SAWN OR RUBBED; PUMICE; EMERY; NATURAL CORUNDUM, NATURAL GARNET AND OTHER NATURAL ABRASIVES SINTERED IRON ORE, SILVER MINERALS AND THEIR CONCENTRATES, **GOLD AND PLATINUM**, LEAD MINERALS, GRANITE (MIG), UNWORKED EMERALDS, COPPER, MINERALS OF PRECIOUS METALS, FELDSPATH SANDS, CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS, ELABORATED BARITE, TALC COOKING OR METALLURGICAL CARBON, **BAUXITE**, PLATINUM, NATURAL BITUMEN AND ASPHALT; ASPHALTITES AND ASPHALT ROCKS, CORUNDUM (MIG), **GOLD**, POZZOLANA (MIG), GARNET (MIG), PHLOGOPITE (MIG).

## 5. San José del Fragua. Mining contracts of temporal authorization.

<b>MUNICIPALITIES</b>	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua, Albania	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua, Curillo	Curillo, Piamonte, San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua
<b>LEGAL STATUS</b>	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME	AUTORIZACION TEMPORAL / SOLICITUD OTORGADA-EN FIRME
<b>FILE CODE</b>	PAL-10001	OJ2-08101	NK2-10511	RJS-08231	NK2-14161	PEG-16351	PEG-08381	PC3-12091	NK2-11071	RJS-08232X
<b>AREA M2</b>	1232.09876 m2	4483271.25656 m2	168556.13821 m2	990471.72789 m2	28129.84923 m2	846495.32346 m2	1270776.85784 m2	266523.97649 m2	15430.00372 m2	4605.24376 m2
<b>MATERIALS</b>	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION	MATERIALES DE CONSTRUCCION
<b>COMPANIES/ NATURAL PERSONS</b>	PAR CENTRO/ CONSORCIO ANDINO 049	PAR CENTRO/ CONSORCIO ANDINO 049	REGIONAL BOGOTA/ CONSORCIO ANDINO 049	PAR CENTRO/ MUNICIPIO DE SAN JOSE DE FRAGUA	REGIONAL BOGOTA / CONSORCIO ANDINO 049	PAR CENTRO/ CONSORCIO ANDINO 049	PAR CENTRO/ CONSORCIO ANDINO 049	PAR CENTRO/ MUNICIPIO DE CURILLO	REGIONAL BOGOTA / CONSORCIO ANDINO 049	PAR CENTRO/ MUNICIPIO DE SAN JOSE DE FRAGUA
<b>APPLICATION DATE</b>	21/01/2014	02/10/2013	02/11/2012	28/10/2016	02/11/2012	16/05/2014	16/05/2014	03/03/2014	02/11/2012	28/10/2016

Source: Author, with data from CMC, 2022.

## 6. San José del Fragua. Requests under evaluation for mining titles.

<b>MUNICIPALITIES</b>	San José del Fragua, Belén	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua	San Jose del Fragua
<b>LEGAL STATUS</b>	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION, EXPLORATION PHASE	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION - ACTIVE	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION - EXPLORATION PHASE	REQUEST UNDER EVALUATION
<b>FILE CODE</b>	UCB-08121	PGL-14401	RB1-08551	SCD-08421	504110	503536	OD9-16261	PEG-16351	504090	503763
<b>AREA HA</b>	193,4054 HA	445,9606 HA	550,704 HA	659,140 HA	168,7703 HA	141,703 HA	879,767 HA	84,7389 HA	223,0463 HA	399,288 HA
<b>MATERIALS</b>	COPPER, GOLD	ROUGH EMERALDS	MICA	EMERALD, COPPER, GOLD, OTHER PRECIOUS AND SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES	SANDS AND GRAVELS (from river)	COPPER, GOLD	LISTED BELOW*	CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS	SANDS GRAVELS (from river)	SANDS GRAVELS (from river)
<b>COMPANIES/ NATURAL PERSONS</b>	Natural persons	Natural persons	Natural persons	Natural persons	(81557) BUSINESS GROUP EDIFICAR ZOMAC SAS	Natural persons	Natural persons	(48574) CONSORCIO ANDINO 049	Natural persons	(81557) BUSINESS GROUP EDIFICAR ZOMAC SAS
<b>APPLICATION DATE</b>	11 mar 2019	21 jul 2014	1 feb 2016	13 march 2017	20 jan 2022	17 nov 2021	9 apr 2013	16 may 2014 expiration: 9 dec 2015	17 jan 2022	14 dic 2021

Source: Author with data from ANM, 2022.

\* Materials of contract OD9-16261:

ANHYDRITE, CLAY, SAND, SANDSTONE, NATURAL ASPHALT, SULFUR, BENTONITE, CALCITE, KAOLIN, COAL, IRIIDIUM MINERAL CONCENTRATE, CORUNDUM, QUARTZ, DOLOMITE, EMERALD, FELDSPAR, FLUORITE, GRAPHITE, GARNET, GRANITE, GRAVEL, MAGNESITE, MARBLE AND TRAVERTINE, MICA, ALUMINUM, ANTIMONY AND THEIR CONCENTRATES, BARIUM MINERALS, BORON

MINERALS, ZIRCONIUM MINERALS, COBALT, COPPER, CHROME MINERALS AND THEIR CONCENTRATES, TIN MINERALS AND THEIR CONCENTRATES, IRON MINERALS AND THEIR CONCENTRATES, LITHIUM, MANGANESE MINERALS AND THEIR CONCENTRATES, MERCURY, MOLYBDENUM AND THEIR CONCENTRATES, NICKEL, GOLD, SILVER, PLATINUM (INCLUDING PLATINUM, PALLADIUM, RUTHENIUM, RHODIUM, OSMIUM), LEAD, POTASSIUM, SODIUM, TANTALUM, RARE EARTHS, TITANIUM AND THEIR CONCENTRATES, VANADIUM AND ITS CONCENTRATES, TUNGSTEN, ZINC MINERALS, THORIUM, URANIUM, OTHER PRECIOUS STONES, OTHER SEMI-PRECIOUS STONES, OTHER METAMORPHIC ROCKS, OTHER ROCKS AND MINERALS OF VOLCANIC ORIGIN, PUMICE STONE, PYRITE, SLATE, RECIPE, PHOSPHATIC ROCK, ROCK OR LIMESTONE, CORAL ROCK OR STONE, QUARTZITE ROCKS, ROCKS OF VOLCANIC ORIGIN, POZZOLAN, BASALT, ROCK SALT, SEA SALT, NATURAL BARIUM SULFATE-BARITINE, TALC, PLASTER

#### Data Sources:

ANH. Open data. Geovisor Agencia Nacional de Hidrocarburos ANH v3.1. Retrieved in July 2022. From: <https://geovisor.anh.gov.co/tierras/>

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ANLA. Open data. Sistema de Información Geográfica Agencia Nacional de Licencias Ambientales - ANLA. Hydrocarbon licensed areas. Retrieved in July 2022. From: <https://datosabiertos-anla.hub.arcgis.com/datasets/%C3%A1reas-licenciadas-hidrocarburos/explore?location=4.555650%2C-75.828500%2C5.52>

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#### **Annex 2 : Interview transcripts.**

The interview transcripts can be consulted through the author.