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An Old War in a New Context .The Interactions between the Agrarian Problem and Armed Conflict in Colombia 1966-2010

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An Old War in a New Context

The Interactions between the Agrarian Problem and Armed Conflict in Colombia 1966-2010

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I. INTRODUCTION

The armed conflict in Colombia has generally been seen as a continuous and homogeneous process, which has covered almost the entire national territory for more than seven decades without substantial changes. Quite on the contrary, our previous studies of the geography of the Colombian conflict have made us conscious of the necessity of taking into account regional and local particularities in order to explain the way the national master cleavages and long term approaches interact with the logic of local and regional actors.

Firstly, it is necessary to remember that the violence in Colombia has never been generalized throughout the entire national territory, but rather it has been highly concentrated and differentiated according to the dynamics of settlement and social configuration in regions, sub regions and localities, as well to the way these regions and localities interact with national political and economic dynamics. For these reasons, our presentation tries to combine the analysis of the

national level with the way the armed actors inserted themselves in the local and regional cleavages by themselves in the local and regional cleavages by emphasizing the geographical evolution of the conflict.

These national-regional interactions have provided, in the first place, a structure of opportunities for the voluntary decision of Jacobin groups, inspired by the Marxist-Leninist ideology, of assuming the violence as a means of taking the power at national level. The forming of these groups has been favored by the ambiguity of some social movements and leftist groups regarding violence as a political option and the hostility of rightist groups toward social mobilization and social and economic reforms. Secondly, the fact that these type of groups have chosen violence as an option has, in turn, favored the development of rightist paramilitary groups, as an answer to the extortions and kidnappings committed by armed leftist groups, and also to the political advances of non-violent leftist groups. These paramilitary groups are commonly supported by local and regional powers and have benefited from compliance or omission on the part of the national Army and the Police.

Of course, it is also important to remember that the origin and development of armed conflict in Colombia was favored by the country's difficult geography, due to three chains of Andean mountains, whose rugged foothills and internal valleys, dense clouds and forests, have created ideal interstitial spaces for the guerrillas to hide in. These spaces are normally very difficult for the Army and Police to access, as well as for the presence of civilian authorities to have effect. However, there are important differences between these two armed groups in terms of their relationships with the regions where they are active: the guerrillas, especially the FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, originally linked to the Moscow line of the Communist Party), generally emerged in isolated areas of peripheral sections of the open agrarian frontier: by contrast, the paramilitary groups tend to emerge in more integrated, economically and politically, areas of the countryside.

For these reasons, our research tries to take into account the territorial dynamics of the armed conflict as well as changes in the strategic decisions of armed actors during the different periods. In order to do

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that, members of ODECOFI¹ have been analyzing the macro tendencies of the Colombian armed conflict in the South west and North East regions of the country as well as the Caribbean Coast, and contrasting them with some sub-regions such as Antioquia and Urabá, the Cordoba and Sucre departments and the Lower Putumayo valley. Some of these studies are already published; others are still being finished. Our presentation intends to make a partial synthesis of the conclusions from both types of results.

Of course, the transformations of these interactions between armed actors and regions are reflected in the changing dynamics of violence through the different periods of time: in recent years, the gradual involvement of armed actors in the circuit of drug trafficking and cultivation has induced some analysts to understand the Colombian conflict in terms of new war parameters (the “greed and grievance” thesis). In contrast to this approach, we consider the recent micro dynamics of conflict in strong relationship with the long and medium term: the involvement of armed actors in the coca business can be seen as one of the results of the combination of the peasant colonization of peripheral areas in the agrarian frontier and their precarious articulation to the national politics and economy.

II. THE DISCUSSION ON NEW WARS: GREED OR GRIEVANCE?

It has been commonly accepted the existence of a strong relationship between the exploitation of natural resources and the presence of illegal armed actors who dispute the profits resulting from these activities, as Collier has pointed out (Collier 2001, 2004 and 2009). For these reasons, some authors as Mary Kaldor (2001), Herfried Münkler (2005) and Martín Kalulambi (2003a; 2003b) have affirmed that recent internal wars have been motivated more for economic reasons than for ideological and political purposes.

In the Colombian case, it is undeniable that there has been some convergence between the expansion of armed conflict since the eighties and the economic expansion produced by banana cultivation in the regions of Urabá and Magdalena, the palm industry in south Cesar and the Pacific Coast in Chocó, the oil industry in Arauca, as well as Coca cultivation and traffic in Putumayo in the nineties, on the Pacific Coast of Cauca and Nariño and in the lower Cauca valley around Caucaasia (in Antioquia). Obviously, the recent insertion of the FARC in the Narco economic cycle has partially been motivated by the need to finance the war,

especially in their shift to the Pacific Coast of the Nariño, Cauca and Valle del Cauca departments. In this sense, this insertion has been used by some public officials of the government of Uribe Vélez to reduce the Colombian armed conflict to a Narco terrorist attack on a fully legitimate State and on an almost perfect democracy. And other analysts have also tried to explain the conflict as merely a confrontation over natural resources such as coca crops, poppy plantations and oil, without any political and ideological motivations. Nevertheless, a long term approach to the historical, political and institutional issues requires a more complex understanding of the problem, in order to take into account the relationship between these economic processes and the integration of these particular regions into the national dimensions of economy and politics. This consideration allows us to go further with the binary and dichotomist opposition between economic and political motivations regarding internal conflict (Kalyvas, 2001).

In this sense, we take into account the analyses of Stathis Kalyvas (2001a; 2001b; 2004; 2006 and 2008), who points out the importance of a sub-national approach in order to understand the complex reality of armed actors. According to him, it is on these levels that the concrete interactions between armed actors, the civil population and political actors take place; on the sub-national level the logic of civil wars is produced and reproduced. Moreover, this author affirms that there are no substantial differences between “old” and “new” wars: he strongly criticizes the idea of contrasting the political and ideological character of “old wars”, motivated by noble causes such as social justice, with the criminally and economically motivated “new wars”.

In this sense, he emphasizes the analytically problematic issue of predation and booty as an eventual cause of war: it is not clear whether the war is motivated by predation or whether predation is a means for war. He strongly criticizes the dichotomy between economic and political issues, between greed and grievance (Kalyvas (2001a) and the idea of a new mwar as a process of de-statalization produced by a failed state. He rather suggests that warlords can be part of State-building processes: on some occasions they can administer justice, collect taxes and guarantee social order on the local level, while soldiers of regular national armies can be also motivated by booty and greed. Finally, he points out the necessity of taking into account the key interactions between the general and local aspects of the conflict (Kalyvas 2001a and 2006).

The importance of sub-national level of analysis has been reinforced by Kalyvas in a new research program (Kalyvas 2008) centered on civil war micro dynamics, in order to improve data quality, check micro foundations and causal mechanisms, maximize the adjustment between concepts and data and measure armed actors’ territorial control. This last variable allows

¹ODECOFI is the Colombian Observatory for integral development, civilian coexistence and institutional strengthening in regions severely affected by armed conflict, selected by the Colombian national research authority COLCIENCIAS as the top centre of excellence in Social Sciences in Colombia.

us to explain the changes in forced displacement, the recruitment of combatants and the patterns of violence. According to this author (Kalyvas 2006), the inclusion of territorial control as a variable is necessary in order to identify wars as twin situations, with the coexistence of the process of segmentation and fragmentation of sovereignty, such as the cases of irregular wars, where the armed actors try to get the population's support and encourage collaboration (Kalyvas, 2008).

Kalyvas historical erudition is reinforced by the Charles Tilly relational model, which tries to explain collective violence in terms of interactions between individuals, social groups, the context of these interactions and political regimens, in order to point out the intermediation mechanisms between political entrepreneurs, specialists in violence, political brokers and variations in political regimes (Tilly, 2003).

The approaches of Kalyvas and Tilly allow us to discuss the political use of the FARC's recent involvement in the Pacific lowlands in order to deny that these guerrillas have any social, political or ideological aspects. In order to refute this, our most recent book (Vásquez and others, 2011) relates the recent involvement of guerrillas and rightist paramilitary groups in the drug business to the long term effects of centuries old tensions on the agrarian frontier and of the regions' gradual articulation with the national center of politics.

III. A LONG RUN MASTER CLEAVAGE: THE IMPACT OF THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM ON SUBNATIONAL LEVELS

Therefore, the systematic comparison between the Pacific lowlands of Nariño, the frontier areas next to Ecuador and the regions of peasant colonization such as El Caguán shows us we are dealing with an old war in a new context. A centuries-old conflict, centered on problems of peasant colonization in peripheral areas of the country, with its political consequences, has now been transformed into a conflict related to the new involvement of certain areas, with a precarious presence of State institutions, in the drug trafficking economic cycle.

A geographical approach to war actions, by using a comparative perspective of the affected regions, lets us to locate the presence of the guerrillas in the settlement of peripheral zones in relationship to the political and economic life on the national level. However, it is always necessary to take into account some important differences in the subnational level: so, for example, in some areas of the sub-region of El Caguán, where the demilitarized zone for the negotiation between the Pastrana government and the FARC was located, the armed conflict and the FARC presence have played an important role in the configuration of the region and of its territorial identity. In contrast, the recent simultaneous emergence of the Coca economy and the

armed conflict on the Pacific coast of Nariño can be understood (at least, partially) according to the "new war" parameter, because they both result from the dispute over financial resources and the necessary military control. However, even in this case, the recent confrontations between guerrillas and paramilitary groups cannot be reduced to a merely economic rationale because it is necessary to also take into account political issues such as the idea of State and society, supported by the armed groups. (Vásquez and others 2011)

It is also necessary to take into account the internal complexity of the so-called Narco economics in order to understand the different moments of the relationship between armed actors and the coca business: we have to distinguish between big, medium and small producers: raspachines (Coca pickers or "raspers"), commercial brokers and big entrepreneurs, according to previous studies (such as the analysis of Cubides, Jaramillo and Mora 1986; Duncan 2006; Gutiérrez y Barón 2008; Ferro 2004, Ferro and Uribe, 2004, Caicedo 2006, José Jairo González 1998, Gros 2004, María Clemencia Ramírez 2001, Salgado 2004a, 2004b; Richani 2003, Tovar 1999; López 2006; Ricardo Vargas, 2003 and 2004, and the investigations of Sinchi group, 2000) Despite these differences, we believe coca production maintains the main features of a typical peasant economy: low-cost, low-tech production, intensive labor, easy transportation but high demand and high prices, produce great advantages in relation to the legal peasant economy.

Bearing in mind this complex economic circuit, our researchers (Vásquez and others, 2011) point out enormous changes in the relationship between illegal armed actors following the different moments of the Coca productive chain: in the seventies, the coca business was dominated by the big "Godfathers" and in the eighties the FARC guerrillas started to collect taxes on production (the protection money or "vaccination"- "vacuna") and protect coca-farming peasants from the big traders. This situation was modified in the middle of nineties because the intensification of the conflict forced armed actors to insert themselves in other moments of the chain of production. The FARC gradually passed from the social regulation of armed colonization in the sixties and seventies to the support of Coca colonization in eighties, when they assumed some social functions such as the regulation of economic transactions in some areas such as the Lower Putumayo zone.

In this way, they became involved in all the stages of the Coca economy: in 1996, the FARC's support of the protests of coca-farming peasants in Guaviare, Caquetá and Putumayo produced the paramilitary reaction, because these groups were afraid of the eventual alliance between social demands of peasants and the guerrillas. And this counter offensive of paramilitary groups forced the FARC to decide to look

for ways to control all the different stages of the Coca economic circuit. And, more recently, they support and impose the cultivation of coca in the Pacific lowlands of Nariño, in order to escape from the attacks of the national army and from the eradication of Coca crops, as well as to look for new economic resources for their war.

These changes have produced more disputes and complex alliances of armed actors in order to control the regional Coca economy and export routes: by then, paramilitary groups, centered in the past on the control of the exportation routes in alliance with the big "Godfathers" of the Drug economy, have to seek control over the peasants in regions such as South Bolivar, Meta, Catatumbo, Guaviare, Caquetá and Putumayo.

So, the national and international decisions made as part of Anti Drug policies, as well as the territorial recovery carried out by the National army with the subsequent retirement of the guerrillas toward the Equatorial border and the Pacific Coast of Nariño, Cauca and Valle del Cauca departments, inserted these regions into the conflict between guerrillas, rightist paramilitary groups and the National army. These conflicts affect the organization of the Afro Colombian communities and produce different relationships between illegal armed groups: confrontation, alliance and compromise, according to the concrete correlation of forces.

Nevertheless, this insertion of the guerrillas in the drug trafficking circuit is not exclusively due to merely economic motivations but also to political reasons because the FARC needed the control of the Coca business in order to counteract the inclination of Coca growers and traders toward the Paramilitaries social bases. On the other hand, our researchers realized the FARC quest for an organic alliance with Coca-farming peasants against the State was contradictory, in the long run, with the peasantry's interests toward a better insertion in national life, and a greater presence of State institutions in their regions. Consequently, the FARC's attempt at using peasant mobilization for their political purposes was contradictory with the more autonomous political goals of peasant leadership. For all these reasons, the alliance between guerrillas and Coca growers was not the result of an ideological sympathy but of a temporary common interest: it explains how easily these groups can change their allegiances and accept the security offered by paramilitary groups. Of course, the FARC are going to continue expanding their social bases in the interstitial areas of this kind of region, which is not fully inserted in the legal economy and political life, but their involvement in the Coca business is seriously affecting their political legitimacy in the urban world and before the international community.

In the long term, our researchers present the FARC's expansion in the lowlands of Pacific areas of

Nariño and Cauca as the latest moment of a centuries-old process of Peasant colonization in peripheral areas. They have concluded that the recent combination between the expansion of Coca-growing areas and the presence of armed conflict in the agrarian frontier is the expression of an unsolved agrarian problem and its political consequences, which have existed during centuries. Because of that, it is impossible to reduce the Colombian armed conflict, as the Uribe government tried to do, to an attack of Narco terrorist groups against a fully legitimated State, nor to simple greed for the drug trafficking resources.

a) *The interaction between national and subnational levels in the foundational period of the guerrillas*

So, in order to understand the recent evolution of the armed conflict it is necessary to relate it to its historical roots, taking into account the foundational period of the different kinds of guerrilla according to the social differences of the regions and, particularly, their relationships with the State institutions and the traditional political parties.

So, these regional differences also explain the diverse relationships between the guerrillas: in the sixties, the FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) guerrillas were the result of the decision of some members of the Colombian Communist Party, in a Jacobin style, who took advantage of the social tensions in an open agrarian frontier and the Colombian State's incapacity of solving them. And the Maoist EPL (Popular Liberation Army) and the Castrist ELN (National Liberation Army) originated in a little more integrated regions of the country, which were experiencing fast and uneven development in a colonization process coming to an end. In this kind of region, the guerrilla groups also took advantage of the social problems caused by fast economic expansion.

Of course, the insurgence of these groups was also linked to Worldwide Leftist politics: so, originally the EPL (Popular Liberation Army) decision to promote a peasant revolution, inspired by Maoist ideas, reflected the Sino Soviet excision; on the other hand, the ELN (National Liberation Army) and its "Foquista" strategy were clearly inspired by the Cuban Revolution.

However, the origin of all these groups is fundamentally linked to the expansion of the agrarian frontier and the type of articulation between the national, regional and local levels of political life. In other words, the different situations are the result of centennial master cleavages such as the continuous expansion of agrarian frontier and the political integration of the new settled regions. Since Spanish colonial times, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the highly concentrated structure of property expelled the growing peasant population to peripheral areas of the country, outside of the control of the Spanish government's officers and Catholic priests. The newly populated areas

became the scenario of social tensions in the late eighteenth century as well as the second part of nineteenth century and the twenties and thirties in the twentieth century (Legrand, 1988).

After this, the recent antecedents of the recent violence are the agrarian conflicts in the Sumapaz and Tequendama regions (Cundinamarca) in 1920s and 1930s (Jiménez, 1996), the Violence in the fifties with the confrontation between Liberal and Communist guerrillas, and the failure of Rehabilitation Commission in the late fifties and of the Agrarian reform in the sixties and seventies (Sánchez and Maertens, 1988 and 1989). These conflicts and failures express the difficulties of the bipartisan system of the National Front to adequately respond to the social and political problems originating in peripheral regions of peasant colonization and organized by other political forces such as the Communist party in the Southwest regions of the country (from the Sumapaz area to South Tolima and West Huila).

The master cleavages of the agrarian problem and the political articulation in the new populated regions find some kind of correspondence in the political and economic problems of this kind of region. However, this correspondence is not homogeneous: in the Sumapaz and Tequendama regions of the Cundinamarca department, the local leaders of the Agrarist groups, traditionally linked to the Communist party, achieved some kind of compromise with the local powers, normally ascribed to the Liberal Party, in order to avoid the armed confrontation in their regions (Merchán 1975; Londoño, 2011; Vásquez, 2008). In contrast, in South Tolima, the confrontation became more violent: there the re-configured violent confrontation between Liberal (The "limpios", the clean ones) and Communist (The "comuneros", the common ones) guerrillas in the fifties represent the internal contradictions of the peasant population. The first ones appear to be linked to the "haciendas" (large estates) of Liberal landowners as peasant workers ("peones", "agregados" or "aparceros") and to their political networks, while the second ones are generally landless peasant and colonizers, influenced by the Communist Party (M. Medina, 1986; J. J. González, 1992 and 2001; Pizarro, 1991)

This defeated second group has been forced to look for refuge in East Huila region, where its social and political organization, supported by small armed self-defense groups, frightened the local powers of the Huila department, linked to the national level of the Conservative Party. One of its main leaders, the Senator Álvaro Gómez-Hurtado accused these organizations for being "Independent Republics", with local authorities outside of the national government's control. His campaign in the Senate, supported by local powers of Tolima and Huila department, convinced the National government of Guillermo León Valencia to launch a

military attack of the Colombian National Army on the Marquetalia and El Pato regions. As result of this attack, the Self defense groups of these regions decided to create the FARC, the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, inspired by some members of the Moscow line of the Communist Party (González J.J, 1992; Pizarro 1991).

On the other hand, the origins of EPL and ELN are a little more complex but also linked in some way to political and social problems on the agrarian frontier. However, the historical roots of these groups have mainly to do with the radicalization of urban youth in a context of fast demographic, social and cultural changes in the context of the bipartisan regime of the National Front, viewed as exclusionary and opposed to the necessary social reforms, especially the ones related to the countryside. The internal contradictions of the political regime, due to its mixed composition of traditional and reformist leaders; the goal of political pacification of the electoral competition between Liberals and Conservatives and their internal factions became contradictory with the attempts of economic developmental and social reformism of the progressive leaders of both parties (Gutiérrez, 2006.) Moreover, the local and regional leaders of some regions, such as the Caribbean Coast, strongly opposed the Agrarian reform and the social mobilization of the peasantry (organized by the ANUC, National Association of Peasant Users Peasant Users (of the countryside), supported by the National government). This organization was mainly located in zones of agrarian frontier soon to be closed as result of the expansion of traditional haciendas: such are the cases of Sucre and Córdoba departments in the western Caribbean Coast (Zamosc, 1988).

The failure of these reformist attempts, the perception of the National Front as a exclusionary regime and the inspiration of the world political context moved some urban groups to look for an involvement in the social tensions of some of these regions in alliance with some remnant groups of Liberal guerrillas, whose dissident leaders were not included in the national organizations of the party (Villarraga and Plazas, 1996; A. Vargas, 1992) So, the national cleavages related to the agrarian problem and political exclusion by the traditional parties have been reflected in the local and regional problems: all these groups have originated in peripheral areas of the agrarian frontier, very isolated from the center of the country, with a relationship with some guerrillas of the fifties, who were not be able to be fully included in the bipartisan political regime of National front. These political difficulties also explain the precarious presence of State institutions, because they are usually mediated by regional or local leaders of the traditional parties.

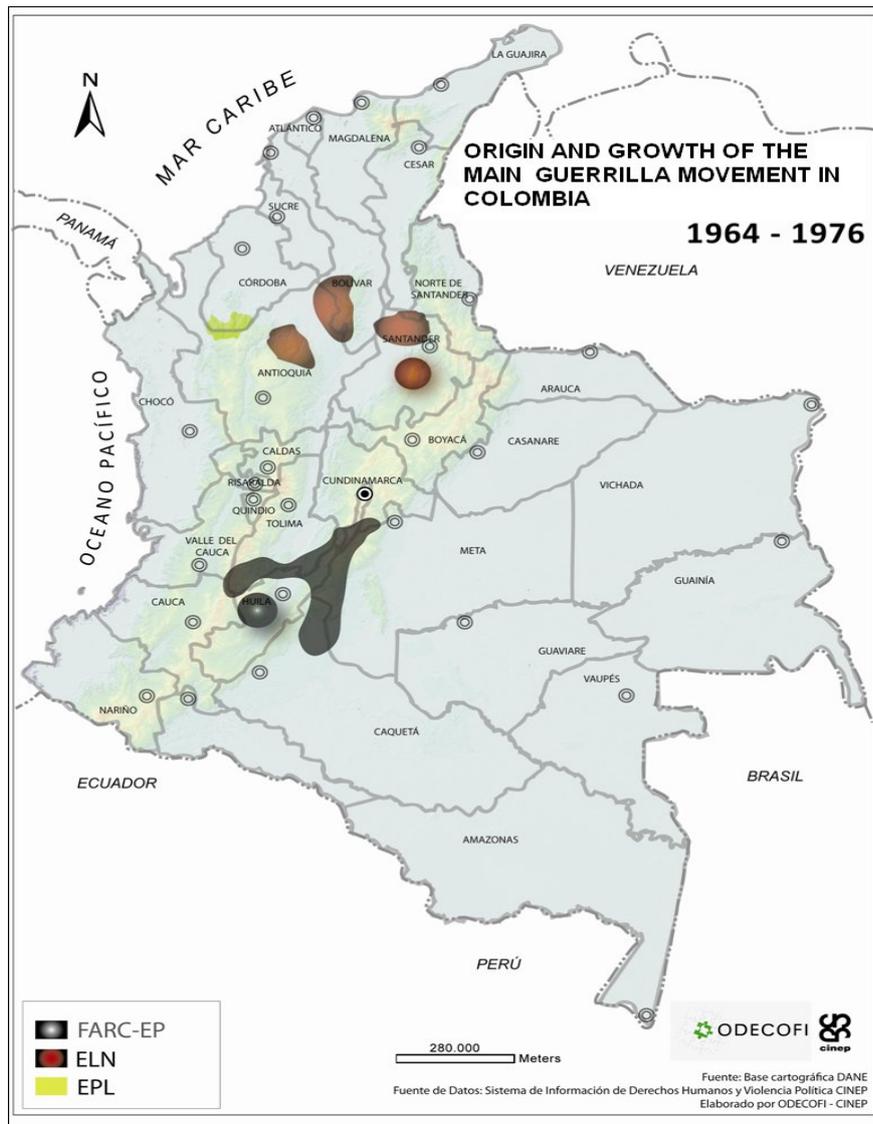
However, we have also to consider further consequences of the bipartisan monopoly of Politics and the failure of the reformist attempts of the National



Front regime: the incapacity of the traditional parties to face social problems, linked to the demographic and cultural transformations of Colombian society in the sixties, produced a big movement of social contestation and mobilization (Archila, 2003). The proliferation of strikes, civic lockouts and other forms of contestation reached its peak with the famous September "Civic strike" (The "Paro cívico") or Community protest in 1977: the conjunction of the different Worker Unions, whatever their ideological and political orientation, with different social organizations of the urban world, has been seen as the most important challenge to the López Michelsen government (M. Medina, 1984). As a matter of fact, this general community protest ("Paro Cívico") and the proliferation of this kind of popular contestation between 1971 and 1981 have been interpreted by some analysts (Rojas and Moncayo, 1978; C. Medina 2009), some guerrilla leaders (Arenas, 1990) and the Colombian army itself as the symptom of a "prerevolutionary situation".

This kind of interpretation produced serious political and political consequences: on one hand, the severe repression of President Turbay's Security Statute moved some leftist urban leaders to join the guerrillas; on the other, the Sixth Conference of FARC in 1978 decided to expand itself into new territories and start preparing the transition from self defense groups toward a small revolutionary army: from 1973, this group created military fronts in Middle Magdalena Valley river; in 1974, they decided to create fronts in Antioquia, Cauca and Cauca valley, following the political and social work of the Communist Party (C. Medina, 2009). In these years, the FARC expanded their presence to more remote areas, with scarce presence of State institutions (Aguilera 2010) such as Caquetá, Middle Magdalena valley, and the Banana region of Urabá, taking advantage of previous political work of the Communist Party in the colonization of peripheral areas of the agrarian frontier.

Figure 1 : Origin and growth of the main guerrilla movement in Colombia 1964-1976.



In sum, in this first moment, the national level of Politics, characterized by internal tensions between different factions of traditional political parties, was reproduced on the regional and local levels by the resistance of departmental and municipal authorities to the presence of social and political organizations, backed by small self defense groups, who defied their political hegemony in the peripheral areas of their territories (Gutiérrez, 2004) However, these interactions between national and subnational levels of power were profoundly modified by the expansion of the guerrillas toward more integrated areas of the country on the subnational level and the peace proposal of President Betancur on the national one.

b) The regional expansion of guerrillas regarding national Politics: the failure of the Betancur peace process and the decimation of the Patriotic Union

The second moment of armed conflict starts with two important changes in the national political life, which produced important transformations on the subnational level. On August seventh 1982, President Betancur recognized the structural causes of the Violence and offered a peace proposal in his inaugural speech; and, later, on September 17th, he created a Peace Commission, composed of important civilian members of the so called "civil society," but without political significance. On the other hand, the VII Conference of the FARC, held between May fourth and fourteenth of the same year, decided to create a revolutionary army in order to cover all the Colombian territory through 48 military fronts, following the decision to take an offensive attitude instead of traditional self defense (Arenas, 1985). This contradiction was reflected in the creation and development of the Patriotic Union, a political party which expressed the desire for political inclusion of some members of FARC, along with civilian groups, some of them members of the Communist Party, and others belonging to independent groups with a leftist ideology.

The ambiguous combination of political and military strategies produced a complex scenario, with many internal and external tensions: the never solved contradiction between militaristic and political tendencies in the FARC and the Communist Party was covered by the ambiguous umbrella of the "combination of all forms of fighting". In the military field, the FARC doubled the number of their fronts in new regions, which were experiencing rapid economic transformations through the expansion of the traditional cattle ranching industry (Meta, Caquetá, Middle Magdalena valley and Córdoba), commercial agriculture (the Banana region in Urabá, palm industry in South Cesar, the Chocó Pacific coast and Middle Magdalena valley), coal (Cesar and Guajira), oil (Middle Magdalena valley, Arauca, Sarare and Catatumbo), gold (South Bolivar and Antioqueño Lower Cauca region).

So, this expansion of FARC was favored by a new context of relationship between the center of the country and the regions, which were becoming more integrated into the national scenario. It also favored the transition of the peasant guerrilla of EPL to a different involvement in a more urbanized and modern world, linked to the trade unionism of Banana workers (Aramburo 2011, Villarraga and Plazas, 1994). Other regions, such as the Oriente Antioqueño (the west of Antioquia department), became affected by the expansion of industry in the city of Medellin, the building of big hydroelectric projects and the Medellín- Bogotá highway: this development inserted some parts of the region into the national and central economy but marginalized others (C. García 2011). The resultant social tensions overwhelmed the scarce regulating capacity of the State institutions (J. Bejarano and others, 1997) and produced some contesting social movements: the private and governmental repression of this mobilization process paved the way for the presence of guerrillas and their counterpart, the rightist self defense or paramilitary groups. The political importance of the building of some national highways and hydroelectric projects (Otero, 2010) was also reflected in military issues, especially in the case of Middle Magdalena valley and in the Caribbean coast (C. Medina, 1990).

Obviously, the combination of military and political strategies reinforced the natural suspicions and reluctances of the local and regional political powers, threatened by the electoral progress of the Patriotic Union and victimized by the guerrillas' extortions and kidnappings. These local and regional reactions were, obviously, stronger in the regions where the guerrillas and the UP political leaders had become a threat to the local and regional de facto powers, such as the Banana cultivation axis in Antioqueño Urabá, Middle Magdalena valley, the Ariari region in Meta, the Middle and Lower Putumayo regions, and the Caquetá, Guaviare and Arauca departments,

The relative autonomy of these regional powers, backed by some local and regional members of the national police and army, and the reluctance of the traditional politicians to accept the peace proposal, along with the ambiguities of the FARC and the Communist Party, explains partially the tragic failure of this political experiment and the genocide committed against the Patriotic Union. This combination of legal and illegal practices produced a favorable scenario for the creation of paramilitary groups, backed sometimes by local and regional members of the national army and police. This framework explains the origin and development of the paramilitary groups, especially in the Middle Magdalena valley, the Urabá region of Antioquia, and the Meta and Córdoba departments.

In the national framework, the opposition to the Betancur peace proposal was reinforced by the natural

resistance of traditional politicians to social reforms and the reluctance of some congressmen and military chiefs, some Catholic Church bishops and clergy and some leaders of economic groups to accept the peace process. In sum, the growing isolation of President Betancur from public opinion and the main leaders of political parties produced the failure of the process (Ramírez and Restrepo, 1989), dramatically expressed in the ill-conceived and disastrous adventure of the seizure of the Palace of Justice by the M-19 movement. On the part of the guerrillas, the combination of the political negotiation with the quest for military advances by the FARC and M 19 made necessary their use of Politics in order to continue the war by other means, as Ramirez and Restrepo point out.

The failure of the Betancur peace process and the almost systematic elimination of Patriotic Union produced, as a political consequence, the increasing autonomy of the more militaristic sections of FARC, which gradually transformed themselves from a subordinate group to the Communist party to become an independent political actor.

This increasing militarization transformed the ambiguous truce between the FARC and the Barco government (1986-1990), inherited from Betancur, into almost a fiction, because this guerrilla was returning then to their initial "nomadism", in order to recover their internal discipline and organization for a new stage of the war (González, Bolívar and Vásquez, 2003). They decided to expand toward new regions and go further into their traditional zones of settlement in peripheral areas of the agrarian frontier. These expansive tendencies became stronger after the Army attack against the guerrilla headquarters in Casa Verde (La Uribe) in 1991, when the National Constitutional Assembly was starting: then, the FARC decided to launch the most important counter offensive of their history. So, between 1991 and 1992, this guerrilla consolidated its presence in Urabá, the Cimitarra river valley in Santander, South Bolivar, Lower Cauca river valley and in Northeast Antioquia. Moreover, from their traditional strongholds of Caguán and Ariari, they extended their attacks against the more integrated areas of Meta, Caquetá and Huila departments; and from their traditional rear guard in Sumapaz (Cundinamarca) toward more central areas of this department in order to produce the perception of besiege against Bogotá (Vásquez, 2005).

This military expansion and political autonomy of the FARC were reaffirmed by their VIII (eighth) Conference, in April 1993, when they decide to create a new political movement, the clandestine "Bolivarian Movement", because they considered the transformations of the new Constitution of 1991 were not enough to face the national problems. They decided also to go beyond traditional guerrilla warfare to a war of

positions, which lead to this group producing several important defeats of the national army between 1993 and 1998 (Las Delicias, Patascoy and Puerres in Nariño, Yarí between Caquetá and Meta departments)

On the other hand, the disaster of the M 19 in the seizure of the Palace of Justice and the paramilitary pressure against the social bases of the EPL in Córdoba and Urabá, along with the military attacks of the Army, forced these two groups to a political negotiation and demobilization (The demobilization of EPL was partially because the dissident group of Francisco Caraballo, located in the Antioqueño Urabá and Northeast Córdoba, decided to continue fighting). Moreover, some smaller groups like the PRT (Workers Revolutionary Party), the Quintin Lame indigenous guerrilla and the CRS (Socialist Revolutionary Current) also decided to demobilize their groups. Some of these groups had some important presence in the Constitutional Assembly of 1991.

These evolutions of the guerrilla groups initially contrasted with the relative stagnation and internal divisions of the paramilitary groups after Rodriguez Gacha's death around the eventual alliance with the Narco traffickers. However, the paramilitary groups of Córdoba and Urabá took advantage of the demobilization of the EPL in order to look to create a coordination of activities of the different groups through the Colombian united self defense (AUC), under Carlos Castaño's leadership. Between 1994 and 1998, this confederation of groups achieved the control of the Caribbean Coast savannas, the north of Chocó, the Middle Magdalena valley, the south of Bolivar and Cesar departments and the main areas of the two Santanderes. In 1998, they had consolidated military blocks in the Caribbean Coast, the Southwest of the country (from Córdoba and Antioquia to Chocó, Caldas and Risaralda), the Eastern plains block ("Bloque Llanero", with fronts in Ariari, Guaviare and the plains foothills) and Metro block with its fronts in Southeast, Eastern and Northeast of Antioquia.

These almost simultaneous expansions of the FARC and AUC groups produced the greatest increase in homicides, massacres and combats by the finals of 90s and the first years of the XXI (twenty-first) century: they affected not only the peripheral and isolated areas of the countryside but also the day to day ordinary life of the population in the more integrated zones of the country, especially the one located near the highways between the main cities and their surroundings.

c) The simultaneous expansion of guerrillas and paramilitary groups: from the negotiation in El Caguán to the Democratic Security policy

The military advances of paramilitary groups in the North of the country, as well as the ones of the FARC in the Southwest, related to increasing political

weakness of President Samper (1994-1998), constituted the framework of the new peace proposal of President Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002, accompanied by his efforts of reorganization of the national army. The bitter political controversies around the abuses of the FARC in the demilitarized zone in El Caguán, granted to the FARC in order to facilitate the dialogues, along with a clear agenda of negotiation from the government and the attacks and kidnappings of the guerrilla in the zones next to El Caguán, were gradually weakening the favorable opinion to the political negotiation.

These attacks, kidnappings and extortions of the FARC were mainly located in Tolima, Cauca and Huila; moreover, this group tried, between 1998 and 1999, to take over some traditional areas of the ELN, due to its weakening military situation: such are the cases of South Bolívar, Catatumbo and Arauca. During the negotiations, the FARC tried to build a new strategic corridor from the demilitarized zone toward the Pacific sea, through South Tolima, North Huila, North Cauca and the South of Valle del Cauca departments. These efforts produced some occasional crises in the negotiation process: these crises were deepened by the FARC's use of weapons condemned by International Humanitarian Law, and the kidnapping and killing of some American indigenists, perpetrated by FARC, increased the international discrediting of this guerrilla and produced a new crisis in the negotiations with the Pastrana government.

On the other hand, this expansion of FARC in the Southwest produced the AUC retaliation in some regions such as Putumayo, Bolívar, Sucre and Antioquia, when the FARC took one of the central strongholds of the AUC in the mountainous junction of Paramillo. As a retaliation against the FARC, Castaño's troops launched a series of massacres and selective assassinations in these regions. The AUC continued expanding their military and political control: from the South of the Middle Magdalena region (Puerto Boyacá) the AUC expanded their presence toward the South and Center of the Cesar department; and from Córdoba and Antioquia, they started an offensive, by January 2000, against the central command of the ELN in the San Lucas Range. The AUC also attacked the ELN positions in Santander North and Arauca, looking for the creation of strategic corridors in order to communicate their fronts of South Bolívar and Middle Magdalena with the ones of Arauca and Catatumbo.

This military strengthening moved these paramilitary groups to go further and look for their political legitimation as a counter insurgency force by organizing social bases and local powers against the Pastrana government's attempts of conceding an eventual demilitarized zone for negotiating with the ELN in South Bolívar (Gutiérrez, 2004). So, this social mobilization of regional and local powers, backed by the

threats of the paramilitary groups and some support of local members of the Army, along with public rejection of the ELN attacks against the hydroelectric infrastructure, prevented Pastrana's efforts to start any kind of negotiation with the ELN.

On the national level, since 1998 the Pastrana government also took advantage of the negotiation process by achieving an important increase in the national army and police capacity to neutralize the guerrilla actions, due to the aid of airplanes and helicopters and the improvement of intelligence operations, supported by the Plan Colombia resources. So, the combats in La Llorona canyon (Dabeiba) and the counterattack in Mitú (Vaupés), as well as the ones of Arauca and Guaviare, showed the inversion of the tactical advantages of the guerrilla. However, this improvement was contradictory with the internal discussion between the military commanders, the Defense minister and the presidential commissioner for Peace regarding the complicity of some regional commanders of the army with paramilitary groups in the Urabá and Middle Magdalena regions.

The combination of these ambiguous and complex processes produced a general consensus on the impossibility of negotiating in the middle of the conflict: the increase of the FARC kidnappings and attacks was interpreted as a proof of the guerrilla's lack of desire for peace, while the strengthening of the national army and the paramilitary advances were seen, by the guerrilla, as a signal of the lack of a national government will for peace (González, Bolívar and Vásquez, 2003). Moreover, the increasing skepticism of public opinion was deepened by the general character of the agenda of negotiation and its totally open timeline. And the September eleven terrorist attacks in the United States favored the national reluctance to negotiate with terrorist groups and increased the number of partisans of the military solution. The result of this "foretold failure" (Kline 2007) was the rupture of the negotiations with the FARC, on February 20th of 2002, and the subsequent military recovery of the demilitarized zone; and, in May, the rupture with the ELN.

However, there was another important consequence of the new national context: it paved the way for the political success of the Uribe Vélez electoral campaign, based on the rejection of internal conflict. His Democratic Security policy reduced the Colombian violence to the attack of Narco terrorists against a totally legitimated and democratic State: in this sense, he insisted on the necessity of recovering the military control of the territory.

During his two periods of government (2002-2010), this initial support to Uribe Vélez was increased by the dismantlement of the guerrillas in Cundinamarca especially in the surroundings of Bogotá, the recovering of the control of the main highways and the "Patriotic



Plan”, the offensive of the national army in the Meta, Guaviare and Caquetá departments. This military progress was accompanied by the negotiation with some of the main warlords of the paramilitary groups. Initially, the obvious result of these two policies was the dramatic decrease in murders, massacres and kidnappings, along with the increase in military combats. And, consequently, the displacement of the armed conflict toward the peripheral areas of the agrarian frontier, the border with Ecuador and the Pacific Coast of Nariño, Cauca and Valle del Cauca departments.

On the side of the guerrillas, the FARC has been forced to abandon the big military operations and to return to their traditional guerrilla warfare: according to some analysts, such as Román Ortiz, this change shows the increasing difficulty of an agrarian guerrilla to be present in a more urbanized world (Ortiz 2006). However, despite some important strategic defeats of the guerrilla including the death of some of its main leaders, the national army was not able to inflict the substantial defeat of insurgency, which maintains some capacity to sporadically attack some rural localities and local military positions and return to their traditional zones of refuge in the peripheral areas.

Nevertheless, the conflict dynamics have been changing: in these peripheral and isolated areas, the guerrillas became confined in some kind of “pockets” or “board linings” next to peasant colonizers in the far places of the agrarian frontier. It means that the former disputed areas, the so called strategic corridors, are now controlled by the public forces; these are the cases of the Caribbean Coast (the regions of Urabá, Montes de María and the Nevada and Perijá ranges). These isolated places of resistance are mainly located in some small traditional strongholds in Catatumbo, South Bolivar, the Cimitarra valley, the Middle Magdalena valley, Lower and Middle Atrato river and Arauca. Even in the Southwest of the country, the FARC’s traditional strategic corridor, in the Amazon piedmont of West branch of the Colombian Andes, became reduced to their rear guard: the El Caguán-Ariari-Duda-Guayabero axis in the Meta, Caquetá and Guaviare departments.

During the 80s and 90s, this historical rear guard made this group able to expand itself to East Huila, South Caquetá, Lower and Middle Putumayo. And, in the last years, this refuge area became the base for their sporadic attacks on the neighboring areas and for starting the creation of a new rear guard in West Amazon toward the Brazilian border through the rivers in the Vaupés, Guainía, Vichada and Amazonas departments and the wildest part of Putumayo. This rear guard was also the base for the expansion toward the Pacific coast and the Western part of Nariño, the Patia river valley and the Colombian mountainous massif, linked to the configuration of a new Coca economic

circuit. As a result of these transformations, the Pacific Coast of the Nariño and Cauca departments became a pole of attraction for the peasant population of Lower and Middle Putumayo, the Patía river valley and western piedmont of Nariño, South Cauca and North Cauca Valley (R. Vargas, 2003).

The recent insertion of this region in the Coca business is due to the comparative advantages of its geography: its closeness to the Pacific ocean route for international trade, as an alternative route to the Caribbean one, and to the Coca cultivations in the western piedmont of the West branch of the Andean Ranges, reduces the costs of production and trade in order to centralize the Coca productive chain (Vásquez, Vargas and Restrepo, 2011).

As far as the evolution of armed conflict and the involvement of the guerrillas in the coca business are concerned, the region became the most dynamic center of the conflict for the control of the Coca trade. The insertion of this region into the Narco economic circuit produced complex and contradictory relationships between the armed actors; disputes and strange alliances between former enemies or eventual allies such as FARC, ELN, armed groups of Narco traffickers (such as the so called Los Rastrojos, belonging to the North Valley cartel) and some old and new paramilitary groups. And it also explains the enormous economic resources which support the military strengthening of the illegal armed actors such as the FARC, the paramilitary groups and the so called “emergent” bands in the region (Vásquez, Vargas and Restrepo, 2011).

Moreover, the FARC also maintained their traditional rear guard in the “Las Hermosas” (“The beautiful ones”) mountainous canyon and the Ata river valley, located between South Tolima, North Huila and the East of Cauca and Cauca Valley. The presence of Alfonso Cano, the main leader of FARC, has made this area in one of the most strategic objectives of the national army. And it also explains the recent FARC offensive actions in North Cauca and South Valle del Cauca: during Uribe’s two periods of government and the first year of Santos presidency, the towns of Caloto, Caldono, Toribio and Jambaló became the main objective of the FARC’s attacks.

Besides the retirement of FARC to these historical strongholds and border frontiers, a new disputed area has been surging during the recent years in the Antioqueño Lower Cauca valley (Caucasia) and in South Córdoba regions: the confrontation for the control of Coca routes between some guerrillas, reorganized paramilitary groups and emergent criminal bands (the so called Bacrim), some of them without counterinsurgent mentality, have reinforced the reduction of the conflict to the economic greed of the combatants.

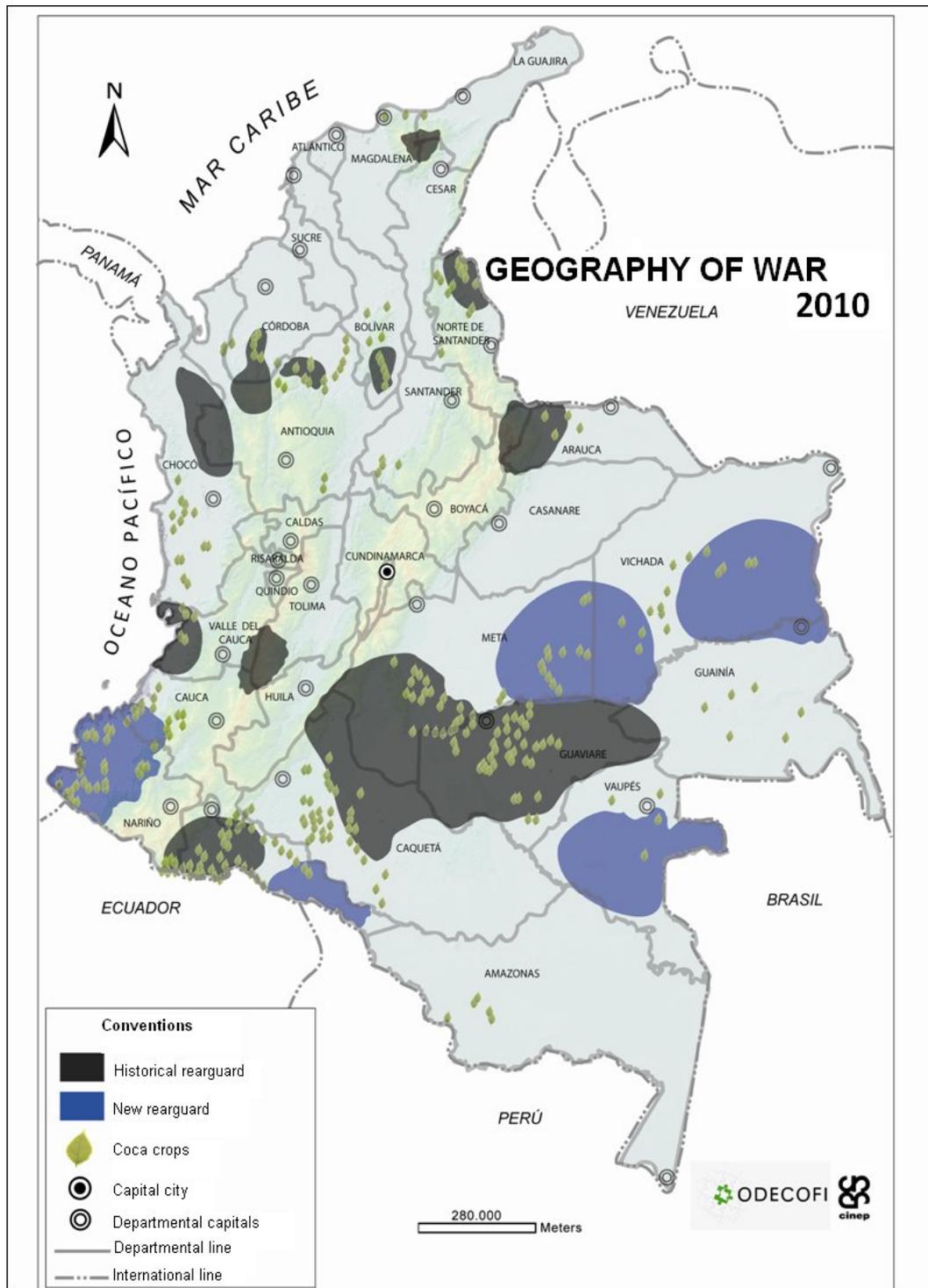


Figure 2 : Geography of Colombia’s war 2010.

IV. CONCLUSIONS: THE NEW CONTEXT OF THE OLD AGRARIAN PROBLEM

The historical process we have described in these pages tend to show the retirement of guerrillas toward the isolated areas of the frontiers and their

involvement in the Coca economic cycle as the last stage of a long history: the result of the continuous expulsion of the overflowing peasant population from the surroundings of the main cities to the peripheral areas of the agrarian frontier, along with the difficulties of the political regime to articulate the independent social

organizations of those newly populated regions. In these particular areas, a different kind of radical guerrilla was born in the sixties. In a second moment, these groups decided, following the example of the Jacobins, to expand themselves to more integrated and richer areas, taking advantage of the social tensions produced by the uneven development of these regions. Their decision of geographical expansion obeys to a larger strategy, designed in order to take the power at national level. It was, as many analysts say, the revenge of the periphery against the center: this geographical expansion is part of a large strategy of these groups in order to take the power at national level.

On the other hand, the guerrilla groups, especially the FARC, played an important role in the social organization of some particular areas in the Southwest of the country: in these isolated areas, the Coca and poppy cultivations became the only product able to link the peasant population to the national and world economy. So, the FARC became gradually inserted in the business: initially, by collecting taxes for granting protection over the cultivated areas, by regulating the prices of the Narco traders and defending the Peasant interests and supporting their social mobilization regarding the officials of national governments (M. Ramirez. 2001). In a second moment, the group extended their control over the territory and its population, in order to prevent the contact of the young guerrilla combatants with the Narco lifestyle and maintain their internal discipline. And, in a third stage, the FARC have imposed coca cultivation on the Afrocolombian population in the Pacific Coast of Nariño and Cauca departments, taking advantage of the geographical situation of these regions.

Of course, the FARC also realized very soon the economic importance of the Coca business as a source of financing and maintaining their military effort, but their insertion in this economic cycle cannot be reduced only to their economic interest. It has to be related to a political decision of taking the war as the only means to solve the two master cleavages of the conflict in the national level: the unsolved agrarian problem and the consequent political exclusion. However, in order to understand the way these master cleavages take shape on the subnational level, it is necessary to take into account the local and regional particularities.

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