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Samir Elhawary



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VIOLENT PATHS TO PEACE?

Rethinking the Conflict-Development
Nexus in Colombia

¿CAMINOS VIOLENTOS HACIA LA PAZ?

Reconsiderando el nexo
entre conflicto y desarrollo en Colombia

Samir Elhawary*

Abstract

International aid in conflict-affected countries is based on the liberal assumption that an inverse relationship exists between violent conflict and development. This paper contests this assumption through a study of the Colombian context that demonstrates violent conflict and development can in fact be interconnected as part of the transition to capitalist modes of production and in the process of state formation. It further argues that a failure by aid agencies to comprehend the complex interaction between conflict and development can result in distorted outcomes in their programming that are detrimental to the stated objectives of achieving peace, development, and justice.

Key words: conflict, peace-building, development, Colombia.

Resumen

La ayuda internacional para países en conflicto está basada en el supuesto liberal de que existe una relación inversa entre conflicto violento y desarrollo. Este artículo refuta este supuesto por medio de un estudio del contexto colombiano que demuestra que, de hecho, el conflicto violento y el desarrollo pueden estar interconectados como parte de la transición a formas de producción capitalistas y el proceso de formación del Estado. También argumenta que la falta de comprensión de la compleja relación entre conflicto y desarrollo por parte de las agencias de ayuda puede generar consecuencias distorsionadas en su programación, que son perjudiciales para el objetivo de lograr la paz, el desarrollo y la justicia.

Palabras clave: conflicto, consolidación de la paz, desarrollo, Colombia.

Introduction

Good things are often thought to go together. This is particularly evident in current international aid policy in conflict affected countries, where peace, development and good governance are conceptualised as mutually reinforcing and desirable traits that are dialectically opposed to violent conflict, underdevel-

opment and authoritarian forms of governance. These are often considered the product of irrationality, barbarism, criminality and backwardness and therefore, in order to confront this lack of modernity and ensure rapid progression from conflict towards development, interventions are needed that promote economic growth through liberalisation and improved forms of governance¹.

* Samir Elhawary es MSc en Violencia, Conflicto y Desarrollo de la School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) de la University of London. Ha sido investigador del Programa para Latinoamérica y el grupo 'Business & Conflict' de International Alert (UK), y actualmente se desempeña como investigador del Overseas Development Institute, UK. Correo electrónico: s.elhawary@odi.org.uk

1 For an overview of this trend in international aid policy in conflict-affected countries see Duffield (2003).

This discourse among aid agencies on the nature of violent conflict in developing countries is premised on a linear chain of cause and effect, where the lack of economic development causes conflict and therefore its resolution requires filling this void through the promotion of more development (see World Bank 2003a). However, violent conflicts are complex phenomena that require complex thought. In protracted conflict-related emergencies, such as in Colombia, where violence is characterised by its multiplicity and interdependence over both time and space, analytical boundaries that create neat categorisations between the 'good' and 'bad' such as legal/illegal, strong/failed state, conflict/development or democracy/authoritarianism, become increasingly difficult to make. In order to understand this fluidity and the implications for aid interventions that seek to promote development and build peace it is useful to view these processes, as Duffield suggests, as a 'living system or organism' characterised by interconnection, mutation and self-transformation (2003: 10). This will enable us to transgress some of the analytical boundaries that emerge from conventional models of thought, particularly the false dichotomy between violent conflict and development.

In fact, this article argues that in Colombia, violent conflict and development do not lie at extreme opposite poles along a linear continuum but can often be interconnected by the contradictions that emerge from the transition to capitalist modes of production and the process of state formation. It will further argue that this understanding of the conflict-devel-

opment nexus has important implications for current aid interventions and that without a radical review of the current discourse these interventions are unlikely to achieve their peace-building objectives and possibly even further perpetuate the civilian insecurity they attempt to alleviate.

1. The conflict-development nexus: violent paths to peace?

The transformation from pre-capitalist forms of societal organisation towards capitalist development and prosperity, where goods and services are produced for market exchange in order to make a profit as opposed to consumption by their producers, is often understood as a linear process that is accelerated when accompanied by a combination of technical policies that consist of deregulating and liberalising markets and improving good governance. Furthermore, based on Kantian thought, advanced capitalist development is seen to enhance the propensity of peaceful relationships, as the economic rationality of commercial exchange overcomes the tendency to resort to force in the production, distribution and consumption of resources. Violent conflict is thus understood as 'development in reverse' along the path towards a state of social progress that embraces liberal values in the political, economic and social fields (World Bank 2003a).

Therefore, in countries where violent conflict interrupts the transition to development, aid agencies seek interventions that reverse this anomaly in order to reassert the course towards development and a liberal peace. This is evident in the

current reconstruction policies in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq and is the logic behind the World Bank's interpretation of conflict as development in reverse, where 'war retards development, but conversely, development retards war' (World Bank 2003a: 1). This inverse relationship is based on the premise that during conflicts, important resources that would have been used for production are used for destructive purposes, which in turn further destroy the productivity of previous resources. Therefore, interventions need to tackle the failure of development and lack of modernity, primarily through the promotion of economic growth (World Bank 2003a: 119).

Furthermore, this liberal interpretation of war criminalises contemporary conflict, with profit seeking by opportunistic leaders the principal motive for engaging in and perpetuating conflict (see for example Collier 2000). Warlords accumulating considerable wealth from natural resource extraction or narcotics in countries such as Liberia, Colombia and Afghanistan are often cited as examples of this trend. This analysis also subscribes to the idea that conflict is an aberration and that once it is circumscribed and policed the normal development path can be resumed (Duffield 2003: 130–133).

This rationale forms the basis of most development aid in Colombia; with most donors concurring that those engaged in violence are principally motivated by profits, hence their involvement in the drugs trade, and the greatest obstacle to development is the armed conflict, as "without sustained peace, there will be no economic and social development. In turn, without economic and social deve-

lopment and democracy, peace will be difficult to consolidate" (Solimano 2000: 8). Therefore the principal challenge for Colombia and its main priority is to bring justice to those perpetuating violent crimes and to achieve higher and better growth, albeit with some reforms to include the most vulnerable and reduce inequity as this will prevent conflict and align Colombia along the right path towards development (World Bank 2003b).

However, such a normative process of evolution along a linear continuum from conflict towards development conceals the often complex interrelation between processes of conflict and development. Violence has many causes, functions, meanings and outcomes and rather than simply represent states of backwardness, criminality or irrationality that stem from underdevelopment, it can often lie at the centre of transitional processes of development. As Duffield argues, complex political emergencies should not be understood as societal breakdown but rather as *emerging political complexes* that are part of transformational processes that often create new frameworks of social representation and regulation (2003: 14).

In fact historically, state formation and the transition to capitalist modes of production in Europe were not characterised by peaceful commercial relations but "drawn by conquest, enslavement, robbery and murder" (Jung 2003: 185) in a process that Karl Marx called primitive accumulation. This process refers to the initial development of capitalism that entailed the emergence of productive capital and the formation of a wor-

king class. These capitalist relations and classes were not solely formed by agreements based on mutual interests. These forms of economic and social organisation were often the result of disruptive processes in which economic surpluses were appropriated by the use of force. As Tilly states in his study of state formation in Europe, “a portrait of war makers and state makers as coercive and self-seeking entrepreneurs bears a far greater resemblance to the facts than do its chief alternatives: the idea of a social contract, the idea of an open market in which operators of armies and states offer services to willing consumers” (1985: 169). This coercive means of accumulation can potentially drive the transition to capitalism by generating resources that promote industrialisation and reinvestment and by undermining alternative means of survival that do not require engaging in wage labour. This creates a class of wage labourers that become dependent on a market for basic consumption goods that capitalists can produce (Cramer 2006: 208).

As Harvey has highlighted, the logic behind the process of primitive accumulation is also a trait in contemporary transitions to capitalist development in what he terms ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (2003:144). This may entail the privatisation and commodification of land, the conversion of customary forms of property rights into exclusive property rights, the emergence of wage labour at the expense of alternative forms of production and consumption and the monetization of exchange and taxation among many others (Harvey 2003: 145). These processes are often

based on predation, violence and fraud; however, they do not necessarily create uniform or progressive outcomes such as those that emerged in Europe. According to Schlichte, in his study of the effects of contemporary wars on state formation, current global political economy means that strategies used for surplus appropriation and capitalist accumulation by warlords and mafia entrepreneurs in wars such as in the Balkans, Somalia and Lebanon create “a patchwork of appropriated competencies and vested interests ... that can hardly be called a coherent form of authority” (2003: 40). The emergence of political and economic structures similar to those in advanced capitalist countries will depend on the ability of pre-existing institutions or those that are developed through conflict and violence to create new mechanisms of authority and regulation that are able to resolve antagonistic disputes between classes or manage to control the monopoly of force (Cramer 2006: 215–216). It is the complex interplay between local, regional, national and international forces that determine the outcomes of primitive accumulation in these transitional contexts of development.

Therefore, the concept of primitive accumulation is useful in understanding some of the violent conflict in Colombia, particularly those conflicts related to land ownership, access and use, the creation of wage labour and the appropriation of valuable assets. The following section thus outlines how violence has often played a substantive role in the formation of some capitalist forms of production and in the state building process.

2. Societal transition and violent conflict in Colombia

Upon independence, Colombia inherited two contradictory modes of production: the *hacienda* system, consisting of large concentrations of land (*latifundios*) and requiring an ample supply of inexpensive labour; and the traditional peasant subsistence economy of smallholdings (*minifundios*). The former started to predominate over the latter, often through the use of violence, as the large landowning elite sought to further concentrate land, thereby ensuring that a sufficient supply of landless peasants could be assured as labourers (Richani 2002: 12–15). This transition in rural areas led to societal reorganisation where an increasing amount of displaced peasants were converted into wage-labourers or sharecroppers on the *latifundios*, and to a process of land colonisation whereby peasants (*colonos*) avoided the *latifundios* by migrating from the central highlands to the peripheries, where they cut down vegetation on public lands to prepare new land for cultivation and thereby expanding the agricultural frontier (LeGrand 1992). The landowning elite sought to benefit from this process of land colonisation by either acquiring these lands or forcing the *colonos* to abandon them. This effectively left many of these now landless peasants with no choice but to become wage-labourers or sharecroppers on the *latifundios* or meet the increasing demand

for labour in the rapidly growing urban centres (Fajardo 2006: 106).

This process of asset accumulation and displacement provided the means in which capitalist modes of production started to take shape. The separation of the peasantry from their means of production served as a mechanism for capitalists to accumulate potential investible funds as well as to create a supply of wage labourers dependent on the market for their livelihoods. Additionally, these effects were furthered by confrontation between the Liberal and Conservative parties during *La Violencia* (1945–58), where armed confrontation created further displacement, led to more land concentration, a consequent expansion of the agricultural frontier and the creation of wage labour that supported the development of important sectors of the economy such as coffee, cotton, rice and banana (Sánchez 1991)². These sectors in turn spurred industrialisation that led to sustained levels of growth³. The emerging dynamics of change differed regionally, in some areas there were progressive changes such as with the growth of the coffee industry in Quindío or the development of agro-industry in Valle del Cauca, yet in other regions there was an increase in land used for un-productive activities such as cattle-ranching (Sánchez 1991).

The violence that accompanied and promoted these transitional processes of change was in part the result of the institutional failure to resolve

- 2 Also see Ortiz Sarmiento (1992) on how the opportunities created by the violence allowed middlemen to accumulate substantial capital used to develop the coffee sector in Quindío.
- 3 Between 1945 and 1953 industry grew at an annual rate of 9.2% and agricultural production increased by 77% and 113% in 1948 and 1949 respectively. These rates of growth occurred as most of the country's departments were experiencing outbreaks of violent conflict (see Medina 1992: 156).

and peacefully channel these conflicts (Richani 2002). The state in Colombia has traditionally been unable to centralise power and as a result many regions in the country have been dominated by powerful elites that control populations through patron-client networks in which they preserve their privileges and autonomy against those of the central state. This regionalism has been an important factor in impeding the ability of institutions to peacefully resolve these agrarian conflicts and define their development outcomes as regional elites have often opposed the reforms that stemmed from the centre (Gutiérrez, Viatela y Acevedo 2007: 17).

The López Pumarejo administration (1934-38) passed Law 200 of 1936 that sought to modernise the agrarian sector and respond to the growing protests from the peasantry by redistributing non-productive land in the *latifundios* and compensating *colonos* for any improvements they had made to the land they had occupied. However, the implementation of these reform measures was fiercely resisted by landowners and political elites (often the same), who used their power to adjudicate land disputes in their favour. Meanwhile, large areas of agricultural land were converted to pasture for less labour-intensive cattle-grazing in order to avoid land claims by tenants and sharecroppers (Richani 2002: 19-20).

Subsequent attempts at agrarian reform also failed to resolve the conflicts between landowners and the peasantry. Law 135 of 1961 is a case in point. It was designed to assist the *minifundios* and increase food productivity after *La Violencia*, for which

the Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform (INCORA) was created. However, INCORA failed to achieve its objectives, distributing less than 1% of the land that was subject to expropriation (Richani 2002: 28). At the same time, Law 1a of 1968 helped convert *latifundios*, through the expulsion of tenants and sharecroppers, into large commercial agribusinesses, aimed at meeting the food needs of the growing urban population and generating surplus for industrial expansion (Pearce 1990: 92).

The failure of reform led to a further increase in the expansion of the agricultural frontier by the *colonos* which opened vast amounts of land that were essentially outside of the state's presence. This emerging dynamic and the closure of the political system through the National Front after *La Violencia* created the spaces for alternative actors to emerge and thrive. These took the form of diverse guerrilla groups that arose as a means for the peasantry and other social groups (i.e.: urban intellectuals, students and the working class) to influence the terms of accumulation and the distribution of wealth and the system in which these terms are cast. The most notable guerrilla insurgencies are the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), which had a strong land reform agenda and were initially linked to the Communist party, and the National Liberation Army (ELN), composed of urban intellectuals and students which opposed the contractual and labour conditions that emerged through the exploitation of natural resources by foreign capital and were heavily influenced by the

Cuban revolution. The increasing war and state making capacity of the armed insurgency further constrained state formation in Colombia, aggravating what Richani calls the 'state's hegemonic crisis' (2002: 95).

The state's hegemonic crisis led to a substantial change in conflict dynamics in Colombia. Firstly, the state's inability to safeguard the interests of powerful elites such as landowners from those of the guerrillas, led these groups to create alternative institutions that were able to do so, such as self-defence groups or paramilitaries (Gutiérrez & Barón 2006). Secondly, the absence of the state in many areas of the country, particularly those of colonisation, was an important factor in the emergence and consolidation of the illegal drugs industry in Colombia⁴. From this industry a new class of drug traffickers emerged that also sought to protect their modes of accumulation from increasing guerrilla influence. They used their illegally obtained capital, in conjunction with other elites, to support the organisation and professionalisation of the self defence groups. However, they also engaged in direct confrontation with the state when it threatened their interests (Restrepo 2006).

Processes of primitive accumulation can also be identified within these changing conflict dynamics. Societal reorganisation in this period created parallel authorities and institutions (guerrillas, paramilitaries, drug-traffickers) that use violence to maintain and further their interests

with regards to the formation, accumulation, redistribution and investment of capital. These markets of violence do not simply create development in reverse but rather distort and redefine the development process, particularly in certain sectors such as the extractive industry and in export-led agriculture. As Richani has noted, the changing conflict dynamics represent irreconcilable differences between "a rentier-based capitalist mode of production championed by large cattle ranchers, land speculators (including narcotraffickers), commercial-coca plantations and mining and oil companies, and a subsistence peasant economy supported by the guerrillas ... a product of the interplay between capitalist development and the social and political forces that oppose it" (2002: 113).

During the latter half of the twentieth century, some of the guerrilla groups, most notably the FARC, often operated in the interests of certain segments of the peasantry (mainly coca-growers), protecting their interests against the large landowners, cattle ranchers and new emerging class of drug-traffickers (Richani 2002: 109-113). They consolidated their presence across large areas of the country due to weak state presence, particularly in areas of land colonisation. They were able to secure steady sources of income through extortion from the affluent, which also included kidnapping. Although they support the peasant economy, the means often differ from the end. According to Rangel, the guerrilla economy is a complex apparatus that on the one hand crea-

4 For an analysis of the combination of forces that led to the emergence of the illegal drugs industry see Restrepo (2006).

tes important social safety nets, such as pension schemes and ensuring minimum wage standards yet on the other hand overlaps with the formal economy promoting capitalist development through investments in financial institutions, large commercial businesses and the stock market (Rangel 2000).

The guerrillas have in fact become the *de facto* authority in some areas in terms of both the monopoly of violence and their ability to control populations and raise revenue through taxation. As noted earlier, in response to the state's inability to curtail the guerrillas' war and state making capacities, landowners, particularly cattle ranchers and drug-traffickers responded to this extortion by forming self-defence groups. These groups, initially legalised by the government and supported by the armed forces, aimed to counter guerrilla influence, protect economic interests and ensure security. This often involved attacking the local population and members of the political establishment who were deemed supportive of the guerrillas (Gutiérrez & Barón 2006).

These self-defence groups became progressively more influential across the country as drug-traffickers increasingly supported their organisation and professionalisation by using their financial clout to provide training and better armament. The growth of the paramilitaries deeply changed their nature and they went from protecting the interests of certain segments of society (cattle ranchers, military officers and drug-traffickers) to acquiring their own, particularly entre-

preneurial interests (both in legal and illegal markets) that conformed to the development of a rentier-based capitalist mode of production.

The entrepreneurial interests in question are strongly tied to the above mentioned agrarian conflicts. The paramilitaries actively sought to expand their territorial control as a means to accumulate capital and political power (Cubides 2001: 132). This further exacerbated agrarian conflicts as they invested their drug money in large agricultural estates. It is estimated that, from the early 1980s until 2000, paramilitaries acquired 4.5 million hectares, representing around 50% of Colombia's most fertile and valuable land⁵. This process is often considered to constitute a 'counter agrarian reform' reversing the frail gains achieved during the reform process and aggravating the agrarian question further. The expansion of territorial control allowed the paramilitaries to consolidate local and regional power (often through penetration of the state), engage in productive economic activities and control strategic areas for their war effort and engagement in the illegal drugs trade. Furthermore, the territorial control by paramilitary groups is directly linked to the expulsion of peasants from their land. It is estimated that the majority of the internally displaced are the result of paramilitary expansion. In fact, there is a correlation between areas of territorial expansion and land concentration and areas with the highest levels of displacement (Ibáñez 2004).

5 Figure from the Inspector General's Office, cited in Valencia, L. (2006: 14).

These events, coupled with a process of economic liberalisation since the early 1990s has had profound changes in the rural sector⁶. Land concentration has led to a reduction in productivity as vast amounts of arable land are converted to cattle grazing and has led to an increase in unsustainable micro-holdings mainly in areas of colonisation (Fajardo 2002). The liberalisation of the economy on the other hand has further reduced competitiveness in the sector as the economy has been subject to the influx of imported goods. This curtails the means of subsistence for the peasantry forcing their migration to seek other forms of livelihoods and consequently meeting the demand, with those who have been violently displaced, for labour in sectors such as those of commercial exploitation, unskilled labour in urban centres and the construction of infrastructure consequently supporting different development processes in the country (Fajardo 2006: 114). This tendency has led to increasing inequalities with many of the displaced living in poor conditions in urban slums and to an increase in food insecurity due to declines in productivity. Furthermore, many of the displaced are forced to further expand the agricultural frontier where they engage in cultivating illicit crops in the lack of other sustainable opportunities (Fajardo 2006: 118).

The reduction of productivity that has derived from increased land concentration and the liberalisation of the economy has also led to a change

in the types of crops cultivated. There has been a shift from temporary crops, common in small scale peasant economies, to permanent crops that are destined for export in international markets. In 1990, temporary crops accounted for 2.5 million hectares of cultivated land whilst permanent crops accounted for 1.2 million hectares. This had changed and by 1997 temporary crops decreased to 1.6 million hectares and permanent crops increased to 1.4 million hectares cultivated (Fajardo 2006: 123). This indicates an aggressive expansion of agro-industrial crops such as African palm, banana and sugar cane. Furthermore, these industries have been strongly influenced by those supporting rentier capitalist modes of production and using violence against workers and trade unions to ensure competitive labour conditions (Amnesty International 2007). In fact, the peasantry often become sharecroppers or day labourers without the benefits of negotiated contracted labour (Fajardo 2006: 130).

The forced displacement of the peasantry can sometimes serve an important function in the provision of a cheap supply of labour that allows certain industries, particularly agro-exports to compete in international markets with decreasing costs of production. As Fajardo notes, there is a cycle of land expropriation, forced displacement of the peasantry, their proletarianisation and the implantation of agro-industry that shapes Colombia's rural development

6 This is not to say that these are the only factors that lead to the crisis, other factors such as the revaluation of the peso and the effects of *El Niño* are also important.

model (2006: 133). The expansion of African palm in the communities of Jiguamiando and Curvarado in the department of Chocó provides an illustrative example of this process. There has been a rapid expansion of the crops since the mid 1990s that has coincided with paramilitary influence in the region. The paramilitaries forged alliances with private investors to invest in the crops for which they received subsidies and incentives from the state as part of its rural development agenda. As one paramilitary leader Salvatore Mancuso openly admitted, "...we have cultivations of African palm. I personally got the entrepreneurs to invest in those projects that are both sustainable and productive" (quoted in Palau 2007: 5). A study by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) has highlighted how the lands used for cultivation are communal lands belonging to afro-Colombian communities and that many were forced to sell or flee the lands. Furthermore, due to the precarious situation of the displaced many have had to return and work as sharecroppers or day labourers on the plantations (2007: 21).

Therefore, rather than represent irrationality, breakdown and collapse, the violence and conflict outlined above plays an important role in shaping economic relations and structures that can be embedded in the development process. This is not to say that the whole development process is based on violence and that all forced displacement is a means to secure wage labour, but rather to indicate that violent conflict can shape the development process, in this case by facilitating the rapid expansion of certain agricultural crops such as African palm, which is in line

with the government policy to promote commercial agricultural crops for export, with plans to expand the areas cultivated with African palm to 600,000 hectares this year (Palau 2007: 9)

Another example that emphasises the often symbiotic nature between conflict and development relates to the extractive industry. The government's national development agenda clearly envisions increasing outputs from the extraction of natural resources such as oil, coal and gold in order to generate resources to foster national development (DNP 2006). However, both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries also extract resources from companies in order to finance their war efforts (Guáqueta 2003). Therefore, the surplus gained from these activities funds both violence and increases state resources for developmental purposes. Furthermore, the extraction of these resources has been at the centre of the contradicting modes of productions sought by guerrillas and paramilitaries. For example, paramilitaries have supported the violent expulsion of the peasantry from their lands in order to cede these territories to oil companies for exploration (Richani 2005: 117). On the other hand, guerrillas in some coal mining areas have supported territorial invasions by peasant organisations that have later established themselves as production cooperatives (Rangel 2000: 590).

The above analysis has attempted to highlight some of the interconnections between violent conflict and development in the transition to capitalist development and the process of state formation. It has shown that a linear model of development on which

violence and progress are dialectically opposed is substantially flawed and that violent conflict is sometimes the means in which the terms of accumulation and distribution of wealth are cast in transitional contexts. Societal reorganisation and change are not technical or apolitical processes and this is particularly evident in the Colombian context where amid institutional failure, antagonistic groups have sought to influence modes of accumulation through violence. The outcomes of such processes are yet to be determined in the face of ongoing violence, and whilst important productive sectors that spur growth have developed, the country is also characterised by mass displacement, high levels of poverty and inequality and a state that has failed to monopolise the legitimate use of force and revenue extraction. As Gutiérrez, Viatela and Acevedo conclude in their study on state building in Colombia, there seems to be a “genuine coexistence” between conflict and development in Colombia where “formal order and informal disorder are organically linked” (2007: 4). The implications for international aid policy that seeks to build peace and promote development are the focus of the following section.

3. International aid policy: peace-building or assisting structures of violence?⁷

As discussed above, most peace-building and development aid rests on the assumption that there is an inverse

relationship between violent conflict and development and that the motivations that cause and perpetuate violence mainly stem from selfish and opportunistic profit seeking and underdevelopment. As result, these illegal armed groups need to be dismantled, either through force or negotiation, in order to remove the main obstacles to reasserting the path to development and peace. Therefore, the demobilisation of the paramilitary groups under the Justice and Peace Law (JPL) in 2005 plus important security gains by Alvaro Uribe’s democratic security policy that have led to a retreat of the FARC deeper into the jungle and prompted negotiations with the ELN have been received by much enthusiasm by international agencies⁸.

As a result of these developments, recent aid policy has sought to promote the reintegration of ex-combatants in order to eliminate the threat from potential peace spoilers and support the livelihoods of other vulnerable groups such as the displaced. In order to achieve these objectives, resources are aligned, through the state agency *Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social*, with the government’s National Development Plan (NDP) 2006–2010. As Colombia is classified as a democratic middle income country, international aid is channelled through the state and aligned with government policy on recovery and development. As one OCHA official put it, “Colombia

7 In this discussion of international aid, this section is concerned with the resources used to support peace-building and development objectives and therefore excludes military aid under Plan Colombia.

8 This enthusiasm is particularly prominent within USAID and the World Bank. Other agencies, in interviews with the author, have been more apprehensive of the nature of the demobilisation process with the paramilitaries. However, as discussed further in this section the nature of aid policy does not substantially vary in its assumptions around the conflict-development nexus.

is not a failed state such as in other humanitarian emergencies.”⁹ Furthermore, the government’s NDP is in line with donor and agency thinking on peace-building, in which recovery and development through increasing economic growth and targeting resources at some of the most vulnerable is the most effective means to achieve and consolidate peace. The plan specifically seeks to increase growth by increasing the productivity of export-oriented crops such as rubber, African palm, banana and cacao through so-called ‘productive projects’ that will facilitate Colombia’s insertion into international markets and support livelihoods for the displaced and ex-combatants (DNP 2006).

Thus, the peace-building objectives of reintegrating ex-combatants and supporting the displaced are aligned with the government’s broader development agenda, emphasising the interrelation between the two –where development leads to peace whilst peace is synonymous with development. Therefore violent conflict is a passing anomaly along the development path that once removed provides the enabling environment for development to be resumed. Perceiving this enabling environment as a *tabula rasa* that requires the implementation of certain technical policies to foster development and peace fails to understand the transformations that are brought about by war (Cramer 2006: 253–255). As shown in

the above analysis of Colombia, the terms of accumulation and wealth distribution and the system in which these are cast have been radically transformed, particularly in certain industries such as in the agricultural sector. So although the paramilitaries have demobilised, it is widely understood that the JPL has been inadequate in dismantling the social, economic and political power they have obtained through war. The law has been a means in which to institutionalise a radically changed development terrain and also the very nature of the state, particularly at the regional and local levels but also at the national level, that serves particular interests¹⁰. A misconception of the current nature of the state, the interests behind the policies it develops and the power amassed by the paramilitaries potentially leads to distorted outcomes in aid programmes. Particularly those that presume the peace negotiation and subsequent demobilisation of the paramilitaries have ushered in a blank slate from which development can be resumed in a democratic environment.

In fact, some of the ‘productive projects’ that have been developed in conjunction with international agencies that aim to support the displaced and ex-combatants have assisted and consolidated some of the regressive structures that have emerged from violence. The process of land concentration described above, coupled with the infiltration of INCODER¹¹

9 Telephone interview with OCHA official, July 2007.

10 The Prosecutor’s Office has charged and is investigating over 40 high level politicians, including senators and congressmen. In fact, Gutierrez, Viatela and Acevedo (2007: 28–29) argue that the demobilisation process allowed many paramilitaries to legalise their illegally obtained wealth and further their influence on government policies through their participation in the national coalition.

11 INCODER, the Colombian Institute for Rural Development replaced the above mentioned INCORA as the main government institution dealing with land reform and wider rural development.

by interests tied to the paramilitaries, has meant that finding adequate land for these productive projects remains one of its biggest obstacles (Indepaz forthcoming). Therefore, in order to overcome these obstacles many of these projects involve alliances between the beneficiaries and the private sector that have access to land. As part of these alliances, beneficiaries often become labourers on different plantations. However, in some rural areas, often with weak state presence, members of the private sector are linked to paramilitary interests and have been able to distort these projects by forcing beneficiaries to work under poor labour conditions, often on illegally appropriated land (ibid). Rather than building peace, these projects can entrench some of the negative development outcomes that emerged from the conflict. As Cramer notes, “societies often cross a fuzzy border from war to peace: the territory on either side of the border can look very similar” (2006: 13).

These incidences come to light in the above example of Jigumiendo and Curvarado where paramilitary interests, in collusion with the military, have established large-scale African palm plantations in areas of displacement (IDMC 2007: 9). The government, including international donors, have enthusiastically supported the expansion of the crop as it attracts private investment and falls in line with government plans to increase productivity of export oriented crops. This is despite the fact that according to the IDMC, 93 percent of land used in these areas for the establishment of plantations has been obtained illegally through

fraud and intimidation, the working conditions are poor and trade union members face threats of coercion. Furthermore, the rural development law passed in June 2007 only requires land claimants to produce officially recognised documents without evidence on how they were acquired; this facilitates plantation owners formalising their illegal ownership (IDMC 2007: 9 –11).

This case shows how supporting economic development as a means of peace-building without understanding the specific dynamics of change that emerged from the violence are likely to have distorted outcomes. As the IDMC report states: “in the continuing absence of the rule of law ... development efforts may indeed perpetuate and even aggravate the injustices faced by the conflict’s victims” (2007: 5). A sentiment echoed by Palau as the rural economy, rather than being regulated by the invisible hand of market forces, is clearly regulated by the ‘visible hand’ of force, brutality and violence (2007: 5).

Therefore, the thinking behind peace-building efforts needs to better comprehend how the dynamics of war are related to development processes rather than presume the advent of peace automatically brings about an adequate environment for standard development projects. Such a review of the conflict–development nexus will help ensure that future projects do not support regressive structures that have emerged from violence but rather processes that can help ensure sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable groups based on locally relevant concepts of justice and reconciliation.

Conclusions

This article has questioned the conventional understanding in current international aid policy of the conflict-development nexus, where violent conflict is dialectically opposed to development and in fact represents 'development in reverse.' This analysis underestimates the conflictual processes that characterise transitions to capitalist modes of production and state formation. This has been particularly evident in Colombia where the institutional failure to peacefully negotiate divergent interests around the nature of the transition have led to the emergence of parallel, violent institutions that seek to influence the terms of capital accumulation and distribution. These violent processes of primitive accumulation have led to diverse outcomes. Some have been progressive in that they spurred the development of important sectors of the economy such as coffee, whilst others have been regressive as rural relations have been marked by land concentration, violent displacement of communities, decreases in productivity and local and regional structures that support the enrichment of certain elites.

Furthermore, the article has shown that the conventional understanding of the conflict-development nexus often presumes that after peace agreements and the demobilisation of ex-combatants a *tabula rasa* exists that provides an enabling environment for liberal development projects that promote development and peace. However, in reality, 'post-conflict' transitions rarely involve a blank slate but are characterised by the structures and processes that have emerged from violent conflict. A failure to comprehend the complex nature

of these structures and processes can often mean peace-building and development projects fail to achieve their objectives and in some cases get distorted and possibly further entrench regressive structures and outcomes. This has been the case with some development and peace-building projects in Colombia, particularly those that have sought to promote the government's agro-export agenda with crops such as African palm.

International aid agencies need to understand the complexity around emerging modes of accumulation and state formation in order to adequately formulate policies that can promote genuine peace-building and development processes based on justice, equality and reconciliation. The specific nature of the post-conflict environment will have to shape these policies to ensure they support the progressive elements of change that may have evolved from the conflict. This will require context specific interventions rather than those blanket approaches based on orthodox development policies that presume development transitions are technical exercises of change rather than a politically charged reorganisation of society. Good things do not necessarily go together and therefore, the challenge for aid agencies is to find ways of intervening that separate the progressive elements of change from those that are deemed regressive and foster their long term development.

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