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'We are not Drug Traffickers, We are Colombian Peasants': The voices and history of cocaleros in the substitution programme of illicit crops in Colombia

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ABSTRACT

Drugs and development policies lack a historical and political economy perspective. This has led to a situation where issues of everyday state-making and agrarian conflicts are ignored. Alternative frameworks that incorporate these elements do not go beyond mere procedural participation. This is also the case with Colombia's Comprehensive Plan for the Substitution of Illicit Crops ('PNIS'), resulting from the recent 2016 peace agreement. Through ethnographic work and content analysis of coca growers' demands, we demonstrate how coca growers are the ones who best understand the historical reasons that led them to participate in this economy and therefore, who can most clearly design and implement transition strategies in drugs and development policies. In addition to history and political economy, alternative approaches must draw on the experiences of those who have suffered from state-building processes.

1. Introduction: Colombia, Drugs Traffic, and the Peace Agreement

Drug production and trafficking have been intertwined with Colombia's internal armed conflict dynamics[3]. Several sets of actors are involved in the production and trade of drugs. However, these actors differ in their interests, power positions, and historical reasons for taking part in this illicit economy. The Colombian government and the former guerrillas of FARC signed the Final Agreement to End the Conflict in November 2016. Both parties agreed on the complexity and the differences among actors participating in drug production and distribution. The agreement claims to provide a solution to drug production and trafficking. However, since the early stages of the peace talks the main assumptions of the agreement were criticized due to its "flat and simplistic view of the classic circuit of drug production, processing and use" (Vargas, 2013:1). The fourth point of the agreement proposes the implementation of the Comprehensive National Plan for the Substitution of Illegal Crops ('Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos', PNIS) (Equipo Negociador de Paz, 2016).

Historically, in the Andean region, the drugs problem has been treated as a mere law enforcement problem (Grisaffi and Ledebur, 2016; Vargas Meza, 2011), with little attention paid to socio-historical factors, the complexities of state-making processes, and the symbiosis between drug dynamics and political power (Vargas, 2013). Other approaches, such as substitution or alternative development programs, link the production and processing of the coca leaf with development issues, hence suggesting that the solution to the problem lies in the field of development. However, development orthodoxy doesn't grasp the complexity of "the 'whys' and 'hows' of coping and survival in illicit-crop-producing territories with high levels of violence and conflict"

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[3] Since November 2019, Colombia has experienced massive demonstrations that have inspired national strikes and social upheavals. The mobilization processes led for the first time to a centre-left government winning the elections. The newly elected government has on several occasions expressed the need to review the current development and drug policies. With this paper, we aim to contribute to these discussions.

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(Gutierrez, 2020:3).

The debates during the past decade on drugs and development policies in the country revolve around the effectiveness of the various strategies applied to reduce coca leaf production. Forty years of substitution and alternative development programs have proven to be insufficient to eradicate illicit crops, and forced eradication has been unsuccessful in reducing coca crops. The PNIS builds on this history of 'safe' development and drug policies focused on crop substitution, that is "to repeat old recipes in new packaging" (Vargas, 2014:5).

However, the PNIS is novel in that it is the first time in history that a drugs and development policy emerged from peace talks, involving coca growers from the early stages of its design. Counting on the willingness of coca growers, the former FARC guerrillas, and the National Government, the programme generated high expectations among coca growers. While the before-2010 policies targeting illicit crops prioritized forced eradication over substitution, the PNIS shifted these policies towards voluntary substitution (Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019b). However, scholars and civil organizations agree that six years after beginning to implement this policy, the results fall far short of its initial goals (International Crisis Group, 2021; De los Rios Jaramillo, 2020; Vélez-torres and Lugo-vivas, 2021). Instead of transforming oppressive economic and political power relations behind drugs production (Vélez-Torres et al. 2022), the PNIS turned out to be yet another appendix to the eradication policy, with the same limitations and problems (De los Rios Jaramillo, 2020).

Development interventions such as alternative development and substitution programmes are often presented as if they occur in a vacuum, although they are embedded in specific socio-economic settings that are the result of socio-historical processes, such as state-building (Ballvé, 2019; Ciro, 2018; Goodhand, 2021; Grajales, 2013; Peñaranda et al., 2021; Vargas Reina, 2021). Understanding and recognising the complexities of state-building in marginal or frontier areas is crucial to explain the limitations of drugs and development policies and exploring possible ways forward for peasants. This is particularly true for *cocaleros* participating in the PNIS, who have expressed their willingness to stop participating in this illicit economy by signing substitution agreements with the Colombian State and pulling out of the coca bushes. Illicit crops are a 'development' problem, not only because possible solutions are founded on an orthodox development perspective, but also because the mere 'process of development' as propagated in the 20th Century, contributed considerably to the creation of the 'illicit crops problem'. Since the second half of the 20th Century, modernisation projects seeking to build infrastructure and integration projects in the Amazon, combined with state-led colonization programmes, were the major cause of the emergence of illicit crop production and processing (Dávalos, 2018; Dávalos et al., 2016; Peñaranda et al., 2021; Torres, 2022). In Perú, Bolivia and Colombia "the initial historical path from Amazonian development to cocainization appears systematic and even in some sense of the word "structural". […] The colonization path into the upper Amazon was the defining factor in the rise of *cocalero* complexes" (Gootenberg and Dávalos, 2018:5).

This article argues that orthodox development interventions that aimed at eradicating illicit crops in Colombia have not considered the historical and political economy dimensions in which this problem is rooted. While the PNIS and alternative development programmes focus on coca crop substitution, they completely ignore the processes of dispossession, marginalisation and exclusion from access to resources, including land, that led peasants to produce and process coca leaves in the first place. These aspects are not considered by the PNIS and constitute its main shortcomings[4].

Furthermore, we address the popular assumption that coca-growing territories are state-less spaces since in these territories the dynamics of state-building are more complex and involve a mixture of legal and illegal actors (Ballvé, 2019; Grajales, 2021; Peñaranda et al., 2021; Vargas Reina, 2021). Moreover, this paper suggests putting the *cocaleros* at the centre of the policy-making process. Rather than calling for the participation of, or consultation with, *cocaleros*, to clean up state's initiatives and safeguard the political rule of capital (Vélez-Torres et al., 2022), the drugs and development policies should be in their own hands. We aim to contribute to the discussions about rethinking drug and development policies, switching from an obsession with the number of hectares of coca eradicated towards creating enabling conditions for the socio-economic transition of illicit economies, in this creation *cocaleros* experiences and knowledge is determinant.

To understand the limitations of the substitution programme in the transition towards licit economies, and to grasp the meaning of the participation of coca growers in the production of coca, it is necessary to consider the historical processes of colonization, that have led to the appearance of the political identity of *colonos*, *cocaleros* and *líderes de sustitución* (substitution leaders). For peasants, "coca became the crop of choice because of the circumstances and context in which farmers had to make decisions"(Holmes et al., 2018:129). Coca base and paste are a low-volume, high-value and easy-to-transport products, and therefore became the product of choice for peasants abandoned by the state (Molano, 1989a) and victims of the development projects of the mid-20th century (Gootenberg and Dávalos, 2018).

Cocaleros are *Campesinos Colonos* ("peasant settlers") who settle in frontier areas '*Tierras profundas*' (Deep lands) (Ciro, 2018) are a result of different types of colonization: the colonization of *baldíos* (wastelands) during the 19th and 20th Centuries (LeGrand, 1986), colonizations linked to specific commodities such as coffee (Parsons, 1997) and armed colonization processes guided by the FARC guerrillas in the 20th century (Molano, 1989b; Tobón, 2001). These 'forced colonizations' (Salgado Ruiz, 2012) are also translated into the political arena, as a large number of peasants living in the '*Tierras profundas*' (Ciro 2018) lose their political rights and with them the possibility to demand rights (Salgado Ruiz, 2012). In this sense, *cocaleros* are peasants expelled from their territories of origin due to various reasons, who colonized new territories and found their main livelihood in coca-growing (Holmes et al., 2018; Torres, 2018).

Over time, *cocaleros* mobilised themselves and got involved in the organizational processes to demand that the Colombian state stop its repressive drug policies, particularly the aerial spraying of glyphosate. This led to the formation of the *cocalero* social movement (Ramírez, 2011) during the 1990s, which challenged the twisted image of them held by the Colombian state as "illegal actors in search of easy money. Instead the *cocalero* defined themselves as Colombian citizens seeking to improve their living conditions" (Ramírez, 2011:111).

This paper aims to unveil the historical and political economy dimensions often ignored by orthodox drugs and development interventions. These omissions have to considering coca territories as stateless, and missing the complexity of the state-building process in the frontier zones (Ballvé, 2020). The structure of the paper is as follows. First, we show how the Colombian drugs and development policies are part of the everyday state-making process in coca territories (Sections 2 And 3). After a description of the methodology (Section 4), the fifth section analyses the political economy of coca production linking the production of coca to the socio-historical processes of colonization. Section 6 presents the case of the PNIS pilot in Briceño and its outcomes from the perspective of the *cocaleros*. The discussion in section 7 addresses the role of *cocaleros* in the historical development of the agrarian question in Colombia and the everyday state-making processes. We conclude that alternative frameworks on drugs and development policies need to be combined with historical and political economy analysis and draw on the experiences and voices of those who have suffered from the state-building process. Despite the uneven geographical and historical development of illicit economies in different parts of the country, coca-growing areas share common characteristics, the most important of which is the role of the state in criminalizing and marginalizing poor

[4] We are very grateful to the reviewers for their comments which made this point clearer.

peasants who grow coca because it is the only possible economic alternative.

2. Drugs policies and development: practices of 'Stick and Carrot'.

During the past 40 years, Colombian drug policies were based on a 'stick and carrot' approach (Ibañez and Martinsson, 2013), consisting of the combination of forced eradication (the stick) and voluntary substitution (the carrot), as illustrated in Table 1.

2.1. The stick: forced eradication

'Forced eradication' (the elimination of the illicit crop without the consent of the growers) is justified in article 375 of the Colombian Criminal Code. It can be carried out through aerial herbicide spraying and military operations on the ground to pull out coca bushes. Colombia is the only country in the Andean region that has allowed the use of chemical substances to reduce illicit crops (Grisaffi and Ledebur, 2016; Vargas Manrique, 2004). To this end, the use of planes, helicopters and drones to spray herbicides (mostly glyphosate) over illicit crops is the most common practice. Aerial glyphosate spraying has proven to be costly and inefficient (Ibañez and Klasen, 2017; Mejía et al., 2017; Rincón-Ruiz and Kallis, 2013). This strategy has been demonstrated to be counter-productive as the eradicated areas are quickly replaced with newly cultivated areas, leading to a zero-sum net result (Reyes, 2014). Moreover, eradication policies have tremendous environmental impacts, as they lead to the displacement of coca cultivation, the deepening of deforestation and the damage to ecosystems (Rincón-Ruiz et al., 2016). Forced eradication leads to human rights violations (see descriptions by Forero, 2020) and to the marginalization of rural inhabitants (Rincón-Ruiz et al., 2016).

In 2015, the Colombian Constitutional Court suspended the use of aerial spraying due to the violation of the right of prior consultation of ethnic communities and the right to physical, cultural and spiritual survival of ethnic communities (Corte Constitucional República de Colombia, 2017). Nevertheless, since 2018, the Colombian government has been seeking to resume spraying glyphosate as a fundamental part of its anti-drug policy, through the formulation of the "Future Route" (Ruta Futuro) (Gobierno de Colombia, 2018). From 2018 to 2022, the government prioritized coercive methods such as manual eradication over the fulfilment of the Peace Accord (International Crisis Group, 2021) increasing violence and conflict in territories affected by coca crops and armed groups. However, in January 2022, the constitutional court reaffirmed its 2015 position on the use of glyphosate in eradication operations (EFE, 2022).

Table 1
Key Moments in the Colombian Drugs and Development Policies.

Period (Years)	Stick and Carrot Strategies in Drugs Policies in Colombia
1971	Richard Nixon launched 'the war on drugs'
1978–1984	Herbicide experimentation for aerial spraying in Colombia
1980	**Crop Substitution Programmes** aimed to provide coca-growers with materials and technical assistance for growing licit crops.
1984	Massive herbicide spraying of coca leaf crops began.
1990	**Area Development Programmes** combining crops substitution, market development, social infrastructure and organizational development
1992	The Colombian government authorizes the use of glyphosate for aerial spraying of poppy crops.
1998	The U.S. government and Colombia launch **Plan Colombia** to combat illicit crops. The first military operation is the 'Ofensiva Sur' in the Colombian Amazon.
2001	**Alternative Development Programmes** aim to create an alternative economy with a strengthened government presence, new employment opportunities and social change.
2015	The constitutional court suspends the spraying of glyphosate for violating the fundamental rights of ethnic communities in the south of the country.
2016	**Signature of the peace agreement** and beginning of the implementation of the fourth point of the agenda 'Solution to the Drug Problem' and the kick-off of the first pilots of the **PNIS**.
2017	**Community Development and Licit Opportunities Programmes**: combining strategies to strengthen community organizations, improve public services accelerate socio-economic development and create dialogue mechanisms
2022	**Criticism of the war on drugs:** The government elected in June 2022 has called for rethinking drug policy and abandoning the old paradigm of the war on drugs.

Source: Own-elaboration based on Lee and Clawson (1993), Moreno (2015) and Vargas Meza (2011).

2.2. The carrot: from crop substitution and area development to alternative development

Combining drug policies with development interventions in the Andean area began in 1980. These 'crop substitution programmes' sought to introduce licit crops to replace the income generated by so-called illicit crops, associated with the production and processing of narcotics. The first substitution programmes in the 1980s provided their beneficiaries with materials and technical assistance to produce legal crops. After their implementation, these programmes were abandoned by their promoters, the most important of which was USAID. The first assessments of the strategy showed that the introduction of substitute crops such as coffee and cacao failed, due to the lack of appropriate climate-proof varieties, poorly developed infrastructures and the absence of a sufficiently profitable market context (Lee and Clawson, 1993). Following this conclusion, the justification for the perseverance of the crop substitution programmes was more political rather than economic, as these activities "can increase the government's political access to insecure zones where guerrilla groups or drug dealers are dominant" (*ibid:* 3).

After this failure, the United States reformulated its drug and development policy from crop substitution to area development programmes in the 1990 s, a shift that complemented the ambition of a crop substitution strategy with new elements such as market development, industrialization, social infrastructure and organizational development (*ibid)*. At the beginning of 2000, this policy was again modified, through the promotion and implementation of 'Alternative Development'. This approach seeks to eliminate illicit crops by designing rural development measures linked to national economic growth, and taking into account the socio-cultural characteristics of rural communities (UNODC, 2010).

2.3. Stick and carrot policies and everyday state-making processes

In Colombia, drug policies and alternative development (AD) programmes have historically been led and sponsored by USAID. Since 2000 the governments of the US and Colombia established the 'Plan Colombia' as the cooperation framework between both countries. This plan combines the counterinsurgency strategy and the war on drugs (Lindsay-Poland, 2018; Vargas Meza, 2011). Participation in AD programs funded by USAID has been conditioned to the eradication of coca bushes, as is for instance the case of the 'Coca Zero' programme during the 1990s (Vargas Meza, 2011). Later on, in the 2000 s, new programs such as 'Familias Guardabosques' (Forest Ranger Families) and 'Familias en Acción' (Families in Action) provided subsidies to coca growers on the condition that they clean their fields of coca bushes. This strategy was combined with military campaigns such as the 'Plan Patriota' (Patriot Plan) and the 'Planes de Consolidación' (Consolidation Plans). As Ciro recalls "although neither the carrot nor the stick has been effective in the war on drugs, they have had an impact on the legitimacy of the state in coca-growing territories" (translated from Spanish) (2018:121). Moreover, stick and carrot strategies concentrate on alleviating the symptoms, instead of the deep causes of drug trafficking linked to marginalization and exclusion of coca territories (Ramírez,

2011).

Stick and carrot policies are inscribed in the imaginary of the narco frontier (Goodhand, 2021)—a resilient and powerful narrative prescribing antidotes for the conflicts present in 'the coca territories'. These spaces are portrayed as marginal spaces full of criminality where the state cannot exercise its legitimate power (Ballvé, 2019). Nevertheless, the conditions of marginalization and exclusion in these areas existed long before the arrival of the coca as a cash opportunity (*Ibid*), and are the result of state-building processes. Historically these areas have indeed been under the military control of FARC guerrillas: "the FARC and the *cocalero colonos* developed a symbiotic relationship in which the rebel group secured the material conditions – in terms of security and infrastructure – for the coca economy, while they arbitered social relations to constitute a local sense of order" (Peñaranda et al., 2021:5). In consequence, *cocaleros* have been the most stable social group backing guerrilla politics.

Coca territories have been the object of military disputes between armed actors: the military campaigns of the government armed forces, in alliance with paramilitary groups, (Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019a) sought to encircle the guerrillas, who in turn defended their positions. Plan Colombia financed and logistically supported military operations in these areas, but also created the 'narco-guerrilla' narrative (Ciro, 2018; Tate, 2015), directly linking the armed insurgency to the socio-economic dynamics of coca. This narrative deliberately eliminated the political cause of the guerrillas and removed the complex symbiotic relation between cocaleros and armed groups, hence ignoring the differences in participation and power between actors (Tate, 2015); with this, "the coca economy was divorced from its complex social context and the crop itself became reified as inherently deadly" (Peñaranda et al., 2021:8), while the military interventions and the eradication were legitimised. Moreover, the fast-spreading cultivation of coca in the south of the country at the end of the 1980s became a powerful state-building engine due to the demographic and commercial dynamism produced by coca, which also allowed for a renewed state taxation and a gradual extension of the state apparatus (Torres, 2007).

Ballvé (2019) refers to these areas as 'narco frontiers' - "social-spatial formations produced through the convergence of uneven development, internal colonialism, political violence, and narco-fueled dispossession" (2019:221) - where social relations are shaped by the production of a specific commodity, such as coca. Likewise, Ciro considers these areas as '*Tierras profundas*' (deep lands) of the war on drugs, defined as rural zones highly segregated, with specific power structures and where the state is not a neutral arbitrator, but a "chaotic and contradictory actor" (2018:114). Although both allude to different locations (the first in the northwestern part of the country and the second in the southeastern part), both notions, 'narco-frontiers' and '*Tierras profundas*', question the idea of coca territories as 'stateless' spaces and reconstruct the role of the state in maintaining the economic interests of illegal actors linked to drugs trafficking and paramilitary groups, and above all their nexus to legal economies (Grajales 2013, 2021; Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019a; Vargas Reina, 2021). Hence the construction of these marginal areas historically resulted in an overlap of 'democratic institutions' and high-intensity violence (Grajales 2013). Following this perspective, Vargas (2021) explains how the state's control has been maintained through indirect rule, that is, the combination of "a thin bureaucracy and a thick system of partisan networks, which regulated the transactions between territories and central decision -making structures" (Gutiérrez-Sanín, 2019a:15). This aspect is ultimately what has guaranteed the territorial presence of the state, shaping marginal areas where the state's violence and its social policies create and maintain scenarios of hostility, vigilance, stigmatisation and poverty while undermining the legitimacy of the state's presence in these territories (Ciro, 2018).

The peace agreement was grounded on a simplistic notion of increasing the state's involvement in areas where the state was "absent", that is, the assumption of coca areas as stateless territories being rediscovered (Peñaranda et al., 2021). This idea however conceals the development of the authoritarian state (Scott, 1998) in Colombia, with the disposition to use the full weight of its coercive power to materialize a specific economic project, even if it is necessary to rely on alliances with armed actors such as the paramilitaries (Ballvé, 2013; Grajales, 2013; Gutiérrez-Sanín and Vargas, 2017). It is in this complex scenario that programmes emerging from the peace accords, such as the PNIS, are implemented; their success or failure depends not only on the technical arrangements of these interventions but is related to the socio-historical process of state-building and the social dynamics of the war on drugs in its '*Tierras profundas*' (Ciro, 2018).

3. Cocaleros and colonos: contesting generalised violence

During the second half of the 1990s, the massive spraying of herbicides over illicit crops mobilised coca growers (Moreno, 2015). In 1996 civic strikes in the south of the country triggered the '*marchas cocaleras*' (*cocalero* marches). In these marches, two-hundred thousand coca leaf growers (nearly a quarter of the total population of the Amazonian departments) participated, including *colonos* peasants, and '*raspachines*' (coca leaf collectors) (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2016). These marches instigated the *cocalero* social movement, which turned the coca growers from victims of repression into legitimate "interlocutors of the state" (2016:519).

The process of recognition of coca growers by the state involved their distancing themselves from armed actors, such as guerrillas and drug traffickers. By declaring their autonomy through their own voice, the *cocaleros* sought to define new policies for coca-growing territories (Ramírez, 2011). This moment of autonomy allowed the shift from being mere coca-growers to *cocaleros*, with a particular identity, their own interests and agenda, distinct from the armed groups and drug traffickers, and recognised as valid interlocutors by the state. Since then, scholars of social movements (e.g. Archila Neira, 2005) have come to consider *cocaleros* as a civil society response to overcome the marginalisation of coca growers, protecting their only source of income and livelihood: the coca leaf (Ramírez, 2011).

To defend their livelihoods from forced eradication, *cocaleros* have applied mobilization strategies such as strikes, direct action against manual eradication, as well as official petitions to the national government, round tables with government officers and participation in public debates and hearings in the National Congress and the Constitutional Court. The use of these tools and strategies increased during the period of negotiation of the peace agreement (2012–2016), due to the escalation of conflicts between coca growers and the military forces in the eradication campaigns (Abril Bonilla et al., 2019). The escalation of conflicts was enabled by the ambivalence regarding drugs policies (*Ibid*). In 2015, the Colombian state suspended aerial spraying of glyphosate and announced a new programme for coca substitution based on the participation of *cocaleros* while within the framework of the peace talks in Havana, and at the same time, the state continued with its forced eradication policy.

The Colombian state, through law enforcement, stigmatizes Colombian citizens who grow coca as 'illegals' or 'drug traffickers', leading to their prosecution and marginalisation. In this process, coca-growing is reduced to figures (number of hectares with coca crops, value of coca leaf production and its subsequent transformation into coca paste), hence simplifying complex social relations to make them controllable for, and by, the state (Scott, 1998). The attempts to turn the illegal *cocaleros* into legal actors, such as the stick and carrot policies, start from an ahistorical standpoint since they do not consider the historical, social, economic and political circumstances that led to the cultivation of illicit crops, while also denying the peasant identity of the *cocaleros*. By doing so, these policies legitimize the state's actions, seeking to eradicate the main livelihood of the *cocaleros* and then prosecute them (Ciro, 2018; Ramírez, 2011).

Besides the denial of their peasant identity and citizenship, violence due to the internal armed conflict and the state-driven war on drugs has

had a permanent impact on the social relations occurring in '*las tierras profundas*' (Ciro, 2018), and contributed to the formation of the *cocalero* social movement, which started to emerge around 1994 (Ramírez, 2011). It led to the paradoxical situation in which the state played a key role in the formation of this social movement, through the application of punitive policies and repression against coca growers, who seek to rehabilitate the term *cocalero*, which simultaneously criminalizes and stigmatizes them, but also gives them pride and identity (Ramírez, 2011).

4. Methodology

This research combines different qualitative data sets, in order to unravel the complexity of the Colombian state-building process in the frontier zones. The point of departure is fourteen in-depth interviews, with the voices of the new drugs policy's main actors: *cocaleros*, government officers, NGO representatives, representatives of the former FARC guerrilla and experts. The interviews were conducted in Bogotá, Medellín, Calí and Briceño. Participant observation in 2019 took place mostly in the Municipality of Briceño in the Antioquia Department. The decision to conduct participant observation in Briceño was made considering that this municipality was selected by the national government and the former FARC guerrillas as one of the pilots of the national substitution program proposed at the Havana peace talks. Also, participant observation was conducted in 2019 in the Municipality of Cajíbio (Cauca Department) amidst the *minga indigena*, an agrarian strike in which indigenous, peasants, afro-descendants and *cocaleros* participated; among the demands of the protest were those of coca growers and participants in the substitution program in the south of the country. In addition, ethnographic work was carried out during the public hearing of the Constitutional Court about plans to recommence aerial spraying of glyphosate and following up on the ruling T-236 of 2017 regulating the use of glyphosate to eradicate illicit crops.

Additionally, fourteen petitions presented by *cocaleros* from 12 different departments during the public hearing in the Congress of the Republic in Bogota on the status of the implementation of the PNIS (10 December 2018) were analyzed through content analysis. The content analysis of the petitions and the transcriptions of the interviews, complemented with various national government reports and additional literature, was developed using a sequential coding process (Mikwamba et al., 2020) in Atlas Ti. The interview quotes were translated from Spanish to English by the principal author of this paper. The results are presented in two ways. The first part (Section 3) focuses on the large picture of coca growing and the *cocalero* identity, while the second part (Section 4) zooms into the substitution pilot in the Municipality of Briceño to illustrate in more depth how the drugs policy emerging from the peace agreement was translated in the field. While specific references are given for content derived from reports and literature, all other content, derived from interviews and participant observations, is not specified unless it consists of literal quotes.

5. Coca and colonization: the agrarian question and coca growing

Colonization programmes have been part of the agrarian policy and frontier expansion history in Colombia since the 19th Century (LeGrand, 1986). The '*tierras profundas*' (Ciro, 2018) are the result of the historical processes of frontier expansion. The social conflicts that emerged from the 19th Century onwards, due to the rigid agrarian structure (Machado, 2017) and the consolidation of export agriculture, were dealt with by the national elites through colonization programmes on *baldíos* (wastelands) (LeGrand, 1986). This meant that state-led colonisation took priority over land reform (Fajardo Montaña, 2009; Torres 2018): granting land in remote areas was a quick way to address demands for land while maintaining land ownership structure (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2013, 2016), thereby avoiding any agrarian reform. As such, the agrarian question and the appearance of the production of illicit crops in frontier areas have mutually enforced each other, as the rapid expansion of colonization also encouraged the production of illicit crops due to the availability of cheap land and an impoverished workforce (Fajardo Montaña, 2014). In some areas, agricultural modernization went hand in hand with the expansion of coca cultivation (Torres, 2022).

Colonization processes and migration in the context of enduring violence have shaped several agrarian frontiers (Molano, 2006). Since the 1920s, the peasantry in these frontiers - former settlers who became tenants in coffee and later on in coca-growing areas - developed a specific identity of '*campesinos colonos*', arguing that "the land they tilled had been usurped from the public domain" (LeGrand, 1986:112). Gradually, the *colonos* became independent producers, provoking their violent expulsion by the landlords of the *hacienda* (LeGrand, 1986). Resistance, violent expulsions and state neglect are the shared life experiences that feed a social movement with political agency and a peasant origin that is considered illegal and criminal by the Colombian State. This resulting collective identity (Ramírez, 2011) has geographical variations and is dynamic, linked to different historical and social configurations of the space.

5.1. Cocaleros in the 'Frontiers': the political economy of coca growing

Critical agrarian political economy analyses of development interventions in post-war settings allows us to transcend the debate about best practices and political willingness in the assessment of peace agreement policies (Grajales, 2020), such as the substitution program within the peace agreement. The critical political economy lens considers that "a recent and violent past is a resource mobilized by policymakers in the procurement of resources and the production of institutions" (Grajales, 2020:4), which probably is the reason why the PNIS has not delivered what was expected. This section describes the political economy of coca-growing by considering property relations and the social division of labour.

Half of the households growing coca in the Andean region and 20% of the households growing illicit crops worldwide are in Colombia (UNODC-SIMCI, 2020:53), making coca-growing an important economic activity in Colombia. For instance in 2018 cocaine contributed 1.88% of the total GDP, while coffee accounted for 0.8% (Montenegro et al., 2019). Cocaine production takes place in four stages: the cultivation and harvesting of coca leaves, the transformation of coca leaves into coca paste, the transformation of the paste into cocaine hydrochloride, and finally, the transportation of the finished product to coasts and borders (Mejía and Rico, 2010). The cultivation and harvesting of the coca leaf and its transformation into coca paste occur largely within peasant economies before it is sold as an input to large-scale cocaine producers. On average, a coca-producing household consists of 5 persons, whose income depends for more than 70% on the activities associated with coca. An average household cultivates about 1 ha of coca (UNODC-SIMCI, 2020). Coca is on average harvested 5 times per year and "it ensures a substantial and continuous cash flows" (F. Tascón, peace advisor[5], personal communication, March 14, 2019). The harvested coca leaf has to be processed within 72 h, hence the processing must be done close to the harvest location.

At harvest time, seasonal workers, '*raspachines*', are hired. For those often young people, coca is a safe income source, based on the harvest quantity. A skilled *raspachin* can collect between 10 and 12 coca leaf *arrobas*[6] in four hours, earning 30USD (former *raspachin*, personal communication, March 28, 2019). With the reduction in volume during processing and the consequent increase in prices, a producer overcomes

[5] Current PNIS director.

[6] In Colombia the *arroba* is the measurement employed by farmers and peasants to measure their production. One arroba equals 11.5 kg.

transaction costs and market barriers due to the ease of transporting small volumes of a high-value, non-perishable product.

The information gathered shows that although coca represents a high income, unrealizable with other agricultural products, peasants prefer to abandon this crop once they have accumulated significant capital to grow 'legal' crops. Experts criticizing mainstream development and drugs policy explain this point in the following way: "the peasant gets tired of hiding and being persecuted and eventually prefers to get out of coca, the most successful substitution is the one done by peasants on their own" (P. Arenas, personal communication, February 14, 2019). This explains why cocaleros had high expectations with the new program and saw the PNIS as a good opportunity to avoid legal prosecution, military evictions and marginalization.

Before the Peace Accord, FARC guerrillas were involved in coca production, setting a tax on producers (FARC Representative, personal communication, February 28, 2019). The guerrillas controlled coca production by setting production limits and boundaries for coca cultivation (Jaramillo et al., 1986; Ramírez, 2011). They became "mediators in the construction of local order, playing a role in generating and enforcing social norms and infrastructure and empowering community institutions to make demands of the state" (Peñaranda et al., 2021:4).

However, the presence of the guerrillas in the marginal areas was interpreted as a security issue requiring state action, and military and paramilitary interventions. The violent pacification accords in these areas were framed as a development opportunity to integrate these areas into the market economy (Grajales, 2013). Following this, Vargas Reina (2021) argues that the Colombian state formed different coalitions in different regions with paramilitary groups and drug traffickers to delegate security provision and "the 'development' of war-torn areas to private stakeholders" (2021:7). State action and development policies have played a role in the dynamics of violence in areas with a high presence of illicit crops, which is often not recognized by mainstream development interventions such as substitution programs for illicit crops.

5.2. *The Blurred identities of the cocalero in the peace agreement: between peasants and criminals*

The peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrilla was a political opportunity to recognize *cocaleros* as victims of the armed conflict, turning them into political subjects (Ramírez, 2017). Within the peace talks in Havana, the problem of illicit crops was linked to comprehensive rural reform and proposed a differentiated criminal treatment of coca growers, which was linked with:

> "… a broader issue, which is the issue of land in Colombia […]. People did not grow coca, poppy, marijuana as a hobby […], but because the social, political and economic conditions of the country forced them to do it" (FARC Advisor, personal communication, February 5, 2019).

Since the peace agreement gave this recognition, coca growers and the *cocalero* movement were included in the organization of and participation in two forums (a national event in September 2013, and a regional event in San José del Guaviare in October 2013), leading to a list of issues that were introduced in the peace talks in Havana. As the *cocaleros'* organizations were included in the peace process from the very beginning, the expectations were high among *cocalero* communities who had experienced the failure of drugs policies. In the words of a *cocalera* leader:

> "the fourth point of the peace agreement generated many expectations because it was something different, there were agreements that had to be implemented locally, there was planning at the local level and the projects were undertaken with peasants"(Personal Communication, March 18, 2019).

This new approach, which was the result of a struggle of twenty years, overcame the criminalization of coca growers and recognized their political identity (Ramírez, 2017). After the signature of the Peace Accord, peasants' organizations such as the Association of Peasant Reserve Zones (ANZORC), the Peasant's Association of Catatumbo (ASCAMCAT), the Peasant's Association of Cimitarra Valley (ACVC), the National Federation of Unitary Agricultural Unions (FENSUAGRO), and the political and social movement *Marcha Patriótica* launched the Coordinadora Nacional de Cultivadores de Coca, Marihuna y Amapola (COCCAM) (National Coordinator of Coca, Poppy, and Marihuana Cultivators), on the 27 of January 2017 in Popayán, the capital of the Cauca Department. More than 5,000 peasants, indigenous and Afro-Colombians marched in the city under the slogan "*somos campesinos, trabajadores como tú*" (we are peasants, workers like you) (Agencia Prensa Rural, 2017). The COCCAM formally represents the *cocalero* movement in the new substitution programme and aims at organizing the participation of coca producers and collectors, and dynamizing the implementation of the fourth point of the Peace Agreement.

From this moment on, COCCAM, together with delegates from the FARC and the government, started pedagogic workshops to explain the components of the substitution programme and to motivate *cocaleros* families to join it. COCCAM created *cocaleros'* committees in villages and municipalities linked to the PNIS, facilitating the participation of 90,000 families in the PNIS and enabling the signature of collective substitution agreements in 24 of Colombia's 32 departments. As a result of their active participation in the national substitution program, several *cocaleros* refer to themselves as *líderes de sustitución* (substitution leaders). They are the promoters of the PNIS who have been demanding compliance with the terms of the programme, supporting voluntary substitution and resisting forced eradication.

As mentioned above, the shift of government in 2018 signalled the replacement of the substitution policy by the Ruta Futuro (Gobierno de Colombia, 2018), which again prioritizes forced eradication over voluntary substitution (International Crisis Group, 2021). The non-compliance and delays in substitution and the increase in forced eradication operations have created three groups of vulnerable people: coca growers who oppose forced eradication and are therefore being victimised; those who were promoters of the PNIS and no longer have guarantees of compliance and security; and local leaders who are constructing proposals for productive reconversion but who are not part of the PNIS (Arenas et al., 2021). In 2018 the COCCAM denounced the assassination of 47 union leaders active in the implementation of the PNIS, threats against the organization's Board of Directors and the forced displacement of its union leaders (COCCAM, 2018). The human rights programme '*Somos Defensores*' shows that from November 2016 until June 2020, 94 people, peasants and social leaders linked to the PNIS, were assassinated due to "the lack of protection of the territories and the lack of security guarantees, although these were foreseen in the peace agreement for those places where the PNIS is being implemented" (translated from Spanish) (Arenas et al., 2021:34).

The social mobilisations that coincided with the talks in Havana included, among their demands, the voluntary substitution of illicit crops (Abril Bonilla et al., 2019; Ramírez, 2017). However, once the Peace Agreement was signed, and following the ensuing failure of the government to comply with the PNIS, the coca growers resorted to opposition and blockade actions against forced eradication, requesting compliance with the agreements that they had reached with the national government (Abril Bonilla et al., 2019). The COCCAM has repeatedly denounced the Congress for non-compliance with the agreements signed between the national government and the *cocaleros*. Under a new slogan "*Somos campesinos, Colombianos como tú"* (We are peasants, Colombians like you), COCCAM demanded the cessation of forced eradication operations, opposed the resumption of aerial spraying of glyphosate, and called for compliance with the terms of the PNIS in particular, and the peace agreement in general (COCCAM, 2018).

The participation of the peasantry and the *cocalero* movement in the peace agreement in general and its role in the PNIS in particular during

the negotiations in Havana was an important step towards the recognition of the *cocalero* identity as a social movement with political agency and peasant origins. However, participation has had a procedural rather than a transformative function. In the latest development of the program and the Peace Accord, there is a general agreement that the government's discourse has veered back towards the rhetoric of criminalization and left behind the socio-economic aspects of the development plans that emerged from the accord. The national government has chosen the repressive agenda of the war on drugs, which is still the principal obstacle to the implementation of the PNIS (Salgado Ruiz, 2019). Moreover, the peace agreement "has not transformed oppressive economic and political power relations" (Vélez-Torres et al., 2022:17) which are the reasons for coca cultivation, the social relations surrounding it and its protagonists: the *cocaleros* and *raspachines*.

The petitions presented by the *cocalero* movement to the national government in 2018 (2 years after the beginning of the PNIS) express the communities' mistrust of the state. For instance, families who signed substitution agreements with the state still did not have copies of the signed contracts, which deprived them of their rights to demand the fulfilment of the signed agreements (COCCAM-Caquetá Official Petition, 10 December 2018). Participants in the PNIS perceive the national government and its substitution policy as misleading and disloyal. Although, the breaches of agreements have increased the lack of trust and credibility in institutions and the state, the communities have been clear about their interest in continuing to participate in the program.

6. The Substitution Policy from Havana to Briceño, Antioquia

6.1. Cocaleros in the peace agreement

During the peace talks in Havana, two different visions of a solution to the problem of drugs collided. On one hand, the FARC proposal started with land reform, granting formal land ownership titles to landless peasants growing coca. After the peasants had secured tenure, special credit lines with low-interest rates as well as technical assistance would be offered to them. This process would conclude with collective substitution agreements with local communities (FARC Representative, personal communication, February 29, 2019). On the other hand, the national government insisted that the substitution agreements should be the beginning of the process, rather than its conclusion. Both parties also discussed the total amount of money a coca-growing household would need to substitute coca with licit crops. FARC's calculations were around 20,000 USD and the government estimated 6,000 USD, in the end, the two parties agreed on 10,000 USD.

After a long negotiation period, FARC and government representatives agreed on the principles of the National Program for Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS) as being:

- the integration of the PNIS into the Comprehensive Rural Reform,
- joint construction and a participatory approach,
- a territorial approach, and.
- the principles and norms for state and citizenship coexistence (Equipo Negociador del Gobierno Colombiano y las Farc- EP, 2016).

The PNIS was created through decree 896 of 2017 (Presidencia de la República de Colombia, 2017). The program establishes the mechanisms for the productive transition from illicit crops to licit economies. In the first year, it provides a family with a subsidy of 12 million Colombian pesos for the whole year (3300 USD) conditional on them demonstrating that there are no coca plants on the household's land. Additionally, the government grants a capital seed grant of 2 million Colombian pesos (540 USD) for food security projects and 3 million Colombian pesos (870 USD) for technical assistance. The program also includes the payment of 9 million COP (2200 USD) for a short-cycle productive project. For the second year, the program offers 10 million Colombian pesos (2,700 USD) of seed capital for long-term productive projects and access to a special credit line for former coca growers (Arenas et al., 2018). In total, over the two years of the programme, the Colombian state envisaged spending around 10,000 USD per household to achieve successful substitution.

In the aftermath of the peace talks in Havana, the United States Government pressured the Colombian government to reduce the number of coca hectares which reached a historical high in 2017 (UNODC-SIMCI, 2018). According to a former PNIS director, political pressures affected the implementation of the programme because it demanded quick results (personal communication, March 11, 2019). In response to these pressures, the Colombian government proposed the development of a pilot program to show effective results. *Cocaleros* at the peace talks proposed that the selection of the pilot location should be based on the organizational levels of the *cocalero* movement. However, the small municipality of Briceño was selected, based on its size and the government's capacity to implement the program faster (Peasant Leader, personal communication, February 19, 2019).

6.2. The Joint Substitution Effort in Briceño, Antioquia

Briceño, a municipality of approx. 8000 inhabitants, is located in the Bajo Cauca basin, in the north of the department of Antioquia Fig. 1. More than 5,000 of these inhabitants are peasants living in rural villages (DANE, 2018). Before 1990, peasants grew coffee, subsistence crops, and raised some cattle. Since 1990 the fall of coffee prices in the international markets led farmers to grow coca leaf instead (Arenas et al., 2018). Coca cultivation spread all over the Bajo Cauca basin, and the peasants of this region lived solely from the production of illicit crops. Three steps can be discerned in the case study of the PNIS' pilot in Briceño. First, 'cocaleros at risk'—when the FARC, paramilitary and state's army created an unsafe place for rural inhabitants; second, 'towards stabilization'—corresponding with the humanitarian demining and the beginning of the substitution pilot; and, third, the 'Jackets' Runway'—that is when the PNIS introduces several institutions which are about peasants, but not with them (despite the PNIS' principles).

With the arrival of coca in the regional economy, armed groups also entered the territory, first the FARC guerrillas and then the paramilitary groups. Amplified by the geostrategic importance of this territory (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA, 2018), Briceño and other municipalities of Bajo Cauca gradually transformed into a hotspot for territorial disputes between the armed groups that aimed at gaining control over illicit economies as well as over formal extractive megaprojects, informal gold mining projects, and large-scale road, energy and port infrastructure projects in the area (*Ibid*). Squeezed between the FARC and the paramilitary groups, the peasants lived dangerous lives: being economically dependent on the armed groups to sell their coca paste while being constantly harassed by them.

Given the characteristics of the coca trade, the money raised was *dinero fácil*, "easy money that is plentiful but goes out as easily as it comes in" (peasant's leader, personal interview, March 23, 2019). Since 2002—the beginning of the *Seguridad Democrática*[7]- the national army began entering areas under guerrilla control, adding another armed group to the constellation. The FARC guerrillas reacted by planting landmines that deeply affected the population. Briceño was now a dangerous territory, and the constant danger of possible explosions terrified the peasants. When Briceño was selected by the peace agreement and labelled a Peace Laboratory, the first peace intervention was the humanitarian demining under the supervision of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. Peasant's testimonies argue that the demining was not successfully done, accusing the agency of leaving

[7] The *Seguridad Democrática* was the security and defense policy of the government of former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez aimed at dismantling FARC guerrillas.

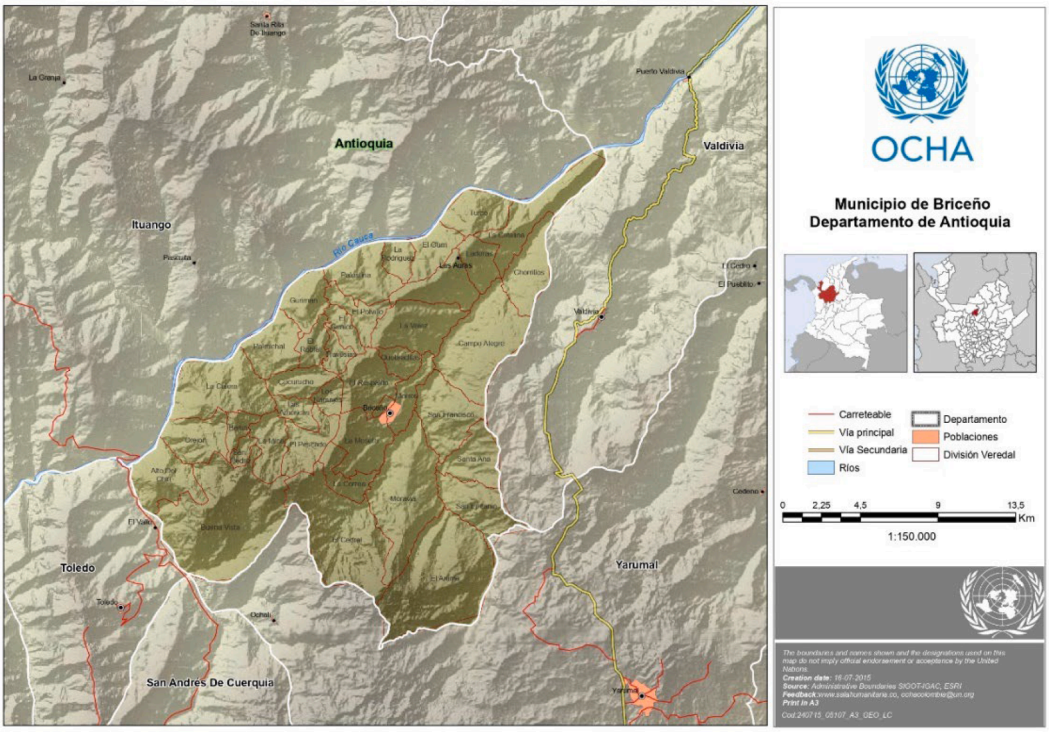

Fig. 1. Map of Briceño Municipality.
Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Fig. 1).

the municipality without taking out all the mines. Ironically, in 2016, on the day that the municipality was declared mine-free, a mine exploded, confirming peasants' conviction that the goals set by the Peace Agreement could not be completely reached.

After the humanitarian demining, 548 coca hectares were eradicated through voluntary substitution agreements in 11 villages selected by the PNIS pilot (Arenas et al., 2018). The authorities proposed a productive transition towards cocoa and coffee with the participation of the *Federación Nacional de Cafeteros* (National Coffee Federation). Coffee and cocoa are considered promising products for substitution because both products are easy to store, transport and sell on the world market. However, peasants were not consulted about this forced transition to coffee and cocoa: the central administration of the substitution programme decided in advance that the resources would be allocated to these activities, which was unidirectionally communicated to the communities involved.

Our data show that, in contrast to other municipalities with a high presence of illicit crops, Briceño did not have a long history of peasants' organizing themselves in trade unions or strong social movements. However, the peasantry participated in the Community Action Councils (Juntas de Acción Comunal, JAC) and the municipality has a Women's organization ASOMUBRI[8]. As the implementation of the humanitarian demining and the substitution program fostered the organization of the JAC councils, their presidents started to promote these programs such as the PNIS, in the municipality. In Pueblo Nuevo, village representatives from the FARC, the national government, the community and International Agencies agreed on the implementation of the joint effort of voluntary substitution, that is, the PNIS pilot in the municipality. At the time of the announcement, the community was enthusiastic about the idea. People from Briceño established thematic 'working tables' to dynamize the substitution pilot, focusing on water, land and environment, conviviality and security, communications, productive development, community and social development, infrastructure, and gender. The topics selected in the village assemblies showed how the peasants envisioned the drug problem: the way forward for them was beyond a mere production-oriented transition towards coffee, and involved a set of diverse but integrated dimensions.

Since the municipality was declared mine-free and the pilot scheme kicked off, the municipality experienced an 'institutional boom' or as *Briceñitas* call it 'the jacket runway':

> "When you arrived in Briceño, you saw jackets of all colours: green, yellow and red. All the institutions were there. They had to open new hostels for all the governmental and non-governmental delegates in the town. But suddenly all that just disappeared" (peasant leader, personal communication, February 12, 2019).

Peasants complained about how the initial euphoria veiled a lack of institutional coordination:

> " We got lunch for free at every event they [the institutions] organised. But we complained because they [the institutions] didn't agree on the dates among themselves […]. Moreover, in every meeting, we talked about the same things over and over again, as if they didn't know about each other"(peasant leader, personal interview, March 23, 2019).

The technical component of the pilot was conducted by a local organization (ASDESEBRI) which identified productive lines for the substitution towards coffee and cocoa and provided technical assistance to the programme beneficiaries. Technical assistance required that the beneficiary families access the resources set by the government on time. However, the disbursement of the resources never happened on time, hindering the implementation of the programme from the outset.

Although the pilot scheme did establish some infrastructure in the municipality, the outcomes of the pilot scheme lagged far behind the targets initially set. Peasants' leaders, *cocaleros* and women's leaders in the municipality agreed that the pilot was not done as planned. Although the peace agreement has a gender component, women's

[8] Asociación de Mujeres de Briceño (Women's Association of Briceño).

organizations in the municipality have shown that this has never translated into the implementation of the programs. Women also pointed out the possibility of re-planting coca due to the government's non-compliance, in the words of a woman leader:

> "Now there is a strong fear that replanting will return because, in addition to the fact that the implementation did not have a gender approach, it is not being implemented as the agreement state… the rural people are enduring hunger because one goes and yes, coca is over, but then the productive projects never began" (personal interview, March 23, 2019)

All the testimonies show that the expectations generated by the PNIS in Briceño were not met, and their participation (during the working tables and all meetings) did not contribute to the decision-making process: decisions were made *about* them, not *with* them.

7. Discussing history and development interventions: colonos and drugs policies

Development interventions in frontier areas are part of everyday state-making processes. Initiatives aimed to 'deactivate' illicit economies - such as the previous substitution programmes, the current PNIS program that emerged from the peace agreement and forced eradication - have been part of such processes in the '*Tierras profundas*' (Ciro, 2018) of Colombia. Lacking a historical and agrarian perspective on how the Colombian state has historically been built in these areas and the resulting relation with *colonos* and *cocaleros*, these initiatives face structural limitations. The Peace Agreement was an important attempt to overcome these limitations but its politically contested nature reduced its potential.

A historical and agrarian perspective includes the transformations of the agrarian conflicts since the 1920s, which gave rise to the identity of the *colonos* peasants (LeGrand, 1986). The agrarian conflicts were transposed in time and space (Fajardo Montaña, 1993) and were transformed in the course of the different processes of colonisation of the agricultural frontier. However, despite their diversity, these processes shared a common feature: a peasantry, expelled from their territories of origin, colonized other lands in search of opportunities to guarantee their livelihoods.

Forced eradication and aerial glyphosate spraying fuelled violence in the countryside, leading to clashes between peasants and the army, and human rights violations. Such repressive drug policies, framed as a 'war on drugs', bear witness to the modernisation-development paradigm of the mid-20th century (Dávalos, 2018) and high-modernist ideology (Scott, 1998), which takes shape, for instance, in infrastructure construction (Uribe, 2019) and state-led colonization processes (LeGrand, 1986). They do not recognize the historical development of the dynamics that gave rise to coca cultivation and processing. This framing of the war on drugs remains the principal obstacle to the implementation of more comprehensive programs, such as PNIS, prioritising voluntary substitution (Salgado Ruiz, 2019), that adhere to a 'self-determined development'-paradigm, built around values such as "the rights of self-determination, free, prior and informed consent, the links between cultural rights and development and rights pertaining to land and natural resources" (Gilbert and Lennox, 2019:4). However, even these programmes are likely to fail if they do not take into account the historical construction of this identity, how it has been shaped by collective action, and how social actors such as *cocaleros* perceive themselves and their relation to the state (Ramírez, 2011).

Despite the Peace Agreement and the PNIS seeking to include social, economic and political dimensions in drugs and substitution policies, the PNIS has (so far) been much like the other substitution policies (Grisaffi and Ledebur, 2016), solely focusing on the agronomic aspects of coca-production and seeking to replace it with high-value commodities such as coffee. This focus ignores the historical reasons that triggered vulnerable, peasant-based rural communities, including Briceño, to enter into coca-growing, such as the dependence on volatile prices on the international coffee market (which is dominated by large-scale producers), or the dynamics of colonization and being expelled to frontier areas. Switching back to coffee, without any socio-economic guarantees, is too risky for *cocaleros*, especially in the context of the Colombian State failing to meet its commitments. It is difficult to imagine a successful transition of this magnitude if the Colombian state does not comply with the basic terms of the substitution agreements signed with coca-growing families in various municipalities of the country. The participation of *ex-cocaleros* in high-value chains exposes them to bigger and more complex shocks, which will probably lead them back to growing coca again. This illustrates the inability of the development orthodoxy to comprehend how and why coca has been an important strategy for dispossessed peasants coping with violence and agricultural commercialization (Gutierrez, 2020).

Moreover, the well-celebrated participation of different actors in the peace agreement and its programs never touched on the core reasons for the armed and agrarian conflict and its relation to the production of illicit crops. Instead, in the places where the substitution pilots were established, these programs became a 'Fest of Vests' in southern Colombia (Vélez-Torres et al., 2022) or, as they were called in Antioquia, a 'Jacket Runway'. Likewise, the peace agreement interventions did not mean the empowerment of local organizations, since organizations from outside were prioritized to make decisions and local organizations were just considered to provide logistical services, as was the case of the women association in Briceño. Participation in voluntary substitution pacts has also been criticized by Jelsma (2018), since these agreements are based on non-negotiable terms, thus the PNIS reinforces the main tendency in Alternative Development approaches on viewing peasants as "passive recipients of aid" (2018:53).

We argue that some actors may have the political will to substitute coca, but their will does not materialize due to structural reasons. This aspect is also identified by Peñaranda et al. (2021), who question the role of the extended presence of the state (under which the peace agreement was grounded) in influencing this. This reluctance on the part of social actors involved in the production of illicit crops and the everyday state-making process are cross-cut by violence and agrarian conflicts. As coca cultivation has played a key role in the state-building process in Colombia (Peñaranda et al., 2021; Torres, 2007), it is necessary to incorporate a historical perspective and a political economy analysis to understand the social dynamics of coca. This is what the *cocaleros* try to explain in their demands and petitions to the national government.

Finally, the shift from an obsession with eradicated hectares to enabling conditions for substitution could contribute to diminishing the negative effects of drug production and trafficking in the countryside without harming rural communities. The substitution of illicit crops is possible *if* the *cocaleros* perceive favourable conditions to exercise their agency and start this transition. This implies that development and drug policies start to stop considering coca growers as criminals, recognise their capacities and agency to actively contribute to the design of the policies, and assure that decisions are made *with* them, not only about them.

8. Conclusion

The design and implementation of drug and development policies in Colombia have been carried out without considering the historical reasons behind the emergence of illicit crops, or the power differentials between the social actors involved in the cultivation and processing of illicit crops. Despite the good intentions behind specific policies such as the PNIS, and the peace talks in Havana, they continue to lack a historical and political economy perspective. Likewise, the policies within the peace agreement are grounded on the misguided assumption that the implementation of the policies will take place in stateless areas (Peñaranda et al., 2021). On the contrary, so-called 'stateless' areas are

the result of the everyday state-making process, and for this reason, the concepts of narco-frontier by Ballvé (2019) and '*Tierras profundas*' by Ciro (2018) are relevant to addressing the complexity of the social dynamics shaping these territories. The state has always been part of these social dynamics, constituting another social force but not a determinant one in the structuring of social relations in these areas (Ciro, 2018). Goodhand et al. (2021) have recently called attention to alternative frameworks for development, peace-building and drugs policies with the capacity of addressing power, space and time in policy analysis and formulation. More compellingly, Goodhand (2021) has called for the urgency of including subaltern perspectives in these policy debates. Furthermore, the empirical evidence presented here suggests putting the *cocaleros* at the centre of the policy-making process. Rather than calling for the participation of, or consultation with, *cocaleros*, the drugs and development policies should be in their own hands. They understand the complex social fabrics in which illicit crops are produced and processed much better. Their knowledge incorporates the historical reasons that led them to take part in this illicit economy and also considers the differences in power among social actors involved in the production of illicit crops. However, their attempts to explain this political economy perspective on diverse occasions and through different means to the authorities, development agencies and state institutions, have been unsuccessful. In conclusion our analysis shows that developing policies that give central stage to rural communities is the only way forward if Colombia ever wants to give peace a chance.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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