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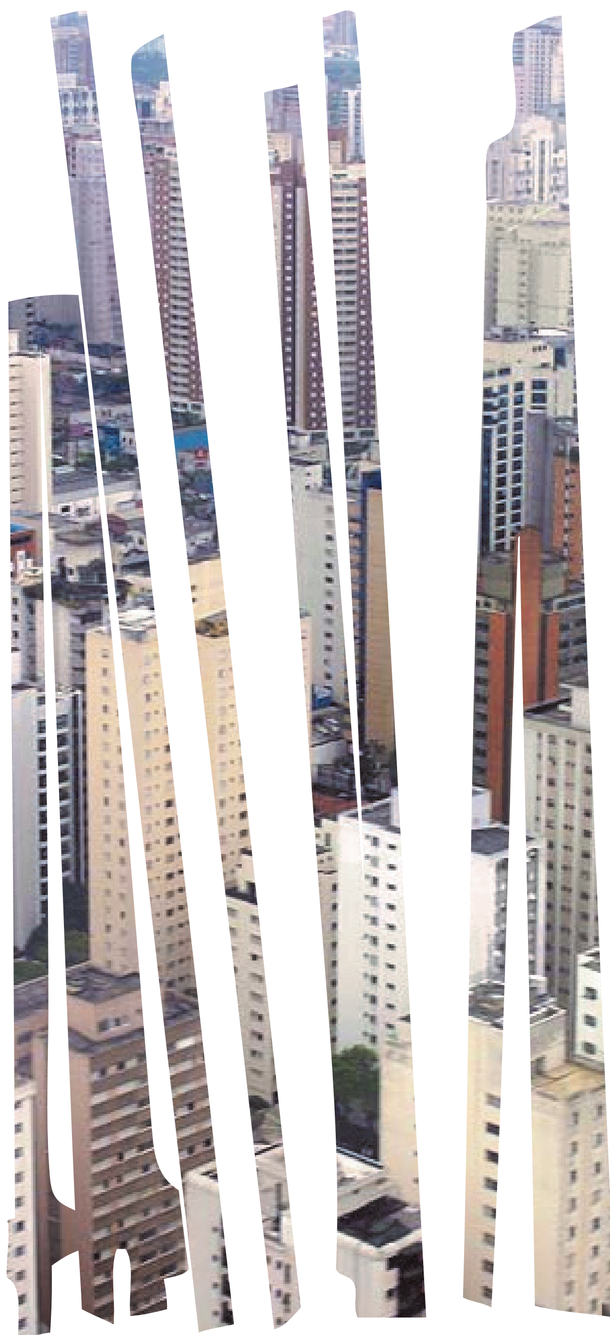
Languages of Stateness

Development, Governance and Inequality

Diana Bocarejo



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Abstract

This working paper is the result of a preliminary analysis of a research project that aims to understand the articulations between local state formation, development and violence. Such articulations are generative of a certain form of governance and of a political subjectivity mainly shaped within the language of neoliberalism. This entails a limited form of state intervention through development projects that leave most of the responsibility to guarantee well-being and even life itself to local inhabitants. As a secondary, and more preliminary line of analysis, I address how within such complex articulations we can understand mechanisms of social inequality (distanciation, exclusion, hierarchization). The specific scenario under study is located in the Colombian Caribbean Coast, where an alternative project on coca eradication was implemented. This project had the stated purpose of forging new relationships between local peasant communities and state institutions and creating new livelihood possibilities.

Keywords: local state formation | social inequality | development | violence and governance

Biographical Notes

Diana Bocarejo is a Colombian Anthropologist, with an MA degree in Social Sciences and a PhD in Anthropology, both from the University of Chicago. Her main areas of interest are Political and Legal Anthropology and Critical Social Studies of Place. She has worked with indigenous and peasant populations analyzing the uses and political implications of multicultural ethnic rights in Colombia, focusing on the strong manner in which these have spatialized ethnic difference and enclosed constitutional rights. She has also worked on State Formation and Political Ecology studying problems of land dispossession, access to natural resources and development with peasant communities who live in areas of coca cultivation and of banana and palm oil plantations in the Colombian Caribbean Coast. From May 2013 until July 2013 she was a Fellow at desiguALdades.net in Research Dimension III: Socio-ecological Inequalities.

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1. Introduction

In this working paper for desiguALdades.net, the research network on interdependent inequalities in Latin America, I intertwine the first analysis of results of ethnographic fieldwork data with the theoretical study of "languages of stateness" and partially, with social inequality. The ideas presented are under development and the text is shaped as a draft that I intend to restructure in the near future into two different articles.

The ruins of drug trafficking and those of the war on drugs are painfully present across the Colombian contemporary social, environmental and political landscape. Such ruins have been transformed by one government after another into a form of state formation deemed capable of shaping different discourses and practices of local governance. The coupling of the war on drugs with the rhetoric of development has been crucial for understanding the genealogy of such aspirations. Of particular relevance are those programs addressed as alternative venues to forced eradication that promote new livelihood alternatives in historically marginalized areas of the nation state, promising a new relationship between civil society and state institutions.

If we take seriously the intention of studying governance (beyond the problem of administration) and the state through its effects or practices, as many contemporary authors have argued (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Trouillot 2001; Gupta 2012), how are we to understand the politics promoted by the programs of coca crop substitution? In this working paper I seek to address how one program that connects the war on drugs with developmental strategies can lead us to understand local languages of stateness and the extent to which it may actually come to reshape them. I use the notion of local languages of stateness employed by different authors who seek to stress the historically specific configurations of states "some practical, others symbolic and performative", to not only study the manner in which the state becomes "real and tangible through symbols, texts, and iconography […] but also to move beyond the state's own prose" and study "how it appears in everyday and localized forms" (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 5). I do not intend to carry out this effort comprehensively and attempt to understand all the everyday practices that build localized states driven by both state and non-state institutions. Instead, I try to understand how through a state development program we can at least start to gauge some of the crucial problems and meanings granted to the state and to its practices of governance and how these practices may actually reshape social inequality in a complex context of violence and corruption.

The program I studied is Familias Guardabosques (Ranger Families or Forest Warden Program), an alternative approach to aerial fumigation and forced coca eradication that involved monetary incentives and productive projects (coffee, cacao, honey, tourism). The implementation of this program in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Northern Colombia provides a unique window to understand two important relationships that serve as powerful frameworks for defining local forms of governance: the manner people perceive and relate to local institutions and elections, and the complex articulation between local inhabitants and state institutions with the entrenched actions of paramilitarism in quotidian politics. These are the two specific concerns that I try to follow in this paper paying particular attention to the manner they are mediated by developmental strategies and rationalities. It is within this overall framework of forms of governance that I believe particular patterns of inequality are actively sustained and articulated both locally and globally. As Sérgio Costa has argued, social inequalities "correspond to entanglements between social processes at different geographical levels […] and emerge at the intersections between different social ascriptions, particularly race, class, gender and ethnicity" (Costa 2011: 5). It is not my intention to analyze those broad entanglements but rather to contribute to the discussion by focusing on the manner in which local politics are of great relevance in understanding some of those social ascriptions and the mechanisms of distancing, exclusion and hierarchization that shape social inequality. As Tania Li argues "analyzing politics means asking about the social forces that sustain the reproduction of inequality, how they are changing, and how they can be changed. What are the relevant social groups, their interests, their alliances, and lines of fracture" (Li 2008: 111).

The program of Familias Guardabosques is an alternative approach to aerial fumigation and forced eradication that included 88,488 families in different rural areas of Colombia, 47% of which had been actively involved in activities of illegal crop production and 53% of which were deemed "at risk of" becoming involved (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Acción Social 2007b: 7, own translation). It was part of the agenda of former president Álvaro Uribe although some of the strategies used were part of Plan Colombia, which was established prior to his mandate. The program included investment from international cooperation funds and state investment[1] and one of its objectives was to preserve "environmental strategic areas, giving a conditioned economic incentive to those families that commit to eradicate illegal crops. In order to participate, the beneficiaries have to maintain the areas free of illegal crops and work in alternative productive projects and initiatives for the recovery and the conservation

1 Some of the funding agencies included international institutions and organizations such as the United States' Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Commission (EC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Bank.

of ecosystems" (UNODC and Acción Social 2007b: 9, own translation). The program has the long-term objective of offering the families involved a legal source of income and new forms of inclusion and engagement with the state.

Development provided a language of bonding and was deemed capable of reshaping both the relationship of local populations with state institutions and their relationship with illegal armed groups. This is not new given that development has been the master rhetoric of state formation in Colombia and in many other so-called "Third World countries". In practice, the desired effects of development were much more complicated to achieve: in particular, given the fact that state developmental intervention was not framed within the desired welfare state local inhabitants were wanting, but instead, within neoliberal forms of economic intervention. Such intervention offered a symbolic form of inclusion related only to a strong presidential image and was premised upon the definition of a peasant entrepreneur, master of his destiny and highly responsible for the success of development and of social change in the area. These premises became new ways of making distinctions of former populations addressed homogeneously as "illegal", defining ways of behavior and of exclusion and inclusion of state resources.

If these aspirations were not ambitious enough, the program was supposed to help end the "vicious circle of illegal crops-violence-terrorism-drug trafficking", and become "a crucial instrument for the achievement of peace in Colombia" (UNODC and Acción Social 2007b: 71, own translation; see also Martínez 2008). Nevertheless, the program was installed in very complex violent contexts, such as in the Sierra, where the open sovereignty of paramilitary forces was, and still is in many ways, lived in the political and daily lives of local inhabitants. This is troubling because this reality has persisted even after the demobilization of paramilitaries was consolidated in the region in 2006 and paramilitary commanders of the area embraced, or at least accepted, the Ley de Justicia y Paz that served as a special transitional law during the process. It is made even more disturbing by the fact that those commanders were extradited to the United States in 2008 with drug trafficking charges after government accusations of their continuous perpetration of criminal acts after demobilization.

Not astonishingly then, a developmental strategy was less than sufficient for countering the pervasive political culture of the area in terms of corruption and indifference to electoral politics and local state institutions, and the highly coercive power of paramilitaries. What is interesting to analyze is how much the program actually made an open move to either break such dynamics or whether it instead tried to adjust to them. What is more, the program provided an explanation of the pervasive inequalities lived by local inhabitants through the language of neoliberal development (i.e. choice,

consumer, markets, self-interest, etc.). I do not believe these processes ought to be understood as completely conscious, or through ideas of conspiracy, but they are nevertheless quite powerfully institutionalized.

As many authors have widely proved, “development is the name not only for a value, but also for a dominant problematic or interpretive grid through which the impoverished regions of the world are known to us [so that] a host of everyday observations are rendered intelligible and meaningful” (Ferguson 1990: xiii). The lives of local inhabitants addressed as illegal citizens and their entrance to legality was rendered intelligible by this interpretive grid. Thus, Familias Guardabosques mobilized a developmental apparatus that as in many other areas of Latin America and the world

> intended to achieve particular goals: the state organization of social life; the depoliticization of issues; the linking of countries and communities to world economies in specific ways; the transformation of local cultures in line with modern standards and orientations; including the extension to Third World communities of cultural practices of modern origin based on notions of individuality, rationality, economy, and the like (Escobar 1997: 504, see also Ferguson 1990; Ribeiro 1995).

By gathering testimony of experiences both past and present I show how the reach of anti-drug policies such as Familias Guardabosques is determined by a wide variety of local issues. Seriously taking into consideration the experiences of people first involved in drug trafficking and later anti-drug policies means more than treating them as “anecdotal” perceptions that merely accompany the certitude of execution statistics; it means paying close attention to quotidian practices (economic and political) and trying to address people’s aspirations and the extent to which anti-drug policy can fulfill them. During 2012 a team of two researchers and I worked in the lower and middle areas of the Sierra (Tinajas, Cacahualito, Nuevo Mejico, San Rafael, Calabazo, Quebrada María, Boquerón, Transjordania and Páramo), using mainly interviews, informal conversations, and ethnographic observations of quotidian working routines and interactions with representatives of the program. This research was part of the program “Drugs, Security and Democracy” of the U.S. Social Science Research Council which has opened an interesting forum of discussion regarding the war on drugs in the Americas. It has also provided, as various Latin American authors previously had (Molano 2000; Vargas 2003; Uribe and Mejía 2011), the necessary studies to address the consequences of the war on drugs and its degree of success.

In a first short section I open up the analysis by showing some of the complexities of governance that may be hidden with the notion of "state absence". This idea is very much present as an explanatory device of the political situation of a wide variety of marginalized areas and of inequality in the country and the world. However, if taken as an unproblematic truth it tends to foreclose the study of the actual practices that shape governance in those places. In the second section, I study the manner in which beneficiaries of the program of Familias Guardabosques relate to state institutions: the strong symbolic power acquired by the Office of the President in granting new forms of visibility and inclusion, and the lack of integration with local state institutions. This will lead to a discussion about the type of developmental model that was actually installed, and the problems of its practice within the context studied. In a third section, I address the problem of violence by showing how the phenomenon of paramilitary sovereignty is crucial for understanding local forms of governance and local state formation and the way Familias Guardabosques related to this context. As Nancy Peluso argues, processes of decentralization, which in this case include the management of violence and access and control over resources, affect "the ways different institutional and individual actors derive benefits, shoulder costs, and make claims" creating "conditions where conflict is likely, while [lacking] steps for realizing the redistributive goals of decentralization aggravates the tensions and potential for violence" (Peluso 2007: 23). As a closing section I will frame some of the main issues about the developmental strategy of Familias Guardabosques within broad critiques made by different local scholars about the developmental state apparatus. I will then study how within the current neoliberal developmental politics there is a strong definition of individual responsible subjects whose (in)capacities become an easy explanation for the ongoing precarious situation of the local peasantry and the indifference of local state institutions. I argue that it is within this new idea of a responsible subject, the precariousness of a thorough state intervention, and the complex relationship between violence and governance, that some of the mechanisms of social inequality are being framed.

2. Beyond the Absence of State

There is a pervasive rhetoric in Latin America about the absence of state institutions to enforce the rule of law and to ensure the well-being of the population in marginalized as well as non-marginalized areas. Local inhabitants in the Sierra who were beneficiaries of the program of Familias Guardabosques widely evoked this perception that also has long and deep roots in academic discourse. I would argue however, that if taken uncritically, this statement tends to foreclose the discussion of the actual practices of governance in the region and its mechanisms of inequality.

As Peluso argues, "'weakness' and 'political will' are such watered down phrases that it is difficult to take them seriously" (2007: 23). In this sense, I would like to present some of the consequences of this rhetoric. Let me begin with one pervasive explanation about the historical "absence of the state" in the region: its geographical remoteness. Both in academic and public policy discourse the argument follows that remote places are harder to govern, and fails to address how their remoteness (not only in the geographical sense) is actively built within complex historical power relations. One academic example of this argument was famously pronounced by Fernand Braudel in the statement "civilization cannot climb hills" (Braudel 1966: 32-33). This argument has more recently been explored by James Scott in his book *The Art of Not Being Governed* where he states, "hills are not simply a space of political resistance but also a zone of cultural refusal […]. This cultural chasm between the mountains and the plains has been claimed as something of a historical constant in Europe" (Scott 2009: 20).

These ideas may very well apply to the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, the highest coastal mountain in the world that rises from sea level up to snow caps with a long story of marginalization perceived not only as both a slot for poverty and violence but also romantically as one of utopia. James Scott explains that Fernand Braudel acknowledged the political autonomy of the hills when he approvingly quoted Baron de Tott to the effect that "the steepest places have always been the asylum of liberty" (Scott 2009: 20). He wrote:

> The mountains are as a rule a world apart from civilizations which are an urban and lowland achievement. Their history is to have none, to remain always on the fringes of the great waves of civilization, even the longest and most persistent, which may spread over great distances in the horizontal plane but are powerless to move vertically when faced with an obstacle of several hundred meters (Scott 2009: 20).

The Sierra has experienced a national and international fascination given its ecological richness, the utopic imaginations around the "natural and spiritual" lives of indigenous groups that inhabit the mountain, and the social contradictions of Colombian magical realism drawn from complex histories of banana plantations, mining industries, tourism and violence.

In the 21st century, however, within the context of the war on drugs, though state institutions may still not climb mountains easily, they can for example have planes to fly over the mountains to spray crops, an activity that entails both a practical and

symbolic way of making places and people "legible". Let us not forget that legibility is in fact one of the main practices of governance. Here legibility refers to the stigmatization of people as illegal producers, a form of classifying and arranging a population in ways that simplified some of the classic state functions (Scott 1997: 2). In this case, those functions relate to the prevention of practices deemed illegal and the consequent act of enforcing punishment not only against them but also against their crops and land.

Beyond this sarcastic image of state practices of fumigation, that by the way have been proved to be utterly inefficient and damaging (Uribe and Mejía 2011), there is a more nuanced argument to make. In spite of the pervasiveness of ideas about the absence of the state, there are at least three problems or clarifications to be made when referring to this idea. First, such rhetoric usually serves as an excuse to not study the actual practices and discourses of different state and non-state institutions that work with the government's endorsement (precarious though their actions may appear and not so precarious when fumigating thousands hectares of land). Second, this idea is very different from stating that people have completely forgotten about the government or the state. Marginality is always a form of state engagement, the precarious presence of state institutions is also a direct action, a positive statement not a normative one. As Anna Tsing explains,

> marginality is a powerful technique precisely because margins are real places where roads do not penetrate, goods are rarely accessible, schools barely exist, as well as a discursive and ideological position from which people learn how to talk about things like state justice and about themselves (Tsing 1993: 38).

In sum, marginality is always "an ongoing relationship with power" and a relationship of historical relations of dispossession that actively include but go beyond state institutions that may be not be simplified in the idiom of "state absence" (Tsing 1993: 90). By asserting the active construction of marginality one can gauge to the specific mechanisms through social inequality is produced. As Göran Therborn states "inequality can come about in different ways" some of which include distanciation, exclusion, hierarchization and exploitation (Therborn 2011: 19). These different forms are entangled through every day mechanisms in which the contours of languages of stateness produced play an important role.

As many ethnographies of the state have proven, if we think of the state through its practices or furthermore if we think of "state like" practices of governance such as (1) asserting territorial sovereignty by the monopolization of violence (by permanent and visible military and police forces); (2) the gathering and control of knowledge of the

population; and (3) the generation of resources that ensure the reproduction and well-being of the population (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 7), government absence is a positive assertion: it is the action of being widely present even if only in the stigmatization of people, the indifference of bureaucrats, the incapacity of development projects, or in not trying to gain complete control over the means of violence. I will return in the next sections to these three forms of entering theoretically and methodologically to the problem of governance.

Third and finally, the precariousness of state institutions does not mean the absence of governance because state institutions are not the only ones asserting such "state like practices". As has been widely argued, "everyday tracks of rule, process, and surplus extraction allows us to study the operation of power in a disaggregated manner and to de-emphasize the state as the ultimate seat of power" (Sharma and Gupta 2006). This is what Nikolas Rose calls the ''de-statization of government'' (1996: 56). Following those lines I take governance as "the administration of access to and provision of rights, services and goods that imply also the definition of categories of inclusion and entitlements that are explicit or implicit in governmental practices and that are institutionalized by many other non-state agents" (Eckert, Dafinger and Behrends 2003: 19). Here I do not take governance in the mainstream version only as an administrative set of tasks but as a concept that involves politics immersed in power asymmetries and social inequalities. In that manner the concept is inscribed in a wider notion of politics leaving "behind conventional distinctions between state, civil society and the economy, between public and private, and does not privilege one organisation or institution, like the state, as the 'natural' or 'right' centre of governance" (Eckert, Dafinger and Behrends 2003: 19).

Hence, my claim here is that drug production as well as the critique of the war on drugs provides a language of non-governmental presence that in fact hides the different manners in which state institutions are locally present and being formed, and also the different processes of governance instituted also by non-state institutions, which, as I will argue later in this paper, relate for example to the actions of armed paramilitary groups. Following these discussions I will turn to the problem of the civil society's engagement with state institutions in order to study how the developmental apparatus used by Familias Guardabosques granted new particular meanings to the welfare state, so longed for in the area, and proclaimed a new regime of individual responsibility that to me is very distant from the historical configuration of subjects in the area. The power of this language infuses the precariousness of state practices that serve as discursive mechanisms through which local divisions in the area between small peasants and

consolidated entrepreneurs are articulated, that in turn also reflect the local hierarchies of land tenure and access to state and non-state resources.

3. The Bond of Development

One of the theoretical and methodological intentions of ethnographies of the state has been to understand the mechanisms though which the state is understood and shaped within banal practices of bureaucracies so that “the sphere of everyday practices is the primary arena in which people learn something about the state” (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 11). How are we to address those quotidian practices associated with the developmental strategies of the Familias Guardabosques? The program in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta included a number of state acts and routines that served to visibilize both the central government, headed by the then-President Álvaro Uribe, and the beneficiaries who were finally addressed not as stigmatized agents but as examples of “legality”. These acts included: events of negotiation and inclusion of the beneficiaries through contracts, visits of international and national “verifiers” (*verificadores)* in charge of following the removal of coca cultivations, massive inaugural acts, days of payment, integration meetings between beneficiaries, workshops on sustainable development and entrepreneurship, interactions with technicians of developmental projects and with local bureaucrats in charge of the program, and visits of international cooperation representatives (United Nations, USAID).

All of these in fact were able to break the quotidian local state indifference in the area, even if only for short periods of time. The indifference of bureaucracy, as Michael Herzfeld has argued, is arbitrarily selective like “benign neglect, which is one of its varieties, it provides a moral alibi for inaction” (Herzfeld 1992: 33). Such inaction has been felt and openly expressed by beneficiaries of Familias Guardabosques who expressed, like Miguel, that the program was their “first and probably the only time of integration in a state program of development […] not as beneficiaries of petty subsidies or of the now unreachable bank loans promoted by the state”.[2]

The acts of high visibility of the program were widely recognized by local beneficiaries. As Marta, a beneficiary of the Vereda[3] Boquerón program recounts, “who would have thought that I was going to meet the president! Or that I would visit and be a guest

2 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Quebrada María, October 2011. This and all interviews cited in this paper were conducted in Spanish and translated by the author. Personal names have been anonymized to protect the identity of interview partners.

3 A *vereda* is a form of territorial organization in Colombia. As administrative units, the *veredas* subdivide the municipalities into smaller administrative parts.

at the Mendihuaca!".[4] The program of Familias Guardabosques was developed by Acción Social, an institution that at the time centralized most of the international cooperation funds to Colombia and that was part of the President's Office. The program negotiated directly with the beneficiaries who voluntarily signed a contract stating they could not cultivate or work in illegal crop production and trafficking. This was, as one of the program's bureaucrats explained "the entrance to legality, to the legality of development".[5] Javier from Quebrada María also explained the importance of the symbolic entrance to legality

> I must admit that when we first started I really felt that my interest was in the money which is always welcome, and that was fine. I thought I would see how it all worked out. I did not really know the state. Later on I understood that was really important was that the towns [*veredas*] that did not participate in the program would not be perceived as being transparent. We are going to clean up that image.[6]

During some of the presidential visits and highly publicized acts of the program local newspapers stated, for example, that: "The Sierra Will Have No More Guerrillas or Paramilitaries" (headline in *El Informador*, 25 February 2004, own translation); "Álvaro Uribe had very close encounters with many of those attending, especially with children who wanted to shake the president's hand" (caption, *Hoy Diario del Magdalena*, 30 April 2005, own translation), and "Guardabosques from Santa Marta: An Example for All Colombian Peasants" (headline, *Cafinotas*, Sept. 2006, own translation).

People recall and cherish with pride their participation in the different events organized by the program. Many of them keep and take particular care of the certificates of attendance referring to them as their "diplomas", and some post their certificates or pictures allusive of the program on the walls in their homes. This is the symbolic power of development as a promise or bond to forge new relationships between the state and civil society.

4 A prestigious hotel near the Caribbean sea in the area of Santa Marta.

5 Interview with state representative of the program Familias Guardabosques, Santa Marta, October 2011.

6 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Quebrada María, October 2011.

Figure 1: Collage of Images Made by Beneficiaries of the Program Working in Tourism in San Rafael

Source: Photo taken by Diana Bocarejo, San Rafael, November 2, 2011.

The program was based on two developmental strategies: monetary incentives and productive programs used not only to eradicate illegal crop cultivation but also to generate the necessary incentives to consolidate alternative legal economies. The monetary incentive that was given amounted to 150 dollars per month per family for three years. Following the analysis of UNODC (2007a) and also from the interviews I carried out, this incentive has allowed some people to acquire or legalize their land and to improve their houses and their cultivation areas. People gathered in a wide variety of workshops. Some of the certificates that people kept included short courses on Solidary Economics, Community Organizations, Fostering Entrepreneurialism, Sustainable Forest Management, Agricultural Best Practices, Entrepreneurial Management Education, Experiences of Success, Ecological Coffee Processing Centers, Fish Farming etc. Perceptions of these workshops are very positive because they generated a space of social gathering for people living in different *veredas* and a strong sentiment of inclusion not as illegal citizens but as agricultural or tourist entrepreneurs. All of them were premised on building knowledge and material conditions to start new, or to consolidate old, agricultural or touristic projects. In addition, these workshops were crucial practices that explained the type of bond that developmental strategies were trying to promote in the area. An important content of such interventions hinged upon the importance of building the individual capacities of peasants, shaping them as entrepreneurs, capable of saving money, and constantly investing in their agricultural or touristic programs.

There is an inherent contradiction in this type of alternative programs: they are built with the illusion of a welfare state when in fact developmental strategies are drawn up within a neoliberal state in which not only are government's old functions delegated to non-state institutions, but in this case, local institutions were not even active participants, and the success of the program was actually based upon the consolidation of local entrepreneurs (a problem that I will address in the final section and that I believe is a crucial mechanism that shapes practices of exclusion).

What is the extent to which a new relationship with state institutions is forged within such a context? The bond created by the developmental strategies with state institutions was not particularly long lasting and was not able to establish new quotidian relationship with local state institutions. The question is important as it may forge new possibilities of equalization, in Therborn's terms in terms at least of labor and labor alliances (Therborn 2011: 22). Familias Guardabosques offered a very potent language of inclusion that tried to break with the stigmatization of local populations addressed as illegal. However, the actual practices established with state institutions did not drastically change. A first inherent problem related to this point was the program duration. In fact, the alternative economic projects, which form a crucial part of the scheme, were, in most cases, actively supported for a few months or at most for two years. The program acknowledges that results will not happen in short periods of time but the lack of direct and continuous assistance (in monetary incentives, and follow up strategies) undermines the achievements of economic rural development projects and the actual capacities to create what they call a strong installed capacity. The duration of this sort of investment has been crucial as shown and argued by other alternative development strategies used for illegal crop substitution (see for example Mansfield 2006 for the case of Thailand). The problem of duration relates to the lack of a serious follow up strategy. As Juan, an expert technician of cacao who followed some of the projects in the area states,

> The problem of follow-up is connected to financial resources. It is a problem of not providing fallback options or assistance to the organizations and institutions that are working in the area for the sake of following up thoroughly with the farmers. For example, take the UMATA [Unidad Municipal de Asistencia Técnica Agropecuaria, or Municipal Units of Technical Agricultural Assistance] which should sometimes visit the cacao or coffee farms and say 'hey, you are planting this incorrectly' and help then and show them, and say 'this is how you do it, let's

> do this'. Instead, UMATA in Santa Marta has not been out to the countryside in eight years.[7]

In addition to this, there have been two main problems regarding the coordination of the activities: (1) In many cases the installation of the productive projects have tended to come at the end of the program when the incentive payments are about to end; (2) Due to the contractual obligations of Acción Social, which require most of the investments to be started and finished within the state fiscal year, most projects have been truncated or completed in a rush, even if the technical conditions for cultivating were not optimal. Representatives of the program also explain the complexity of several contractual procedures. As a representative of the Red de Productores ecológicos Ecolsierra explains

> There are too many bureaucratic procedures involved in the whole thing. For example, we are nowadays concerned because we have an alliance to grow cacao, and Acción Social made the commitment to give us five million five hundred thousand to pay for the promoter ($2550), but to this day they have not given us any money and we have been working on the project for four or five months. So here we are with no real follow up or assistance in the countryside.[8]

In addition, there have been issues with product commercialization. Given that 86% of the productive projects initiated or consolidated by the program involve agricultural production (UNODC and Acción Social 2007a), the commercialization process is crucial. Acción Social, the United Nations and certain institutions that have participated in agricultural projects such as la Federación Colombiana de Cafeteros (Colombian Coffee Growers Federation) and Red Ecolsierra have contributed somewhat to this commercialization. However, as I discussed with representatives of these institutions, they believe commercial organizations should also be incorporated from the beginning of the program to create a thorough follow up strategy of commercialization as a substantial part of the program. Following their perception, this will help to generate more direct sales opportunities, without the participation of intermediaries, getting more profit and also promoting specific projects in conjunction with the companies.

By contrast, one of the cases of development strategies that generated success stories within the framework of illegal crop substitution explained the relevance of having robust investment projects in terms of the duration, investment funds and coordination

7 Interview with an expert on cacao cultivation hired by the program of Familias Guardabosques, Santa Marta, January 2012.

8 Interview with an expert on cacao cultivation hired by the program of Familias Guardabosques, Santa Marta, January 2012.

of efforts of different state and non-state institutions (Mansfield 2006). David Mansfield explains how the success of Thailand on illicit crops is the result of an

> effort that has revealed the necessary investment in 'nation building' (where US$ 2.6 billion [current prices] was invested in the development of the northern areas between 1970 and 2000) as a prerequisite to the success of more discrete Alternative Development efforts (where the investment was nearer US$460 million [current prices] over the same period). The Thai example tends to suggest a sustainable solution to illicit drug crop cultivation goes well beyond the scope of specific project interventions but needs a concerted and coordinated effort across arrange of different sectors and ministries. Indeed, it is now increasingly accepted that no single project can address the myriad of motivations and factors that influence illicit drug crop cultivation(even at a local level) and that the elimination of coca and opium poppy will be dependent on the achievement of broader development goals (Mansfield 2006: 14).

Under the conditions of implementation of Familias Guardabosques in the Sierra, what is the actual "new" relationship being forged with state institutions? The notion of "states at work" in the case of local state institutions is filled with indifference, avoidance and lack of commitment with the project. As one representative of the program recalls "the Mayor and Governor's offices have always worked separately here. We have never been able to integrate the local government institutions". As such, in the different activities of the program that as I mentioned earlier included contracts of inclusion of beneficiaries, workshops, installation of productive projects, follow up activities and payments, local state institutions were not active participants. Their presence was only noticed in some of the inaugural events, in particular, when then-President Uribe came into town. The official local link of the project was supposed to be in charge of the Unidad Municipal de Asistencia Técnica Agropecuaria (UMATA) a very precarious link given their very limited human and economic resources and the lack of an active agenda drawing the terms of their intervention. Given the emphasis of Familias Guardabosques on the environment, the program representatives expressed that they openly tried to build a relationship with the local office of National Parks and with the Corporación Autónoma Regional del Magdalena (CORPAMAG). As one of the representatives explained, these meetings and approaches were not productive and did not provide any active engagement from the institutions: "The Parks Office works differently in different places but if there is a place where they tend to be quite recalcitrant, this is it. We have not been able to get anything done with them, it's been impossible, we have made so many trips to that office". In the case of CORPAMAG the same representative stated that "this government office does not provide very much at

all [even though it is] a corporate public government entity in charge of managing the environment and promoting sustainable development in Magdalena".[9]

In sum, the program was not able to deliver any strong intervention in environmental policy, a problem that in part was because of the lack of articulation with local environmental state institutions. Moreover, the problem relates with a long history of criminalization of peasants in the area promoted by environmental institutions who have banned for decades their use of the two National Parks (see Ojeda 2012 for a more thorough analysis on this topic). This criminalization has excluded peasant communities before and after the installation of the project. These communities are characterized as being destructive and as being agents that do not actively produce socio-natural environments but are merely isolated from them. This powerful language provides a mechanism of reproducing distanciation and exclusion, in this case between local peasantry thought to be not environmentally-friendly, and experts, visitors, tourists who mobilize languages of conservation.

Another state institution that was painfully absent was the Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural (Colombian Institute of Rural Development, INCODER), the office that has as one of its objectives "to facilitate that small and medium rural producers have access to land and other resources, in order to promote different alternatives for the efficient, rationalized and sustainable use of these resources" (INCODER 2012, own translation). This of course is a crucial concern since we ought to think about "mechanisms of equalization" given that land tenure is such a contentious issue in many parts of the Sierra, in particular due to the pressures of tourist and agricultural industries and of violent armed actors in the area. Moreover, the area has a long history of problems related to formal legalization of land titles that was not overtly taken into consideration in the design of the program. Many beneficiaries of the Familias Guardabosques program tried to reach INCODER's bureaucracy in order to legalize their land, arguing the necessity of such recognition for ensuring the investments they were making within the developmental program. In studies of illegal crop cultivation, it has been argued that "where household access to land is acute both coca and opium have been found to be extensively grown" (Mansfield 2006: 7; see also Kruseman 1985). In spite of this, Familias Guardabosques has not promoted clear policies regarding land legalization for its beneficiaries and has not worked closely with the relevant state institution in charge, INCODER. Many beneficiaries of the program are not legal owners of their lands. This is the case because some people occupy land they do not own, some beneficiaries of the program have not gone through the process of

9 Interview with state representative of the program Familias Guardabosques, Santa Marta, November 2011.

legally registering their land (an expensive process), or because the land has not been divided according to official procedures and hence land titles have not been granted. The program's intentions to promote land legalization were based entirely on the assumption that beneficiaries already had land and that they would use the monetary incentive provided by the program to legalize it and fulfill all the official procedures. Unfortunately, the local state bureaucracy of INCODER did not actively identify with the program, and for many beneficiaries land legalization and land acquisition was, and still is, a necessary condition for guaranteeing the commitment and investment of the program's beneficiaries in the alternative projects promoted. For many local inhabitants their participation in Familias Guardabosques was a way of affirming their presence in the area, as legal and visible citizens. However, given the strong pressures and new configurations of land tenure in the area driven by tourist or agroindustrial projects and by the violence exerted by paramilitaries and state forces, local inhabitants feel that officially owning their land is a minimum condition to reclaim land dispossession or at least to be able to sell their land.

The lack of active participation of local state institutions is also explained by an open attempt of the program to protect its resources and credibility, by, to some extent, avoiding to get involved with local bureaucracies widely accused of corruption and of having links with armed groups. As Miguel, a beneficiary of the program explains:

> the national government and others, recognizing the political mess and bad politicians that do not do anything transparently that are present here, thought that it would be best if the money did not go through the hands of these scoundrels. Otherwise we would not have received anything and we would have gotten a small fraction of what was sent from the President's office. So they decided to do it directly and we didn't believe them. We would say that if the Mayor's or Governor's Office got their hands on this, we will not get anything and we are not going to be a part of that. But they said that we would work directly with the President's Office, with Acción Social and the communities and they came to trust us very much. We established good friendships with those people.[10]

The program has suffered from numerous scandals as a result of program organizers being seen negotiating with armed groups to facilitate the setting-up of the program in some areas. In one of the cases, which was openly addressed in the media, took place in Urabá where, through the consolidation of the Asociación Comunitaria de Urabá y Córdoba (ASOCOMUN), created by the brother of a paramilitary commander "El Alemán", "they sought to take funds from the public and private sector through projects

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10 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Quebrada María, October 2011.

and programs, one of which is Familias Guardabosques" (VerdadAbierta.com 2011, own translation). The then-National Coordinator of the Program against Illicit Crops (PCI) of the Uribe government, when referring to this open relationship of the program with paramilitarism, stated that she "met alias 'Germán Monsalve' in 2004 when she first arrived in the area for the purpose of getting the Familias Guardabosques program going […] I met him that year as a local leader. I did not know that he was 'El Alemán's' brother. I came to know that sometime later" (Verdadabierta.com 2012, own translation). The problem escalated even further when in the judgment against congressman Antonio Valencia Duque, who recognized his relations with paramilitary groups in Urabá, he "declared that he used the Familias Guardabosques program, sponsored by ASOCOMUN, to get enough votes in the 2006 election" (VerdadAbierta.com 2011, own translation).

In the Sierra the paramilitary commander of the area approved the installation of the program and was directly involved in some of its activities. I will go back to this topic in the following section.

For now, an important lesson learned from these anti-drug policies is that the non-intervention of local state authorities only reinforces the perception that they are neglecting the areas where the projects are being implemented. More troubling is the fact that the program has not been inserted into local state investment agendas. Hence, as has been argued by Ricardo Vargas (2010: 67 own translation) Familias Guardabosques "has only been associated to a politics of subsidies without being included in a development plan negotiated with local organized communities". This also provided a new form of distanciation of the local communities in relation to the planning procedures of the state, very far from the current conceptions of participatory budget that have tried to actively incorporate local populations in order to promote changes in the unequal access to citizen participation.

Problems with the duration of the program, the coordination of monetary incentives and productive projects, the commercialization of products, lack of a thorough follow up strategy and the precariousness of the intervention of local state institutions, could and should in fact be seen as issues related to the design and implementation of the program. Following these problems one might think as Li points out that "one approach to the contradiction between dispossession and protection would be to look at how it is sustained by quotidian practices of compromise that enable, at the end of the day, a monstrous disavowal" (Li 2010: 80; see also Mosse 2008). Hence, the result could be thought as a problem of "bad faith, or the fact that the protection is real but minimal, self-serving and disciplinary" (Li 2010: 80). However, mechanisms of inequality in this

case in terms of distanciation and exclusion should be understood, following Li, as not originating from a “master plan [instead of] only assemblages pulled together by one set of social forces, only to fragment and reassemble” (Li 2010: 80).

As I will show in the final section these problems relate to the manner in which the developmental apparatus in Colombia has been conceived and practiced, in particular to the problems related with the lack of a broad conception of “rural reform” in which specific programs such as Familias Guardabosques should be included within wider local, regional and national plans. In addition to framing these critiques within the work of various local scholars interested in development, I believe that Familias Guardabosques is a good example for understanding how the rationale of current developmental politics hinges so strongly in the belief in an entrepreneurial peasant subjectivity that in turn becomes an easy target for excusing the lack of thorough state institutional investment, that in turn reproduces the sort of distant relationship between civil society and local state institutionality.

4. Violence and Governance in the Sierra

In spite of the different approaches on state formation, one of the shared debates is the pursuit of asserting territorial sovereignty by the monopolization or control of violence (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 7). However, such control of violence in Colombia has been, to say the least, not a process uniquely or widely owned by the state. Familias Guardabosques unfolded during a critical period of violence in the Sierra after decades of paramilitary rule entrenched in the quotidian life of local inhabitants and in the political culture of the region. Such entrenchment was based on an intensive cocaine economy in which the region not only produced it but was also used for trafficking. Hence, the program was installed within a complex configuration of non-state sovereignty and, a few years before, the process of government demobilization with paramilitaries started in the Colombian Caribbean Coast. People living in the area had to live within paramilitary dominance and their life was controlled and challenged.

Their stigmatization as illegal producers of cocaine and as citizens living within a parallel sovereign system also served as an important mechanism of producing inequality. As Stuart Hall explained, “stereotyping also deploys a strategy of *splitting”* (Hall 1997: 258, original emphasis). Hall has worked on this issue showing how “stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power. Power is usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group […] it classifies people according to a norm and constructs the excluded as ‘other’” (Hall 1997: 258-259). Moreover, in the case under analysis a profound expression of inequality is experienced by the little value

that the life of local peasants living within paramilitary rule has for state institutions. This I would say is a radical form of shaping differences between citizens, related to the Foucauldian premise "to make live and to let die". The mechanisms of letting people die have been a growing object of study in contemporary social theory shaping new readings of social inequality. For instance, in his last book Akhil Gupta analyzes development and poverty as biopolitics, stating that "the life-denying consequences of chronic poverty […] have in fact largely disappeared from public discussion" (Gupta 2012: 4). For him the analysis of development should not only rest on the manner inequality emerges or is reproduced by the implementation of developmental projects but we ought to take seriously how the life of millions of people has come to mean so little for contemporary nation states. Tania Li has also addressed the problems of development under such lenses using the concept of "surplus populations". She explains that it "is offensive to suggest that some people are surplus, yet […] the truth is that large numbers are in fact abandoned about the politics of let die scenarios" (Li 2010: 68).

In addition, those "let die" scenarios acquire another layer of complexity when they are also so strongly shaped by the dispute between different sovereignties of state and other armed groups, such as those in the case analyzed. How could we address the relationship and complexities of the implementation of the program Familias Guardabosques in the volatile context of paramilitarism in the Sierra?

On the one hand, as I stated previously, the program tried to forge a new space isolated from local state institutions. On the other hand, the program needed the approval of Giraldo who actually gave his consent so that the process could start. People recall how at the start of the negotiation with representatives of the program coming from Bogotá:

> since we had seen that the different governments had never delivered, how could we be expected to pull out our crops. What were we to feed ourselves with? They said that a subsidy was on the way, they said that this and that was coming, but we, as representatives and leaders of the community, said it could not be, that that was impossible. The organization (referring to the paramilitary organization) had the same conviction so the program representatives left.[11]

However, during those years local inhabitants also recall how Giraldo "would always say that we should work and plant something else, because this business is going to end" and then after studying the intentions of the program of Familias Guardabosques

11 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Nuevo México, May 2012.

he started saying that “anyone who wanted to do it should do it, the standing order is that they should do it because there is no other way out, this business is going to end”.[12]

Pablo who lives further up in the mountain, explained how the messages started to circulate all over the Sierra and recalls how

> […] At first the government convinced us and Sr. Hernán said that we should tell the community that it was better for us to eradicate or we would get fumigated on and would not get any money and he would also end up in trouble. The army and the drug control agency would come and make it difficult to control the region, and then they would say that it was he who was pressuring people not to eradicate. And so, he gave the green light and said that everyone should eradicate down to the last plant so that the government would not just intervene with the subsidy but also with the social policies that the local governments had not carried out. Perhaps through the President’s office something would get done.[13]

Almost a decade after the implementation of Familias Guardabosques in the Sierra Nevada, local communities still do not trust local authorities and sometimes even recall with nostalgia the order that armed groups were able to bring to areas that the state has not been able to control, however violent their methods may have been. This is even more remarkable due to the demobilization of the paramilitary commander of the area, Hernán Giraldo, and his men in 2006, and after his extradition in 2008. The paradox lies in the contrasting images of the dominance of Giraldo. On the one hand, there is a general recognition that he was the ruling force in the area. He was known as the *patrón* and he decided who lived and who died. People recount the atrocities he committed, including his now famous taste for young virgin girls. The Grupo de Memoria Histórica explains that

> the paramilitary have extensively resorted to violent sexual discrimination against women and members of the LGBTI community, instituting in their areas of influence a despotic and patriarchic order that covers many faces. The ancestral right of the lord (*droit de seigneur)* persists in many areas and what happened in Magdalena under the control of Hernán Giraldo is perhaps the most aberrated form of this renewed atavism (Grupo Memoria Histórica 2011: 230, own translation).

12 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Nuevo México , May 2012.

13 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Nuevo México, May 2012.

Paramilitary stories of sexual violence across the Sierra are brutal and painfully present in the memories of many people. The same state report describes how:

> Different from other commanders, Hernán Giraldo, a.k.a 'El Patrón', transforms the area where he establishes in domination his own piece of land. It is a place where he controls the social landscape not only because of what it means to him in economic terms, but also because he settles there, lives among the other residents, becomes the authority, fathers children, builds a family and establishes godparent and client relationships with his neighbors (…) he never spoke of an exact number of women and children, but did talk about 'lice spread all over the *veredas*' that were part of his rule. Nevertheless, other sources have indicates that he fathered thirty-eight children during his forty years of control over the Sierra Nevada (Grupo Memoria Histórica 2011: 283, own translation).

On the other hand, many perceptions of local inhabitants assert that as a *patrón* he delivered what the state did not. He was able to generate ideas around a "moral economy", a way of distributing goods, access to work and even access to land and other natural resources. He approved land occupations by landless people; he organized health brigades and the Community Action Committees that were able to keep the roads passable and operational, for example. In a very troubling manner even some people whose families were victims of Giraldo narrated that "Hernán Giraldo had total control of the zone, if you wanted to live well there were some rules of the game, you had to follow them, if you were a small time producer he did not give or take anything from you, we might say it was easy if you followed his rules, but if you did not you started to have problems".[14] Miguel who lives in the area surrounding Guachaca states: "When Sr. Hernán was here, he would pay the health promoters. They would visit schools, vaccinate children, give them anti-parasite medication. They would do this very often, one need only ask that a promoter come up and they would". [15] In a conversation with inhabitants of Calabazo they expressed how Giraldo was strict with issues of drug consumption by local inhabitants and thefts so he was able to "ameliorate drug problems and fights, everyone would party in peace". [16] Francisco who lived in the middle slope of the Sierra considered that "the *paracos* asked for a lot […] but the *campesinos* were fond of him".[17] Different stories of land occupation recalled the power of Giraldo. Ariel for example explained how

14 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Quebrada María, October 2011.

15 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Quebrada María, November 2011.

16 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, San Rafael, January 2012.

17 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Nuevo México, May 2012.

> never did the *patrón* say that we should go somewhere because he was boss. That never happened. Our fear was that if the land was owned by a rich guy, he would not like that we take land that had an owner, you know. So we had to do the paperwork right [referring to a letter that he sent to Giraldo], and explain that if the land belonged to the bank then we would take care of things with the bank, but if it was his then he would come and we would fix things with him, and he accepted it that way. That would happen a lot here, they would start to squat […] but if he would come and say we had to go then we would go and nobody could say a thing. But if the police would come we would get into it with them with machetes.[18]

Talk about the past is very much guided by the order Giraldo was able to configure in the area, even if people did not have a direct connection or access to him. The way they talk about their lives and the past of their communities within the years of Giraldo's dominance is completely narrated through Giraldo's persona.

Another important process for understanding local governance in the area relates to electoral dynamics. On the one hand it has been widely proved how local politics was completely managed by paramilitaries. The well-known work of Claudia López has been crucial for unveiling this strong connection. She denounced a number of pacts and meetings between politicians and paramilitaries:

> The different agreements are evidence that the imposition of candidates in every office and seat elected by popular vote, not only intended to gain political representation, but also to capture the state and government functions that the elected candidates would have. On the one hand, through gaining local and regional positions they would be able to climb more quickly to national positions, as they in fact did in 2002 and 2006 (López and Sevillano 2008: 7 own translation).

Nowadays, even if people recognize that "when *El Patrón* was present [you had to vote] for X or Y, there was no real choice of election", elections and local politics continue to have their own strong dynamics of clientelism. People explain the pervasive local political culture, including practices of corruption and ways of negotiating with politicians, as unchangeable. The representatives of Familias Guardabosques also had to relate to these political practices but this time openly trying to isolate their practice from local politics, as I mentioned in the case of local state institutionality. The program did not try in its inception or in its practice to relate to local state institutions, and beneficiaries of

18 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Nuevo México, May 2012.

the program did not acquire a better level of negotiation with politicians or change their electoral perceptions and practices. During election periods, beyond the traditional seeking of long-term favors or political commitments, communities actually attempted to get something before the election itself such as power transformers, zinc tiles, construction materials, soccer uniforms etc. As one local inhabitant told me during past elections "with the town councilor we got the suspended bridge on that side of town and other things for out in the field".[19] Another local leader told me: "well, it is sad, but it is what happens, we ask the candidate what do you have, what are you going to give me and I vote for you, are you going to pay for my vote or are you going to bring any benefits for the community, be it a power transformer or a machine for the road?".[20] In addition, people expect local authorities to rob but at least to leave something done, "*robe, pero robe bien, deje algo*" (Rob, but rob nicely – leave something behind, own translation).

There is then a plurality of actors and institutions involved in practices of governance, a very common assertion to make today all over the globe. In what concerns the disparity in the use of violence, what could we say about state formation and of the strategies of development used by Familias Guardabosques?

Authors like Catalina Martínez Gutiérrez (2008) have argued that the program helps to decrease violence. She makes this statement by pointing to a reduction in the homicide rate in areas where the program has been implemented. She states, that "the work that has been carried out provides evidence to affirm that the program of alternative development known as Familias Guardabosques can have an important effect on violence […] the participation in the program decreases by 14.5 points the rate of homicide in every hundred thousand inhabitants at the municipal level" (Martínez 2008: 21, own translation). However she also acknowledges that "it is possible that with the decrease in the economic incentive, the Familias Guardabosques are not able to effectively consolidate their human capital and that therefore, since they continue to be caught in the traps of criminality to which they are vulnerable, there is no real effect on violence" (Martínez 2008: 21, own translation).

I would add that given the intricate manner in which non state sovereignties work in practice in Colombia inserted in quotidian lives and local and national politics including processes of elections, it is at least important to acknowledge many more variables when gauging the level of violence, besides murder rates. I believe there are

19 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Nuevo México, January 2012.

20 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Quebrada María, November 2011.

certain “lessons” that we can draw from the connection between violence and anti-drug policies in the case under study. Firstly, the official withdrawal of powerful illegal groups (in this case a complex mixture between paramilitaries and drug cartels) does not automatically lead to more trust or success for local state institutions. People do recognize the triumph of the state but a state thought of as a far idea/entity that does not correspond with the pervasive perceptions of local state corruption and their link with illegal armed groups.

Secondly, even if local communities affirm there is a positive impact in increased presence of the army compared to previous years, people still perceive this security as very much dependent on the consolidation, or not, of a *patrón* figure. Thus, it is not uncommon to hear that things are calm “until the next Hernán Giraldo figure comes along, although it’s hard to imagine another like him, with as much power”. Last December people’s fears became reality after the murder of a paramilitary leader of the Urabeños’s group. Following the murder, the shops and transportation services of the nearest city of Santa Marta were closed for four days at the demand of local paramilitaries. Local authorities were powerless to fix the situation even if the President proclaimed on television: “Urabeños: we are coming after you, not only in Magdalena, but also in Córdoba, in Urabá, in Antioquia. Wherever you are we are going to get you” (*El Espectador*, 1 June 2012, translation by the author). During the first months of 2013 local inhabitants had to deal with the dispute between different emergent paramilitary factions that tried to control the area producing great fear, instability and violence. For many, there have been moments after Giraldo’s demobilization that violence has been more acute.

Thirdly, a very difficult reality to acknowledge, at least for me as a Colombian citizen and academic, is the nostalgia that one still hears from people in the area, (some of them even victims of Giraldo) about the “Giraldo years” when things were more “organized”. It seems people still do not believe that the state is capable of containing violence, and organizing local communities for the common good. There is a strong perception of corruption and local elections as processes of clientelism with no major changes or favors received “only a few tiles of zinc or power transformers, that is not a venue for social and economic change”,[21] to use the words of a local inhabitant.

Finally, in many areas where Familias Guardabosques has been rolled out, illegal armed groups are the ones who allow, and in many ways promote, the policy locally. This paramilitary involvement has undermined the credibility of the program. Even

21 Interview with state representative of the program Familias Guardabosques, Calabazo, January 2012.

representatives of the program, explained that some actions that were driven by the program, found out years after their inception, that they were actually in place by the direct involvement and coercion of Giraldo

> At first I had a strong commitment to Ensolmec [a local association created by local inhabitants involved in the program in which all the beneficiaries were saving their money]; When one gets here and sees all these people with positive attitudes one feel encouraged. But no, little does one know that there is a man behind it all saying 'that's how you have to do it'. At first, I did not really understand things, and put a lot of energy into Ensolmec. About a year ago I gave up and said no more.[22]

Thus, for other representatives their feeling is that "We were there by being sort of duped. As I told you before, when I first came to Santa Marta, I liked working here so much. I thought these people were awesome, I thought they were really committed when in actuality they were being forced to partake". [23]

In sum, all of these complex connections between paramilitary violence and different forms of governance included the exercise of local elections, relations with local state institutions, organization of economic activities and every day forms of control of the territory and lives of local inhabitants. All of these connections shape complex mechanisms of local inequality in the area, stereotyping populations, defining precarious forms of engagement with electoral politics and local state institutions and fueling practices of violence (both in terms of the structural violence of poverty and of the control exerted by paramilitarism). This was the context in which Familias Guardabosques was implemented by providing, as I explained earlier, a very precarious bond through strategies of development between inhabitants and local state institutions. Moreover, such relationships were and still are mediated by the power of paramilitaries in the area, and the strong clientelist rationale behind electoral politics that provides very little results for local inhabitants. Despite the short reach of the developmental bond in the actual quotidian practices of governance, they shape a particular language of stateness that is, "localized meanings, genealogies, and trajectories as they appear couched in mythologies of power, as practical, often non-political routines or as violent impositions" (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 5). Moreover, as I argue in the final section of this paper, development provided a potent language of self-promotion and

22 Interview with state representative of the program Familias Guardabosques, Santa Marta, November 2011.

23 Interview with state representative of the program Familias Guardabosques, Santa Marta, November 2011.

individuality, that I would argue depoliticizes the complex political practices that shape the state locally.

5. The Responsible Peasant Entrepreneur: The Excuses of Neoliberal Development

Development has been addressed as a zombie category, using Eduardo Gudynas's words, who claims it has been declared dead several times in the last decades but it is still alive (Gudynas 2011: 442). Many social scientists from Latin America have argued that

> the idea of development, it would seem, is losing some of its hold. Its failure to fulfill its promises, along with resistance by many social movements and communities, are weakening its imaginative appeal; practitioners of critical development studies are attempting to give form to this social and epistemological weakening of development their analyses (Escobar 1997: 512).

In processes of state formation, I would say that development is very much alive and the meaning it has acquired within neoliberalism provides an important window for addressing the language and means of its own current perpetuation, disputed though it might appear in certain contexts. As such, as I tried to show throughout this text how development practices articulate and forge governance locally and shape different forms of exclusion and hierarchization which in turn define how inequality is lived and perceived.

I want to argue that on the one hand, Familias Guardabosques is part of a developmental apparatus in which problems of design and implementation have for decades been discussed by various local analysts who have actively tried to reshape it and to shed light on some of its inherent contradictions (Fajardo 1997; Molano 2000; Vargas 2010). As I tried to show, the different activities involved in the program of Familias Guardabosques actively build local languages of stateness, as precarious and inconsistent as they might be. Here, development is seen as a precarious practical bond between local inhabitants and local forms of governance driven by state and non-state institutions that shapes for example, the type of relationship that inhabitants have with local state institutions, elections and the control over violence and coercion. However, development provided a language of inclusion and opened new hopes for many local inhabitants who still long for a more comprehensive notion of development that better relates to their desired idea of a welfare state.

On the other hand, I believe that the power of development and of Familias Guardabosques is not actually the installment of a new starting point of social and economic livelihood possibilities but a framework of meaning through which the current inequities are explained or at least excused. I will focus, in particular, on the highly mobilized rhetoric about individual responsibility and the new framework of peasant entrepreneurship that exalts the language of individual competitiveness and excuses the problems of the developmental apparatus even more.

I will start with the first group of discussions that addresses some of the problems and contradictions of the developmental apparatus in Colombia focusing on the points that I believe are of particular relevance for understanding Familias Guardabosques and the manner it participates in shaping local meanings of state. A first line of inquiry of different local analysts is the power that armed groups have acquired in many areas of the country as a reason to understand the indifference or inefficacy of local state institutions. As Absalon Machado explains it creates "an economic structure that is parallel to legal activities, by means of which drug-trafficking develops political power, thus establishing a shadow structure that has more reach than formal institutions" (Machado 1999: 16, own translation). This situation leads to

> the power of generating high levels of involvement of people within that network of parallel or illicit activities […] or to conditions in which a relative presence of the state institutions only carry out formal functions […] that lack real power. This leaves the exercise of these functions at the hands of those funded by the drug economy (Machado 1999: 16, own translation).

Here development strategies suffered from a lack of power vis-à-vis the powerful institutional and economic structures of illegal economies. However, even if I share this argument it is also important not to underestimate or understudy the manner in which local state institutions also articulate with such powers creating forms of coexistence, open dispute or incorporation that become active means of production of local meanings of state. These local meanings include notions of trust, quotidian practices of engagement and the manner in which people trace limits between contested sovereign powers (illegal armed groups and state forces).

Within such complex scenarios of armed conflict, development has also been used to extend the militarization process of the state and as Vargas argues "the kind of articulation that took place between Familias Guardabosques and Uribe's strategy of 'democratic security', can create a symbiosis for these communities in the context of a confrontation being led by the central government" (Vargas 2003: 290, own translation).

This may put local communities at risk and also forge a relationship to the state either based on their services as informants or on their stigmatization as insurgents. In the case of the Sierra although the stigmatization of local population was very much present, the process of demobilization and the close relationship between local state institutionality and paramilitarism did not scale the involvement of local populations in the militarization process.

In turn, most of the discussions regarding how to enhance or reshape the developmental apparatus in order to achieve better results, are based on the design and implementation of a thorough state intervention that includes local and regional developmental plans and that takes the problem of land reform and economic regional dynamics seriously. That is, to actually forge mechanisms of redressing social inequality. For Vargas, it is crucial to include alternatives of development of small-scale peasants in development plans because this is “a long-term perspective in the effort to conform a unified regional state” (Vargas 2003: 286, own translation). This requires “a reassessment of the traditional schemes of agrarian reform, to instead think about a ‘rural reform’” (Machado 1999: 18, own translation), since there is a perception that

> a traditional redistributive agrarian reform that creates small and isolated individual properties, does not seem to be economically or socially viable. Small land-ownership and farming are very fragile in the face of a changing and uncertain context, and a weakened State can no longer provide the necessary assistance (Machado 1999: 18, own translation).

This is in fact a perception that is widely shared by inhabitants of the Sierra who wish for a more thorough state intervention that actually understands the complex history of land tenure and land use in which most of the productive economies are owned by a few local elites and peasants and indigenous peoples have arduously fought to keep their land. For Ruth Suárez, a wide notion of a rural reform in Colombia implies “an active intervention toward redistributing assets that are actually valuable such as job opportunities, social welfare and education” (Suárez 1999: 63, own translation). Along those lines, Machado also stresses the importance of shaping a “multimodal economic plan” since this “makes small-scale property and farming viable, if it integrates relationships and agreements with the medium and large scale, through a process of dynamic and participative development, founded on social and economic networks of exchange” (Machado 1999: 13).

Along those lines, many local inhabitants of the Sierra hope for a more participative intervention in which they can get to meet and negotiate with the powerful companies

and land owners of the area. As one of them stated they wish to get involved "on more equal footing" (*en términos más equilibrados*, own translation). This same idea is present in Machado's analysis who claims that in Colombia

> The configuration of a structure of land-ownership and use, and of the main means of production, can only come as a result of negotiations, local productive and social pacts between peasants and institutions, and not from a law coming from the central government that dictates that a multi-modal structure must take place (Machado 1999: 17, own translation).

These views incorporate a notion of cooperation but in particular of efficiency immersed in projects of economic association (*asociativismo*). This *asociativismo* in many cases between small, medium and big entrepreneurs is very much seen as benevolent and free of complex power relations that contrasts with the long histories of dispossession of peasants in Colombia. As Suárez explains:

> If what defines efficiency is the use of family labor by means of productive systems in small rural productive units, this should not always entail antagonistic relationships between large and small entrepreneurs, since the former would fill in niches in which the latter would not be able to participate, such as those activities in which there are actually advantages in terms of scale and technology, or simply those where a larger units can achieve economies of scale in the procurement of credit, stockpiling, distribution and commercialization. Despite this, one often finds relations of exclusion among the large and small (Suárez 1999: 58).

For many authors the arrival of neoliberalism in Colombia, that since the early 1990s has opened its space to international trade and to the establishment of foreign companies, is a crucial explanation for the lack of a thorough developmental investment. Alfredo Molano has in many contexts expressed for example how

> in areas where there are [illegal] crops, strategies for eradication and substitution have also failed […] because they have been set up at the service of clientelism, and because the *apertura* has had a devastating impact. In sum, we have to look to neoliberal policies to find the strengthening of illegal crops and the failure of repression, and the origin of the escalation of the war in which we live in today (Molano 2000: 30, own translation).

The language established within neoliberalism, as argued by authors all over the world, has taken over the quotidian lives of citizens who constantly use notions of competitiveness, individuality, choice, markets and self-interest. As Doreen Massey states “the vocabulary we use, to talk about the economy in particular, has been crucial to the establishment of neoliberal hegemony [and] this vocabulary of customer, consumer, choice, markets and self-interest moulds both our conception of ourselves and our understanding of and relationship to the world” (Massey 2013: 4).

Familias Guardabosques is a very clear example of the manner in which such language has framed developmental strategies and the manner people ought to understand their responsibility and their engagement with the state. The general idea is that of the construction of a responsible subject, master of his destiny, capable of saving money and giving up the temptations of illegal drug cultivation or any other illegal activities (mainly gas smuggling from Venezuela). This new subject is above all astute and clever, he knows and understands “the market” and knows that “even if I am a small producer, I have something unique to give and sell”-as one of the beneficiaries of the program states.[24] The charismatic entrepreneur, a word constantly used by experts and local inhabitants alike, needs to have the unique quality of *saber moverse* (knowing how to move, own translation) as smoothly as possible within the two local sovereign powers of the paramilitaries and the economic and political elite to be able to surpass the difficulties and play within the market and not within the complex spheres of politics.

The depoliticization effect of development has been studied by James Ferguson who states that development is an “anti-politics machine depoliticizing everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding bureaucratic state power” (Ferguson 1990: xv). In the case I am studying, I would argue that development has provided a language that is thought to surpass the complex political contexts that I presented in the previous sections while not even trying to expand the bureaucratic state power. Developmental strategies have been executed in spite of such political instability finding its ways to articulate, but not openly engage, with the precarious and negative experiences of local populations with state bureaucracies and illegal armed groups. I would not argue that it is an overt intention of hiding the daily practices of governance but to think of them as a separate political field as long as they do not openly interfere on the “dynamics of the market”. If development is not an abstract or isolated form of knowledge the ethnographic question to ask is “what effects do these

24 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Quebrada María, November 2011.

ideas bring about?" (Ferguson 1990: xv). How are they connected with and implicated in larger social processes?

I want to argue that these ideas create a notion of self-responsibility that tends to take the state out of the picture even if, as I stated before, people still long for a welfare state. It is not uncommon to hear after long discussions about the lack of thorough developmental state interventions a sort of self-blame and responsibility: "we can be lazy sometimes", "I should learn more about this entrepreneurship thing so that I can start a business at a different scale", "one has to be responsible and push yourself up", "maybe if I learned about computers I would be able to learn how the Dávilas have done it!", "we saved up and our money was stolen but really it is all our fault", "we don't have much to save up and with the payments on the loans even less, but we need to someday to see if we can do something", "I don't know what I am going to do about the title to the farm, but we'll have to think of something, because who else will?".[25]

The vast majority of workshops as I previously showed included topics on Solidary Economics, Community Organizations, Fostering Entrepreneurialism, Management Education, Experiences of Success, etc., that stressed the self-responsibility of peasants and the importance of building entrepreneurial associations. Those beneficiaries of the program who worked on tourism have been more clearly mobilizing the language of competitiveness and *asociativismo.* As Mariela explains "the idea is that we organize ourselves better, because we have to get serious. If we have an operator, this association has to work like clock-work. We need to have a book that keeps accounts, we need to fulfill all the requirements and we need to work and get this to work as it should".[26]

Others do recognize their own motivations, self-interest and self-promotion as individual valuable features that even when inserted within illegal activities are highly recognized. Eliseo is one of those locally recognized entrepreneurs who actually used to have a laboratory for cocaine production then moved to gas smuggling and now combines this activity with a tourist cabin. He states:

> I work a lot. I mean, I am a business man, I like to do business, wherever I see that I can make something, I am there. You won't find me looking for a machete, you'll find me looking for a way to earn some money to move up in the world. The gasoline business has given me this […] I had to but then the business got

25 Short exerts from interviews with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Calabazo (January and May 2012), Quebrada María (October and November 2011), Nuevo México (January, February and May 2012) and San Rafael (January and November 2012).

26 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Nuevo México, February 2012.

> bad. I used to make a lot more but then business got but so I got started with this […]. I broke my back working and struggling for a reason. I did what I had to and here I am, I achieved my goal of having a tourist cabin.[27]

The ideas about *asociativismo* are also highly present and for some creating an association is one of their future desires. However, the investment that all the beneficiaries made in the local association called Ensolmec, as part of the requisites of Familias Guardabosques and of Hernán Giraldo, proved to be a disaster and its closure is full of stories of corruption and theft, especially given the fact that people were not able to recover their investment. In spite of this, some inhabitants still see the importance of associations. As a group of cacao growers explains,

> the idea behind Guardabosques de la Sierra, comes from our fundamental need to associate. The objective is to create an enterprise that produces and commercializes mainly cacao, though we know that some associates have other productive branches such as avocado and tourism. Our farms have the potential to do something, and that is what we would like to do as Guardabosques […] our projects have always had that idea, and the government entities have always advised that we create an enterprise.[28]

Asociativismo provides a language of collectivity but one that is framed within notions of individual entrepreneurship, choice and responsibility. In fact, as Doreen Massey explains about the naturalized vocabulary of neoliberalism: “what is in contention here is social solidarity; the knee-jerk language reflects – and reinforces – the prioritization of individual choice over collectivity, over the very notion of (the construction of) a society” (Massey 2013: 13). There has been a proliferation of work about this topic within contemporary social theory and authors like Michael Rustin are showing the transition from a political engagement to a welfare state, to rapidly growing neoliberal forms of governance. For this author, today we are missing the view of a “relational society” stressing that “human relationships cannot be encompassed within a narrow, market-exchange world view” (Rustin 2013: 1). What critical analysts of development in Colombia and Latin America actually show is precisely what Rustin explains when he states that

> the modern ‘welfare system’ was constructed during the earlier epoch of capitalism that we have called the social democratic settlement [and that it was]

27 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Calabazo, May 2012.

28 Interview with participant of the program Familias Guardabosques, Quebrada María, November 2011.

a set of responses to these various phases of dependency. This settlement recognized – and indeed insisted – that the ‘law of the market’ could not, for the majority of people, provide sufficiently for such needs (Rustin 2013: 25).

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Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut
Preußischer Kulturbesitz

Contact

desiguALdades.net
Freie Universität Berlin
Boltzmannstr. 1
D-14195 Berlin, Germany

Tel: +49 30 838 53069
www.desiguALdades.net
e-mail: contacto@desiguALdades.net

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