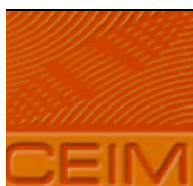


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CHANGING SOCIAL RELATIONS
OF PRODUCTION IN URABÀ :

**SOCIAL FORCES AND
THE COLOMBIAN FORM OF STATE**

OLIVIER PLAMONDON



Centre d'études sur l'intégration et la mondialisation
Institut d'études internationales de Montréal
Université du Québec à Montréal
C.P. 8888, succ. Centre-ville,
Montréal, H3C 3P8
Tel : (514) 987 3000 # 3910
<http://www.ceim.uqam.ca>



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this essay is to analyse the changes in the conditions of existence of the peasantry in Colombia's Urabá region since the 1990s. To theorize those changes, an analysis of production relations is made using Robert W. Cox's historical materialist approach. This approach demonstrates that, to understand the changes in the region, a broad perspective that looks at the levels production, the state, and world order, is needed. The first section describes the evolution of social relations in the region in the 1990s, and it shows how a reactionary alliance of social forces caused massive displacements in the countryside. The second section analyses the social forces and the organisation of production in Colombia. What is found is that paramilitaries, agrarian elites, and narcotraffickers are taking part in a specific social structure of accumulation that not only caused the shift to the export of non-traditional crops, but also has provoked greater land concentration and the forced displacement of peasants. The third section looks at the specific form of the Colombian state. This form is rooted in its history of economic liberalism and political authoritarianism, and it has recently seen the establishment of a hegemony based on the balance of agrarian elites and other economic groups' interests.

Colombia is a unique country. It has been engulfed in a violent conflict for sixty years, it hosts the two oldest guerrilla groups in the Americas¹, and it is the leading coca leaf exporter in the world. It is also home to extremely resilient reactionary forces. Indeed, since Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated in 1948 during his attempt to become one of Latin America's contemporary popular presidents², no left wing party has led the government, and a historical deficit of social reform has exacerbated social polarization (Medina, 2001: 34-36). As in other countries, the Colombian state facilitated the development of paramilitary forces to counter the insurgency, initially as death squads in the 1950s and later through the legalization of *autodefensas* that coordinated with the army. However, even though this strategy caused a gradual territorial contraction of the insurgencies from the mid-1990s onwards, it was not able to defeat them. Colombian counter-insurgency has also involved the violent repression of popular movements and worker organizations. Indeed, from the 1980s the intensification of paramilitary action resulted in the physical elimination of the *Unión Patriótica*, a Left-wing party, and in one of the highest rates of homicide in the world during the 1990s (Alcántara Saez and Ibeas Miguel, 2001: 19).

Political analysis of this country benefits from taking regional specificities into account, as “Colombia’s mountainous terrain and tropical climate ... combined to make the country ... a series of economic archipelagos” (Safford, 1995: 117). In the following, I will utilize Robert W. Cox’s historical materialist approach to analyse the evolution of the conditions of existence of the peasantry in the Urabá region since the 1990s. If correctly articulated, this analysis will reveal how the conditions of existence of the peasantry have become increasingly precarious, affected by a convergence of social forces which included regional elites’ interests, as well as the specific form of the Colombian state. This essay will also demonstrate that the evolving context of Urabá cannot be studied by focusing solely on the region; it also requires a broader analysis, including the organisation of production in Colombia and the country’s specific form of state.³ Thus, the region is the analytical starting point but other levels are taken into account.⁴

¹ The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP, hereafter “FARC”) and the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) formed in the 1960s.

² Gaitán was going to be the candidate of the liberal party in the 1950 elections; he had been building on popular movements that were rising in this country as well as elsewhere in Latin America. He was backed by unions and had reached out to the working poor, much in the same way that Juan Domingo Peron did in Argentina. His assassination is thought to be one of the main causes of the ensuing period called *La Violencia* in which, from 1948 to 1958, 200,000 persons were killed.

³ Ideally, it would require a comprehensive analysis of forces pushing towards change and continuity at the world order level. This is out of the scope of this essay, but will be referred to pertinent works when necessary.

The first section of this essay highlights the evolution of the relations of production for Urabá's peasantry. First, a description of the region's strategic importance for national and international interests will be offered. Second, pre-conditions for paramilitary expansion in Urabá will be described, as a struggle between various political and armed actors from the early 1980s permitted the emergence of a reactionary alliance in the mid 1990s. Third, a para/military action called "Operation Genesis" will be presented, emphasizing the displacement of Afro-Colombian peasants and the material conditions of their new status. Fourth, Cox's definition of modes of social relations of production will be utilized to outline the consequences of displacement for the peasantry and for Urabá's social relations in general.

The second and third sections analyse the broader dynamics that were involved in the changes of production relations⁵ in Urabá. First, the main social forces involved in the paramilitarization of Colombia's countryside will be analysed, thus providing an outlook of the production level, especially related to agro-pastoral production relations. Second, in light of the analysis made at the level of production, a synchronic and diachronic analysis of the Colombian form of state will reveal its tendencies to extreme forms of political conservatism and economic liberalism.

On contemporary changes and continuities at the world order level see Cox, 2002; Gill, 2003; and Bakker and Gill, 2003.

⁴Such a method is valid in other regional cases of paramilitary expansion accompanied by the commodification of social relations. The Cordoba and the Magdalena Medio regions would be valid examples.

⁵ Production relations is a broad term that refers to the relationship "...between the people involved and the world of nature... social relations of production focuses attention more specifically on the pattern or configuration of social groups engaged in the process, and the term power relations of production focuses on the dominant subordinate nature of this pattern of social relations (Cox, 1987: 12).

THE PARAMILITARIZATION OF URABÁ

“No peasant gets used to the city
because in the city we don’t know
how to do anything”
CAVIDA, 2002 : 178

The aim of this section is to analyse the changes in the conditions of existence of the peasantry of Urubá since the mid-1990s. The massive forced displacements that took place during that period were the result of national and regional processes that emerged in the context of Colombia’s civil war. Therefore, prior to the analysis of those displacements, the pre-conditions for the strategic expansion of paramilitary groups and the accompanying change in production relations will have to be delineated. Those pre-conditions were observable from the mid-1980s onwards, when the revolutionary left achieved hegemony in the region. This hegemony would weaken as the insurgencies fragmented and regional elites radicalized their position in dealing with left-wing social forces.

The section is subdivided as follows. 1) The severity of the conflict and changes in social relations were conditioned by the nature of the region; for that reason, a description of the economical and political values that it represents for foreign actors will first be offered. 2) Second, a description of the struggle for social control between various political and armed actors between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s will sketch the pre-conditions for the changes that would come in Urubá’s countryside. Briefly, the armed competition between the FARC and the *Ejército de Popular de Liberación* (EPL)⁶, the political liberalization which permitted the appearance of parties acting as political arms for the latter groups, and the control of the unions in banana farms by the EPL initiated a political and armed struggle for social control. Later, the demobilization of the EPL led to its transformation into a political party that would eventually align with the army and its paramilitary allies. Finally, a whole range of political and armed forces, constituting a reactionary alliance, would permit the expansion of paramilitary forces well into the greater part of Urubá’s territory. 3) Third, a military and paramilitary operation in February 1997 will illustrate the consequences of the paramilitary expansion for Urubá’s peasantry: massive displacement and dispossession.

To conclude this section, 4) I will conceptualize the changes of production relations and conditions of social reproduction of Urubá’s peasantry using the case of the Afro-

⁶ Note the EPL does not have any relation to the ELN, see *Supra* note 1.

Colombian communities of Curbarado and Jiguamiando. I will argue that from 1997 onwards, social relations of production evolved from a contraction of the subsistence mode of social relations of production to the expansion of capitalistic modes.

Urabá, a Strategic Region

Urabá is a geographical region (not an administrative subdivision) surrounding the gulf of Urabá, located northwest of Colombia and bordering Panama. On its western front, the Atrato river flows from the Andes to the gulf and is close to the Pacific⁷. It could be argued that the formation of the region dates back to the mid-1950s. In this period, the construction of a road from the capital of Antioquia (Medellin) to the sea port of Turbo combined with the beginnings of banana production to stimulate immigration from other parts of the country.⁸

Clara Inés García attributes the geo-strategic importance of Urabá to the fact that it is a “region of borders” (2004: 715). Indeed, it is in the first place a region where various actors have been struggling to secure spaces to extract natural resources by legal and illegal means. One of the reasons for this is that its western part accounts for one of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world, thus attracting corporate interests to exploit its natural resources.⁹

Secondly, Urabá links various national regions. The Pacific and Atlantic coasts join to form an isthmus south of the border of Panama, the Atlantic coast having been under the influence of paramilitaries, while the northern portion of the Pacific coast was under the hegemonic presence of the guerrillas until the mid-1990s (García, 2004). Thus, these characteristics contribute to Urabá’s recent history of being a national watershed in the competition between the state and the insurgencies:

⁷ Geographically, one refers to the region of Urabá as Chocó department’s lower-Atrato region and Antioquia Department’s Urabá. This distinction is important as some authors, such as Leah Carroll, only refer to the Antioquian part of Urabá.

⁸ From 1951 to 1964, population increased fivefold, from 15,000 to 77,000 (Carroll, 2000).

⁹ Of prime importance here is the perception that in this region the agrarian border has been advancing at an increasing speed. The agrarian border is defined as the limit between unexploited or selvatic areas and other zones that have been modified by human activity. Nevertheless, this conception of an empty space does not hold if one observes the legal situation of Chocó’s part of Urabá (the most selvatic part of this region). Indeed, Quibdo’s Diocese asserts that all of the region’s lands are titled either to private interests, collective territories (afro-colombian in most cases), or indigenous reserves. Hence the inexistence of lands available to colonization (Diocesis de Quibdo and Human Rights Everywhere, 2004: 144).

The importance of the denouement of the war in Urabá in favour of paramilitary groups is related to the fact that, on the one hand, Urabá was a symbol of the social and political success of the revolutionary left in the 1980s, and on the other, the hatred deriving from the conflict between the former guerrillas of the EPL and the guerrillas of the FARC was strategically exploited by paramilitary groups, guaranteeing the latter a proliferation of willing volunteers for its counterinsurgency war in the rest of the country (Fernando Suárez, 2007: 14).¹⁰

Indeed, the shift from the hegemony of the guerrillas to the dominance of the paramilitaries represented an important phase in the gradual strategic contraction of the guerrillas in Colombia.

Third, Urabá is a region of international borders, combining a gateway from the Atlantic to the Pacific and at the same time sharing a border with Panama. It has logistical importance for corporate and state interests, as illustrated by the project of a dry canal that would link the Pacific and the Atlantic and by the plan for the completion of the Panamerican highway, which is part of the Plan Puebla Panama¹¹, a mega-project that would link all of the Americas. Another aspect of this international importance is related to armed groups' supply routes, as control of this strategic corridor for irregular armed groups means an improved drug and arms trade.

Hence, the local, regional, and international dimensions combine to grant a strategic importance in economic, social, and military terms.

Guerrilla Hegemony in the 1980s

The situation of the 1980s was a consequence of the region's formation under the impulse of banana production. This sector developed in the *eje bananero* ("banana axis"), an area south of the gulf which grouped the three most important cities of the region¹². Production was controlled by Colombian owners who had accumulated lands, and in the beginning marketing had been monopolized by the United Fruit Company. Thus, a group of

¹⁰ In Spanish: "La alta saliencia del desenlace de la guerra en Urabá a favor de los grupos paramilitares tiene que ver con el hecho de que, por un lado, Urabá era un símbolo del éxito social y político de la izquierda revolucionaria en los años 80, y por el otro, el odio derivado del conflicto entre la antigua guerrilla del EPL y de la guerrilla de las FARC explotado estratégicamente por los grupos paramilitares que les garantizó a éstos una proliferación de verdugos voluntarios por su lucha contrainsurgente den el resto del país."

¹¹ Plan Puebla Panama is a project that involves not only the completion of the Panamerican Highway, but also other infrastructure plans like electric connection.

¹² Apartado, the port of Turbo, and Chigorodo are the most important cities of Urabá.

agribusinessmen came to have important economic and political representation since they accounted for 93 percent of Colombia's banana exports (Carroll, 2000; García, 1996).

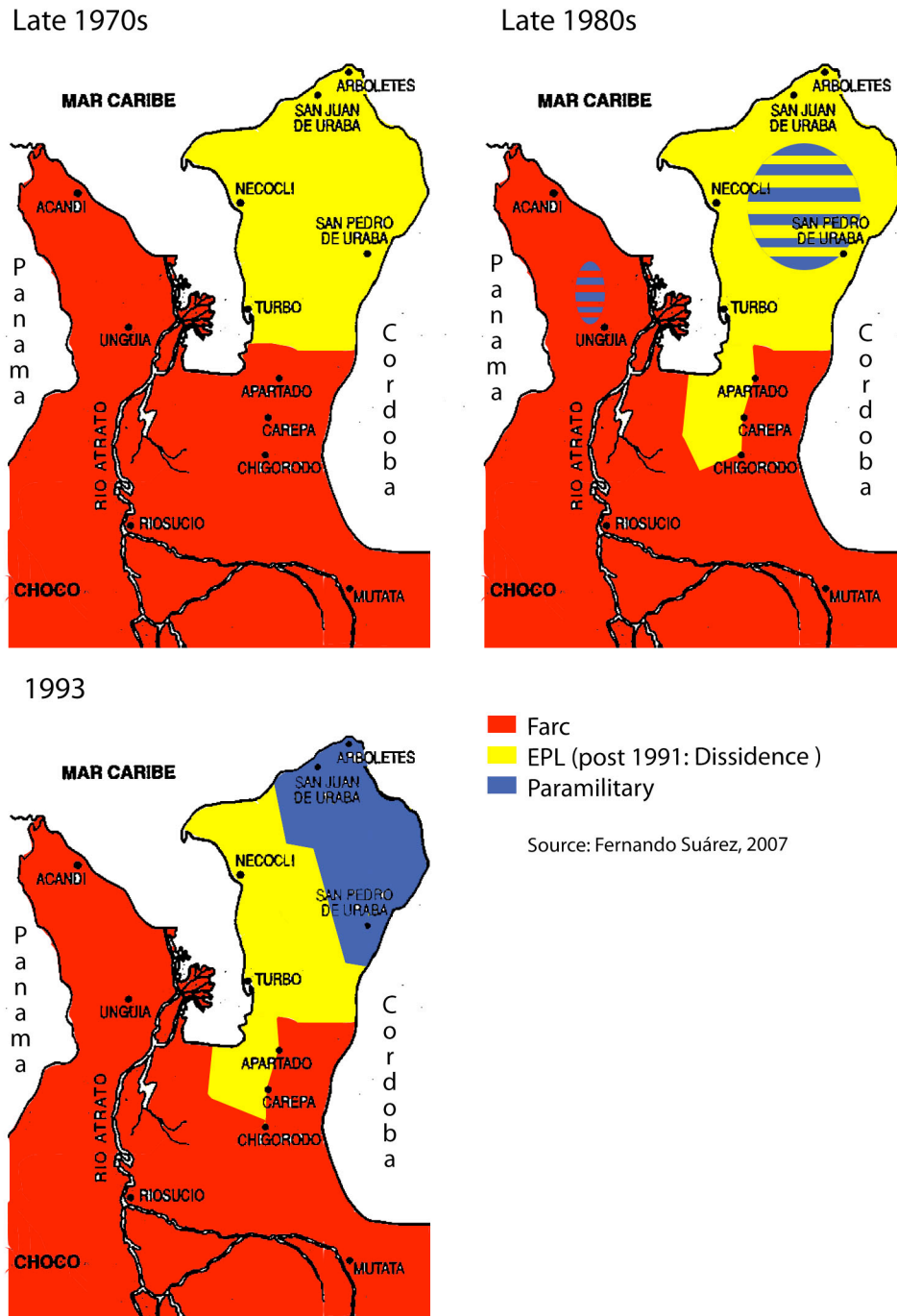
Concerning social relations of production, workers labored sometimes 20 hours per day and lived on the farms. At the same time, unionization was successfully repressed by employers utilizing a variety of tactics ranging from intimidation to assassination. This situation lasted until the early 1980s. García thus observes that in twenty years, neither the employers by means of co-optation and tutelage nor the left-wing federations of unions achieved the consolidation of the trade union movement. For that reason, the guerrillas were able to take advantage of the difficulties of trade unions in the public sphere, and assume a role of representation and protector for the movement (García, 1996). Thus, in the 1980s, substantial contradictions in the organisation of production revolved around the poor conditions of existence among banana workers. In this context, the armed pressure of insurgent groups opened the possibility of worker organization and collective negotiation of being accepted by the banana agri-businessmen.

The FARC first arrived in the region in the late 1960s with its fifth front. In 1977, a segment of this front deserted and joined the EPL in northeastern Urabá¹³, thus initiating the EPL's presence in Urabá. This segment of the EPL would develop specific characteristics which would become important in the conflicts of the 1980s and the 1990s. Indeed, from the early 1980s the EPL put an emphasis on organizing banana workers and other sectors of the working class and was active in land invasions. Meanwhile, the FARC did not change its profile and remained focused on the peasant settlers.¹⁴

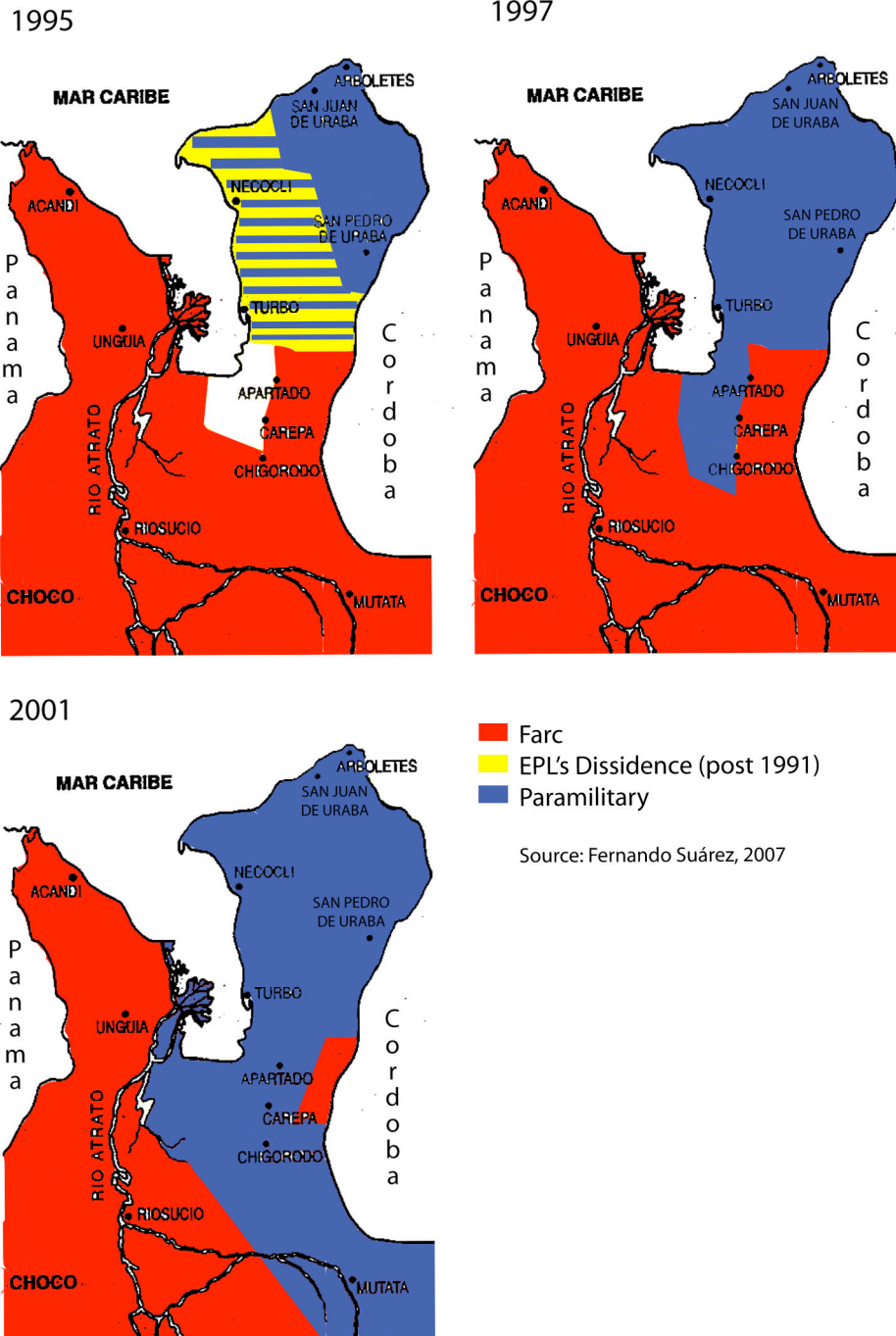
¹³ Originally, the EPL was the military arm of a segment that had separated from the FARC in the late 1960s. This segment dissented from the FARC's over-emphasis on politico-electoral strategy (Fernando Suárez, 2007).

¹⁴ Even though more research would be necessary to identify the differences between the two guerrillas, Andrés Fernando Suárez offers some interesting characteristics, the most important being: first, the FARC's vanguard is considered to be the peasantry, while the EPL's vanguard was the workers, in this case specifically the banana workers. Second, the FARC has a strategy of territorial expansion, as opposed to a strategy of territorial contention for the EPL. This meant that the FARC put a priority on supporting and organizing the peasants who were colonizing land, while the EPL was supporting and fomenting land invasions and suburban expropriations. Related to this characteristic is the type of territorial control that each would adopt. The FARC tended to be present in backward (peripheral) areas, and the EPL where there was a high concentration of peasants and rural proletariat. A third characteristic is the relation of armed groups to institutional-political power. The FARC practiced the combination of forms of struggles through the Colombian Communist Party (PCC), while the EPL opposed electoral participation until 1988 (Fernando Suárez, 2007).

Map 1: Territorial Presence of Armed Groups, late 1970s-1993



Map 2: Territorial Presence of Armed Groups, 1995-2001



Those political and strategic differences would initiate a cleavage that would become definitive when the EPL demobilized in 1991, and those differences would later be exploited by paramilitary groups and the social forces supporting them. In the 1980s this cleavage was most visible in what some analysts have called the “intersyndical war” of 1985-1986, when both guerrillas competed for areas of influence in the *eje bananero*.

Though the workers were represented by two unions, respectively supported by the two guerrillas, the EPL played the most important role in this struggle, thus granting it legitimacy among the local social forces, and consequently giving it a substantive social base. This leverage gained by the EPL in a strategic region formerly under the sole influence of the FARC exacerbated the tensions between the armed groups¹⁵; nevertheless, in the conjuncture of the 1980s these were diffused by the pressures of contending social forces and the central government.

Indeed, in this conjuncture members of regional elites such as the large landowners, banana farm owners, and cattle-ranchers were repressing worker organization and the increasing number of land invasions¹⁶. At the same time, the central government of Belisario Betancourt (1982-1986) propounded peace talks with the guerrillas, thus opening a public space to various groups in the country for the first time since the 1950s. These talks were seen as treason by the regional elites and the army, thus radicalizing them and setting the pre-conditions for the formation of paramilitary groups. In sum, the inauguration of peace talks at the national level and the successful unionization and negotiation for 60 percent of banana workers in 1985 contributed to an increasing regional polarization¹⁷. This situation kept the insurgencies from competing with one another, and it permitted gains in worker organization and electoral competition (Carroll, 2000; Fernando Suárez, 2007).

Yet another aspect of the successful worker organization should be emphasized. It is related to Cox’s observations regarding bipartite arrangements between workers and employers as vehicles for hegemony: “worker-employer conflict became institutionalized when the trade unions of established workers were recognized and accepted as legitimate ... institutionalization of conflict is the product of hegemony – concessions can be made to the unions without disturbing the ultimate control of the hegemonic class” (Cox, 1987: 65). As

¹⁵ These tensions are illustrated in the competition for the town of Currulao, which led to at least 50 fatalities (García, 1996).

¹⁶ For example, in 1982 1.200 families created two suburbs around Apartado, and in 1992 an EPL-led invasion resulted in the creation by 5,000 families of another suburb. (Romero, 2003; Fernando Suárez, 2007) Concerning the repression, only in from January to September of 1987, 40 trade unionists had been assassinated (Romero, 2003: 175).

¹⁷ Romero describes the same type of polarization in the case of the neighboring department of Córdoba (Romero, 2003).

was noted above, the institutionalization of conflict in Urabá was a concession made by a non-hegemonic social class, but the arrangements of the mid-1980s would create a cleavage that would work to the advantage of agribusiness and social forces opposed to the interests defended by the insurgencies. Indeed, the EPL's consolidation in the worker movement would gradually lead to a shift of its political interests and would permit the relative demobilization of its social base.

The Inflexion Point: Demobilization of the EPL

The demobilization of the EPL resulted from the nature and extension of its social control in Urabá, the threat of delocalization of banana agribusinesses, and the intensification of violent reaction from the mid-1980s to 1991. As noted above, from the mid-1980s, the EPL enjoyed territorial control of the northeast of Urabá as well as the central urban subregion of the banana axis. Most importantly, the type of political consolidation it wielded was primarily based in worker organization. On the other hand the FARC were present in the remaining portions of Urabá, primarily organizing peasants through cooperatives, auto-gestion and communal organization. The FARC had also taken advantage of the peace talks to form the *Unión Patriótica*¹⁸, a political party which would have a significant amount of strategic importance as it became "...the principal politico-electoral force of the banana axis between 1986 and 1994" (Fernando Suárez, 2007).

In that period, the EPL's departure from the strategy of combination of forms of struggles was notable. For example, in 1987 the insurgencies' strategic advantage on the armed, political and syndical fronts were prompting the national directorates of the guerrillas to call for "partial insurrections", but activists preferred to consolidate the gains made in the negotiations of 1984. Similarly, during the strike of 1989, the EPL's banana worker union was advocating a separation between armed pressure and mobilization, arguing that it would permit a relaxation of tensions with the employers. In addition, concerning the nature of the EPL, Romero observes that it gradually had abandoned the theme of land redistribution since it was raising opposition from agribusinesses and cattle-ranchers.

¹⁸ Betancur's peace process with the Guerrillas culminated in the demobilization of various groups in the beginning of the 1990s and the formation of left-wing political parties to represent them. At the same time, Betancur's reforms led to the first municipal elections in 1988, and the election of departmental (first administrative sub-division) governors in 1992. The *Unión Patriótica* took advantage of this on the municipal level.

Another important factor for the demobilization of the EPL was the insertion in the latter's zone of influence of a paramilitary group led by Fidel Castaño, an important cattle-rancher related to the Medellín cartel¹⁹. In 1988, this group assassinated more than 50 banana workers in the span of 40 days²⁰. Most importantly, the mobilization and the armed competition were provoking what was perceived by the banana agribusiness as a regional crisis. The latter considered the possibility of relocating its capital to Central America. The EPL's response was unequivocal:

We saw the real danger of the disappearance of the banana zone, the weakening of the workers' potential, and the setting of the score for us... we figured the possibility of an alliance with the banana businessmen, highlighting problems of economic development, other social problems, and human rights (Romero, 2003: 177).²¹

The EPL demobilized on the first of March 1991 and transformed itself into a political party²². As part of the negotiations, Fidel Castaño's paramilitaries accepted to withdraw from the region. The EPL kept a part of its army as a militia²³ to defend its members and its social base against a faction that refused to demobilize and against the FARC, which declared that the former guerrilla had turned to the side of the state. The conditions were set for the isolation of the FARC as the sole opposing social force in Urubá.

Gradual Paramilitarization: 1991-1997

This period was highlighted first by the beginning of sizable violent confrontations between the FARC and the EPL in 1992 and 1993. Subsequently, from 1995 to 1997, the process of paramilitarization of Urubá - that is, the territorial expansion of paramilitary groups accompanied by the increasing influence of the social forces supporting them - would be completed by four elements. First, paramilitary forces re-entered the region, this time in closer coordination with the army. Second, an important section of the EPL integrated into the paramilitary groups. Third and fourth, as a result, the *Unión Patriótica*

¹⁹ In 1988, Fidel Castaño's "Tangueros", were in the process of defeating the EPL in the neighbouring department of Córdoba.

²⁰ In 1990, they would commit the most important massacre of the region's history, the massacre of 42 civilians in the town of Pueblo Bello. See: Interamerican Court of Human Rights, 2006. Romero notes that between 1986 and 1991, the rate of homicide in the three principal cities of the region oscillated between 200 and 900 per 100,000 persons. During this same period, the national average was between 51 and 96 per 100,000 persons.

²¹ In Spanish: "vimos el peligro real de desaparición de la zona bananera, el debilitamiento del potencial de obreros y el ajuste de cuentas contra nosotros ... planteamos la posibilidad de aliarnos con empresarios bananeros, alrededor de las consignas sobre problemas de desarrollo económico, problemas de tipo social y frente a los derechos humanos."

²² From 1991 the EPL would be renamed *Esperanza, Paz y Libertad*.

²³ The *Comandos Populares*.

was politically and physically eliminated, and any social sector considered as collaborating with the guerrillas was violently repressed.

From 1991 onwards relations between the FARC and the EPL were polarizing, but they exacerbated into violence only from 1992 when another round of peace talks between the central government and the FARC failed. The tensions were not only caused by the perception of the alignment of the EPL with the state, but also because of the fact that the EPL was now in the electoral arena and could convert its influence in worker organization into votes that would be taken from the FARC's *Unión Patriótica*. A good example of those dynamics is the case of the Chinita Massacre. In 1992 the EPL organized the invasion of a suburb by 5,000 landless families in Apartado. This irritated the FARC since prior to this event, the Chinita had been built up as an electoral stronghold for the *Unión Patriótica*. On January 23, 1994, the FARC executed the region's second most important massacre, with 34 fatalities. Subsequently the *Unión Patriótica* would be blamed and declared illegal by officials, worsening the situation since the FARC would be left with only armed pressure and community organization to maintain its hegemony. Thus, in this case armed pressure was emphasized.

An important factor in the FARC's gradual loss of territorial control was the re-consolidation of the state in Urabá, impelled by Cesar Gaviria's (1990-1994) neo-liberal policies (which will be treated in the second part of this essay). After breaking the peace talks with the FARC, Gaviria advanced policies of economic development and military expansion. On the one hand, *Plan Urabá* sought the development of social services and infrastructure to improve the banana exports' competitiveness. Indeed, bananas had displaced coffee as the most important agricultural export²⁴, and Urabá concentrated the bulk of banana cultivation in the country. On the other hand, given the importance of those exports for the administration's policies, it paid more attention to the concerns of the social groups related to agribusiness. It correspondingly responded to the increasing instability in the region by establishing the XVII brigade²⁵, which from 1995 onwards would play a pivotal role by coordinating with paramilitary groups.

Two additional elements need to be taken into account to understand the paramilitary expansion. First, in 1994 the increasing violence and a reduction of international prices convinced the banana agribusiness to opt for more radical solutions to the region's problems:

²⁴ This displacement was the result of the international crisis of coffee prices in the 1980s.

²⁵ The establishment of the XVII brigade meant that permanent presence of soldiers would be doubled (Fernando Suárez, 2007).

Powerful groups of investors and *bananeros* made the decision to re-establish political control and public order in Urubá, as a condition for confronting the adverse circumstances of the international markets. If this was not done, this sector perceived that it would either enter into a terminal crisis, transfer its activities to another region of the country, or move its capital to Central America, with the risks implied by such an operation; in addition, it meant a defeat at the hands of the FARC (Romero, 2003: 205).²⁶

The second element is the legitimacy crisis of Ernesto Samper's presidency (1994-1998). Samper faced impeachment because his election campaign had been financed by narcotraffickers. In 1995 Samper was facing the possibility of a coup (Avilés, 2006) and was antagonizing the army because of his attempts to promote a peace process with the guerrillas²⁷. The failure of the peace process and his increasing lack of legitimacy led to the fragmentation of the state's authority in Urubá, which in turn granted an important autonomy to the army in Urubá, and additionally permitted the reactivation of paramilitary groups in north-eastern Urubá.

In 1994, paramilitaries had the support of the banana agribusiness, the army, narcotraffickers (who had an interest in land accumulation), and the cattle-ranchers. A key addition in this alliance would be an important segment of the EPL. Indeed, from 1992 the EPL had had members assassinated and for that reason had obtained punctual protection from the army. The frustration created by the ongoing violence, which spiralled into a concert of massacres in August 1995, led some of its members to integrate with the paramilitary groups²⁸. With such a strong social basis, the paramilitaries would achieve control of the banana axis and of the three main cities of Urubá in 1996, and they would expand to the south and to the western subregion of the Atrato river in 1997.

This process would correspond with the most violent period of the region's history; homicides went from 400 in 1994, to 800 in 1995, 1.200 in 1996, 700 in 1997, and 300 in

²⁶ In Spanish: "la decisión de poderosos grupos de inversionistas y bananeros de recuperar el control político y el orden público en Urubá, como condición para enfrentar las circunstancias adversas del mercado internacional de banano. El precio de no hacerlo, según este sector, era entrar en una crisis terminal o su traslado a otra región del país o a Centroamérica con los costos y los riesgos del caso, además de la aceptación de una derrota a manos de las FARC."

²⁷ Conversely, Samper was facing no opposition from the army in his peace talks with paramilitary groups.

²⁸ Paramilitaries had understood the nature of the cleavages between the EPL and the FARC. For example, on one occasion they assassinated 18 banana workers in a zone organized by the *Unión Patriótica* and the PCC, and made a declaration to make it look as if the EPL were the authors. More importantly, the EPL perceived that the paramilitaries could not interfere in labour relations, and had the only objective of getting rid of the FARC. Indeed, Mario Agudelo, former leader of the EPL, tells that: "...I believe that one of the characteristics has to be taken into account, is that the *Autodefensas* did not arrive as politico-military project, which is different from the guerrilla because it is a politico-military project, they simply arrive as a counter-insurgent force and as such, at least in the first phase, they do not intervene in themes of politics" (Fernando Suárez, 2007).

1998 (Romero, 2003)²⁹. Highlighting this violence was the physical and political elimination of left-wing parties. From 1985 to 2001 the *Unión Patriótica* counted 1.092 members assassinated in the region, with a peak of 356 in 1996³⁰. It is thus understandable that in July 1997 the *Unión Patriótica* and the PCC would retire from electoral competition, stating a lack of guarantees (Fernando Suárez, 2007).

Operation Genesis

The presentation of the paramilitarization of Urabá offered above centered on the competition between the main social forces for hegemony. This presentation will permit a better understanding of the changes in production relations that occurred from the mid-1990s. Those changes will now be analysed with a focus on the conditions of existence of the peasantry. Thus, the description of Operation Genesis will provide an example of the violent repression that the peasants and any social sector perceived to be associated with the guerrillas were facing.

In February of 1997 the army's seventeenth brigade carried out an operation that aimed to strike and uproot the FARC-EP from one part of the lower Atrato basin, the Cacarica and Salaqui tributaries.³¹ Informally, the operation involved coordination between the army and the paramilitaries, whereby the army carried out air strikes on limited areas, while paramilitaries swept through Cacarica basin's 22 communities ordering its inhabitants to leave for the distant port of Turbo and assassinating selected leaders.

While Operation Genesis represented the most direct assault on the Afro-Colombian peasants' way of life, the general para/military repression actually occurred throughout all of Urabá during a longer period of time. Indeed, from the mid-1990s, it combined various strategies, such as economic blockades, selected assassinations, and massacres in various areas.³² The economic blockades involved paramilitaries setting up roadblocks outside urban zones (or at strategic locations on watercourses) where peasants were not allowed to transport more than a certain amount of food and provisions, as it was assumed that it was destined for the guerrillas. In these roadblocks, presumed guerrilla members were sometimes identified and were assassinated on the spot, or they were taken away and

²⁹ Romero also notes that the homicide rate in the banana axis oscillated around 500 per 100,000 in those years, while the national average – one of the highest in the world - was 60 per 100,000. (it was between 25 and 30 in other Latin American countries, and 8 per 100,000 in the USA).

³⁰ Nationally, the *Unión Patriótica* had a total of 3,000 members assassinated.

³¹ Here after: "Cacarica".

³² 'Massacre' is a juridical denomination in human rights whereby, depending on the human right institution that defines it, more than 3 persons are assassinated in a systematic way.

disappeared³³. At the same time, events such as the *Massacre de Brisas* of October 1996, when eight peasants were executed publicly, announced the beginning of the repression in the lower-Atrato region (*Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz*, 2005: 33-34).

As mentioned earlier, Operation Genesis was a formal military operation in the Cacarica tributary of the Atrato, from the 24th to the 27th of February. The football coliseum of Turbo, Urabá gulf's main port, was prepared by officials to receive those who would be displaced by the Operation. More importantly, paramilitaries visited each community, threatening its inhabitants to leave for Turbo within the next few hours. To terrorise the communities, they demonstrated their brutality by cutting off a peasant's head and playing soccer with it in front of his family. Operation Genesis was a 'successful' operation, with 3500 peasants from the Cacarica and Salaqui tributaries displaced and 70 assassinated or disappeared (*Defensoria del Pueblo*, 2002: 9)³⁴; the Operation, combined with paramilitary operations upstream of the Atrato, produced between 10,000 and 15,000 refugees in the lower Atrato basin³⁵. Of the 3500 peasants displaced from the Cacarica, 2300 settled in Turbo, while 200 crossed the border to Panama, the rest dispersing to more remote locations (*Defensoria del Pueblo*, 2002 : 4).

While Cacarica and the lower Atrato exemplify the displacements observed in this period, it is pertinent to make a distinction regarding the social groups affected in the Urabá gulf. On the one hand, communities located in the Atrato river basin are Afro-Colombian communities whose members are defined as tribal people.³⁶ Specifically, their relation to their territories, identities, and communitarian social organisation results in their definition as indigenous, aboriginal groups who require the appropriate legal protection by the state. On the other hand, the groups located in the rest of the region did not necessarily share an ethnic affinity. Because of this distinction, one could argue that both social groups were displaced due to their class characteristics and their potential sympathies with guerrillas³⁷.

³³ I am using the verb *desaparecer* in the same sense that is being used in Spanish. The verb 'to disappear' means the forced disappearance of a victim. It is a patent example of a word that reflects a specific reality of Latin America.

³⁴ The 'Defensoria del Pueblo' is Colombia's Ombudsman.

³⁵ Tania Hallé reported a total of 10,000, while Mike Wouters reports between 14,000 and 17,000 (Hallé, 2007; Wouters, 2001: 508). Hallé's M.A. Thesis is the product of 13 months of field work in Afro-Colombian communities. Thus, here I will refer to her thesis as it provides information scarcely available in NGO's newsletters and websites.

³⁶ I follow the definitions stipulated in the Covenant no. 169 of the OIT on indigenous and tribal peoples. International Labour Organisation, *Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples*, adopted 1989, entry into force 1991. Web: <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/62.htm>

³⁷ On this second category of victims in Urabá, comes to mind the famous case of San José de Apartado. this community was granted provisional measures by the Interamerican Court of Human Rights. Interamerican Court of Human Right, http://www.corteidh.or.cr/medidas/apartado_se_06_ing.pdf ;

The lower Atrato communities' members were confined to subhuman conditions in their refugee sites, roughly between 1997 and 1999. Indeed, again using the Cacarica community as an example, Afro-Colombians were deprived of what the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights called the "minimum essential levels in terms of foodstuffs, primary health care, shelter and housing, or education" (UN, 1990: parr. 1 to 3). Testimonies are illustrative of their conditions: "...while conversing we could hear our stomachs grumble, because the communitarian saucepan was very meagre, because it was a saucepan for 1300 persons" (CAVIDA, 2002: 182)³⁸. At the same time, the lower Atrato basin was controlled by paramilitaries, and the peasants could not go back to their land to find provisions unless they were willing to risk their life: during this period fourteen peasants of the Cacarica community were assassinated and fifteen were disappeared (*Defensoria del Pueblo*, 2002: 11).

Living under these conditions, various groups in the communities decided to return to their territories between 1999 and 2001, as paramilitary control became more permissive in that period. While the return would soothe some of their injuries, the struggle would continue, as the late 1990s only represented the first phase of paramilitary consolidation.

African Palm Agro-industry and Land Accumulation

A report by the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights once stated that out of the newly forced displacements, 65 percent of the heads of households possessed lands (Suárez Montoya, 2007). Indeed, the forced displacements in the mid-1990s reflected a trend that has been observed during the course of Colombia's history, that is, the dispossession of the lands of the displaced. Here, the case of the Afro-Colombian communities of Curbarado and Jiguamiando will serve to present an instance of the trend.³⁹

Peasants of the communities of Curbarado and Jiguamiando left their lands under paramilitary threats in 1997. Due to the paramilitaries' continuing control of their region, the communities' members could not occupy their lands (inside the collective territories, lands are allocated by the community to each member), but set up "humanitarian zones" that shared characteristics with refugee camps⁴⁰. The agri-businesses that had activities in this

³⁸ In Spanish: "... mientras conversábamos la barriga nos silbaba porque era muy grave la cuestión de la olla para los alimentos porque era una olla comunitaria para mil trescientas personas"

³⁹ An important characteristic of this instance of dispossession is that the land is not occupied by a large land-owner or a cattle-rancher, but by agribusiness.

⁴⁰ Humanitarian zones are a way of occupying collective territories while claiming neutrality in the conflict. No armed actor is allowed in the zone, be it from the state (army, police) or not (guerilla, paramilitary, private

region were legally constituted in 1999, just after Operation Genesis. They began to occupy and exploit the peasants' lands in 2001, when they used more than fourteen illegal modes of appropriation of lands, the latter in most cases conducted through falsified contracts (*Justicia y Paz*, 2005: 93-125). In this way, in 2004 the Colombian Institute of Development stated that 22.022 hectares of the collective territories of the communities (out of a total of 101.057) were "affected" by African palm (*Comisión Colombiana de Juristas*, 2006: 88)⁴¹.

Production Relations

Hence, the theft of Afro-Colombian's lands is one example of the reconfiguration of production relations that followed the peasants' displacement. On the basis of this presentation, it is possible to make three theoretical deductions regarding the social of relations production. Cox's modes of social relations of production will be used in this conceptualization, keeping in mind that each of the modes considered coexist with other modes and change through time (Cox, 1987: 33). The modes evolve in content and relative importance, depending on the analysis in time and space of the organization of production, the form taken by the state, and world orders (this analysis will be made in the second and third sections).

The first theoretical deduction is that the forced displacements caused a contraction of the modes of subsistence and self-employment, and a consequent expansion of the primitive labour market. The subsistence mode is observable where production is "...determined by the biological needs for survival and reproduction and does not exceed them" (Cox, 1987: 37-38); no transformations of the structures of production are observable, and producers are substantially outside the networks of commodity exchange (Cox, 1987). While barter existed as complementary exchange, the lack of accumulation through trade and the tribal quality of the Afro-Colombian communities represents the mode of subsistence as the predominant mode of social relations of production prior to Operation Genesis (CAVIDA, 2002: 51-70). Another mode observable in the peasantry of Urubá is the mode of self-employment. It is defined as the production of goods and services for sale through the producers' labour and means of production, and it is typical to the peasantry in capitalist development (Cox, 1987: 52-55). While this mode was less important in the lower Atrato basin, it was predominant among the rest of the peasantry of Urubá.

security enterprise). The communities in the zone receive humanitarian assistance from NGOs, and the government is held responsible by the Interamerican Court of Human Rights for any incursion by armed actors.

⁴¹ See also: *Defensoria del Pueblo*, 2005.

The mode of primitive labour market is found where people are detached from the original social relations governing production, a dynamic that is intensified with conjunctural social dislocations; participants in this mode are highly insecure as they have lost the protection of the kind of social cohesion that existed in the rural communities whence they came. They become part of social relations that are observed among the poor, beggars, and vagabonds (Cox, 1987: 44-48). This is the situation into which the majority of the displaced peasantry was forced in Urabá between 1997 and 1999, whether they were recipients of humanitarian assistance in a refugee camp or located in remote urban areas.

Second, with regard to the enterprise labour market mode, where wage labour is employed, a distinction is necessary in Colombian rural settings, namely that between formality and informality. For instance, even when an enterprise such as a logging operation, banana or African palm plantations is set up, its legal form does not imply explicit social relations of production, since in our case local power relations are paramilitarized. In the political organisation of the zones under their influence, the paramilitaries use a model of imposition of 'development' in three phases: a) the 'liberation' from the insurgency and their 'supporters', and the imposition of processes of land concentration and authoritarian social structures; b) wealth is brought through development projects (employment creation, building schools, etc.) with the knowledge of, and legalization by government institutions; and c) the legitimization and consolidation of the process when the necessary structures for the expansion of capitalism are put in place and the modernizing state installs itself with the cooperation of the private sector, NGOs, and the 'organized' communities (Coleman, 2007: 5-6). This model shapes social relations and grants the characteristics of the peasant-lord mode to the enterprise labor market mode, or, better said, blurs the analytical delimitation between the two. Hence a better understanding of the social relations of production in this context may be obtained with the use of the indentured labour concept (Persaud, 2003: 135-136) combined with a reminder of the historical residues left behind by the power relations that were part of the *hacienda*⁴²: Indebtedness as a form of bonding, production that is exclusively sold to the landlord (in this case, agribusiness), and coordination with local informal authority for the control of labour (Kalmanovitz, 1994: 46-73). These characteristics also apply to the banana workers, even though their situation is related to the bipartite mode⁴³.

⁴² Relevant characteristics here are the control of movement and the threat of physical violence. Now, the example of African palm is interesting, as corporations use various legal forms of employment; either in some cases it employs displaced peasants that were from other regions, local wage labor, or it uses a form of subcontracting called "strategic alliances". In the latter, it propounds associations of peasants whereby they get a loan by the company for the technology used to exploit the lands. Thus, in practice the members of these associations never see the money of the profits, and are indebted to the company for loans they can never repay (Hallé, 2007: 136).

⁴³ The bipartite mode is when the union and the employer negotiate, the latter often pressured to do so by the (states)men who often see the workers as a political base.

Finally, it is necessary to refer to the household mode as the analytical link to the concept of social reproduction. Hence, Cox describes it as the distinct mode "...that is the principle means of sustaining and reproducing the human species" (Cox, 1987: 48) and states that in times of economic crisis, "...production functions are forced back into the household" (Cox, 1987: 50). The displacements of 1997 had gendered consequences for the peasantry of Urubá. First, since in most cases assassinations were directed at men, (*Justicia y Paz*, 2005: 69-89) women were left to sustain the family. Second, because the primitive labour market often rendered male peasant skills useless. Pressure from this situation fell on social reproduction, that is, on biological reproduction, on the reproduction of labour power, and on the "...institutions, processes and social relations associated with the maintenance of communities" (Bakker and Gill, 2003: 19-20).

Partial Conclusion

The strategic importance of Urubá demonstrated how it is a region with important natural resources, where the armed groups are fighting for zones of influence and the Colombian state and corporate groups are implementing (mega) projects since it is 'the best corner of the Americas'. The fact that it is a strategic region also justifies the use of analysis at the levels of production, state, and world order, since all those spheres are visible in the history of the region. Even though the paramilitarization of Urubá was the result of the balance of social forces in the mid-1990s, the analysis of the pre-conditions for the establishment of this balance contextualized the changes. The latter highlighted a special characteristic of this region compared to similar cases in Colombia; in the words of Romero: "the specificity of Urubá lies in the fact that coincidences, pacts and tacit understandings seem to have included Sintrainagro, the most organized and consolidated worker organization, as well as *Esperanza Paz y Libertad* [, the ex-EPL]" (Romero, 2002: 163).⁴⁴ The case study of Operation Genesis provided a focus on the specific changes in the conditions of existence of Urubá's peasantry. The displacement, persecution, and dispossession of peasants of Urubá implied their subsumption in more capitalistic social relations of production. Indeed, peasants are increasingly either employed or surviving in a context in which social relations favour a constellation of dominant social forces.

⁴⁴ In Spanish: "En el Urubá, sin embargo, las coincidencias, pactos o acuerdos tácitos o explícitos parece que incluyeron a Sintrainagro, la organización de trabajadores más importante y consolidada de la región, lo mismo que Esperanza, Paz y Libertad..."

SOCIAL FORCES: REACTION AND ACCUMULATION

The paramilitarization of Urabá implied a convergence of social forces with national and regional scope. Thus far, what has been outlined is that the EPL and the banana agribusiness were important regional actors in the conflict, and that the demobilization of the former helped considerably the reactionary alliance that would reconfigure the production relations of the region. However, the prior section also hints that other social forces linked to state and world order levels shaped the outcome of the social conflict in Urabá. This section, by looking at the organization of production in Colombia, will permit a clearer conceptual view of the developments in Urabá.

First, some theoretical considerations have to be made regarding Cox's use of historical structures at the three levels of analysis of production, the state, and world order; this method lends the conceptual tools for the delineation of social forces in time and space. Second, I will analyse Colombia's social forces in terms of those which were the most important in shaping the relations of production in Urabá. Third, a brief analysis of the organisation of production with an emphasis on the agro-pastoral sector will outline the material basis that conditioned the emergence of those social forces.

Historical Structures: Frameworks for Action

In the previous section, various modes of social relations of production were presented to specify how social relations changed in Urabá. Those modes form part of Cox's approach, which uses historical structures to outline the contexts in which various types of agencies can affect and are affected by their surroundings. Thus, these structures are conditioning frameworks for action composed of ideas, material capabilities, and institutions that interact with each other. They constitute "...the context of habits, pressures, expectations, and constraints within which action takes place" (Cox, 1996: 97) and are to be viewed from the bottom up or from outside in terms of conflicts which arise within them and open up the possibility for their transformation. In Cox's approach,

The method of historical structures is one of representing what can be called limited totalities. The historical structure does not represent the whole world but rather a particular sphere of human activity in its historically located totality (Cox, 1987: 100).⁴⁵

Hence, historical structures refer to the three aforementioned levels: the organisation of production and the social forces engendered by the production process; forms of state, as derived from a study of state/society complexes; and world orders, the particular configurations of force which successively define the problem of war and peace for the ensemble of states.

Therefore, when the presentation of the changes in the social relations of production in Urubá was made, the political economy of Colombia was being analysed at the level of production. One could argue that African palm agribusinesses and paramilitaries constituted groups that, at the production level, could potentially be a part of a social force, with the same applying to the displaced peasants. As particular configurations of social classes, social forces are engendered from and shape the production process and bring about changes in the form of states.

Agrarian Elites

Nazih Richani defines the agrarian elites as a social group including the cattle ranchers, large landowners, and agribusiness (2002: 133-155)⁴⁶. I will first present their historical characteristics, which will be followed by a differentiation between the agribusinesses and the other two groups.

Cattle ranchers and large landowners are the longest-standing social group to be presented here. From the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, they were the basis of a strong structure of social domination through their control of land and through the power relations of production of the *hacienda*. From the beginning of the twentieth century they gradually lost importance as the booming coffee sector induced capitalist development

⁴⁵ It is necessary to note that these historical structures are seen as heuristic tools and not concepts that are to be proven through a positivistic, hypothetico-deductive model. In this sense, it could be noted that Cox's approach is developed from a post-positivist epistemology. On epistemology and ontology see Gill, 1993, 2003.

⁴⁶ Richani presents this categorisation based on the groups' politico-economical importance and its tendency to support armed conflict instead of negotiation with the guerrillas. In this category Richani adds the coffee growers, which are not treated here because of their lesser importance in the process described (2002: 133-155). This term corresponds to particular social groups who are a bourgeoisie in the sense that they own means of production in terms of land and capital. Bourgeoisie is not used as a reference here since the large landowners are in numerous cases not engaged in typically capitalistic activities, but simply continue to hold land as a basis of social power in the manner of the *hacienda* owners.

(Kalmanovitz, 1994; Oquist, 1980). Not only did this development lead to the contraction of the social relations anchored in the *hacienda*, but the countryside was also gradually capitalized by agribusiness. However, the cattle-ranchers and large landowners retained important social control in some regions (Richani, 2002).

The cattle-ranchers and large landowners are ideologically conservative, and they have accumulated wealth through non-capital intensive activities and rent-seeking. At the same time, Richani argues that they have been the group most affected by the guerrillas' taxing, robbing, kidnapping, and murdering given their possession of land and location close to areas controlled by the insurgencies (2002: 141-145). For those reasons, the cattle-ranchers and land-owners have been more prone than any other social groups to set up and support paramilitary groups.

The agribusiness segment encompasses a constellation of businessmen and could be divided between those with a marked integration to global markets (bananas, African palm-oil, and sugar, for example) and those that are oriented towards the national market. They are ideologically conservative and have supported paramilitary counter-insurgency - as was demonstrated in the case of Urabá - since in some cases they are reaping the profits of land accumulation caused by the forced displacements.

Finally, one important characteristic of the agrarian elites is their regional character. Indeed, even though they are nationally represented by associations such as the *Federación de Ganaderos* (FEDEGAN), these groups' composition and social importance have varied regionally. For this reason, Mauricio Romero claims that the opposition to negotiation with the guerrillas and the democratization of the political system in the 1980s came from what he calls the regional elites (Romero, 2003). His description of the regional elites' political identity in the department of Córdoba helps to sketch the ideological outlook of the agrarian elites:

...a political identity at odds with social mobilization, the autonomous organization of subaltern sectors, and the penetration of the state in their areas, especially concerning the themes of peace and reconciliation. This identity also exhibited masculine values of honour and courage, and promoted vengeance as a form of conflict resolution (Romero, 2003: 124).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In Spanish: "... una identidad política en contra de la movilización social, la organización autónoma de los sectores subalternos y y aun de la penetración estatal, en particular en temas de paz y reconciliación. Esa identidad también resaltó valores masculinos de honor y valentía, y promovió la venganza como forma de resolución de conflictos."

Paramilitary Groups

The mode of operation of the paramilitary groups has already been treated in the case of Operation Genesis (see the first section of this essay). They are at the center of violent reaction in Colombia and are thus linked to the majority of social groups with a relation to counter-insurgency. For this reason, their delineation as a group cannot be straightforward. Indeed, the high level of collusion from some segments of narcotraffic, the army, or the agrarian elites could lead to the conclusion that some of these groups' members are paramilitaries. To solve this theoretical problem, I will adopt Romero's analytical definition, which separates the paramilitary group from the one who supports it with pecuniary or logistical support (Romero, 2003)⁴⁸.

Paramilitarism has had its antecedents in a country where the state has never secured the monopoly of legitimate violence⁴⁹. In the nineteenth century, the large landowners had their own militias to complement the power relations inherent to the *hacienda* (Kalmanovitz, 1994). In the period of the *Violencia* (1945-1965), the conservative party and segments of the agrarian elites formed death squads (*Pajaros*) to repress members of the liberal and communist parties. Finally, from 1965 to 1990, in line with the policy of national security, the state would legalize the existence of armed civilians called *autodefensas*.

The contemporary form of paramilitarism has two origins. First, in the late 1970s members of cartels set up their own death squads as a reaction to rising kidnappings, of which the group *Muerte a los Secuestradores* (Death to the Kidnappers, MAS) is the prime example. Second, cattle-ranchers in the Magdalena Medio region also formed groups to defend themselves from the guerrillas, a model which would be duplicated in the rest of the country. Especially in the 1980s, the paramilitary groups would gain autonomy from their supporters and would assume their own social form (Romero, 2003; Richani, 2002).

Given this historical background, one could define the main traits of paramilitary groups in terms of the conditions of their formation, the institutionalization of the social

⁴⁸ For Romero the paramilitary is a "...violent entrepreneur, which refers to the individual specialized in the administration, deployment, and use of organized violence, the latter being offered as merchandise to be exchanged with money or another type of merchandise. The violent entrepreneurs should not be confused with the normal entrepreneur and their businesses, be they legal or illegal. Both generate revenues by producing goods and services for the market, but their administrators generally do not use violence, but they pay for those who are specialists in its deployment and use" (Romero, 2003: 17).

⁴⁹ This weberian concept could obviously be discussed for the majority of third-world countries, that is why Romero argues that monopoly of violence is a social process.

control that they exert, and their ideological outlook. First, they respond to the regional element highlighted in the case of the agrarian elites. Furthermore, Romero argues that in every regional context "... there are two common elements ... : initial participation of groups of the army and support from the traditional or emergent regional elites" (2003: 24).

In terms of institutionalization, the model of the imposition of development was already mentioned above in relation to the enterprise labour market mode, that is, the elimination of the guerrillas' supporters, the arrival of development agents in the zones, and the consolidation of hegemony through legitimization. Once this hegemony in the local sphere is achieved, social relations have been articulated the following way:

The social actors tend to be the economic corporations, with the cattle-ranchers leading, and the municipal administrations controlled by those corporations. Protest mobilization is restricted, the agenda of public discussion, limited, and there is a tendency to political homogenization or limitation of the public sphere and to activities of association, especially those related to the affirmation or defence of their rights (Romero, 2003: 57).⁵⁰

Finally, the ideological aspect of the paramilitaries could be illustrated by Romero's description of the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), the federation of paramilitary groups headed by Carlos Castaño from 1994 to 2003:

... [They] admire the "freedom fighters" of Ronald Reagan or the Nicaraguan Contras of the 1980s, and support neo-liberal economic policies ..., precisely those denounced by the FARC. In this sense, the AUC are more global than local, and reveal the business orientation of their principal supporters and protectors, the latter benefiting from the economic stability that is offered by those violent entrepreneurs (Romero, 2003: 56).⁵¹

Narcotraffickers

While research for this essay is not advanced enough to make definitive statements on the importance of narcotraffic in Colombia, it is necessary to present the narcotraffickers as a social group. Colombia is the leading producer of cocaine in the world. Regarding its

⁵⁰ In Spanish: "... los actores sociales tienden a ser los gremios económicos con los ganaderos a la cabeza y las administraciones municipales bajo control de esos gremios. La movilización de protesta es restringida; la agenda de discusión pública, limitada, y hay una tendencia a la homogeneidad política o a la limitación de la esfera pública y a las actividades de asociación, en especial las que tienen que ver con la afirmación de o defensa de derechos"

⁵¹ In Spanish: "... admiran a los 'luchadores de la libertad' de Ronald Reagan o la Contra nicaragüense de los años ochenta, y apoyan las políticas económicas neoliberales ..., precisamente las denunciadas por la guerrilla. En este sentido, las AUC son más globales que locales, y revelan la orientación a los negocios de varios de sus principales protectores u auspiciadores, quienes se benefician de la estabilidad económica que les ofrecen estos empresarios de la coerción."

economic importance, Nazih Richani reports that in 1999 the value of contraband goods increased to 2.2 \$US billions, that is, about 25 percent of total imported goods and 50 percent of Colombian exports (Richani, 2002: 101).

As in the case of the paramilitaries, delineation of this social group requires qualifications. Indeed, narcotraffickers have used the services of more or less autonomous paramilitary groups, and they have accumulated lands at such a rapid pace that they could be represented as an emerging segment of large landowners⁵². Notwithstanding this, the traffickers' ideological outlook is affected by the following:

Narcotraffickers are economic liberals par excellence and agents of globalization because of their international clandestine business against the states' rules (regarding narcotics) but not against the free enterprise system, open markets, or the cherished property laws, which ultimately protect their interests (Richani, 2002: 101).

Guerrillas, Social Movements, and the Working Poor

The combination of groups here is not intended to hint at a semblance of collusion, but at the fact that they are more prone to affect social relations of production in the same way.

The FARC and ELN are the main insurgencies left since the demobilizations of the 1990s. The former is a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group formed in the 1960s following the persecution of peasants during the *Violencia*. The ELN is a Maoist guerrilla organization with a Guevarist strategy of warfare. They both use the strategy of combination of forms of struggles which led to the justification of the persecution of social movements and trade unions by dominant groups and the state since the 1960s. Given the historical subordination of the peasantry by the large landowners and the high level of concentration of land in Colombia, land reform has been at the forefront of their political agenda (Romero, 2003).

⁵² From the mid-1980s to the mid 1990s – the heyday of Pablo Escobar - , there were important tensions between them and the state, as some liberal elements were trying to reduce narcotraffic's influence on politics. During this period, various paramilitary groups were integrated into the Medellin and Cali cartels. The period from the mid-1990s would suggest a more autonomous role for paramilitarism, the latter having their own narcotraffic activities (Richani, 2002). More recently, the brother of Carlos Castaños (ex-leader of the AUC), Vicente, has been recognized as the most important narcotrafficker because he did not join the demobilization program propounded by the present administration (*El Espectador*, 14th of July 2007). Regarding narcotraffickers' form of economic reproduction, Richani notes that "in a span of less than ten years (1980-1988), from a total of 4 billion dollars, 45 percent were invested in land properties, especially cattle ranches (mainly used for speculation in land prices)" (Richani, 2002: 118).

Social movements and trade unions historically have had restricted possibilities of mobilization. Indeed, given the similarities of their demands, they have constantly been associated with the guerrillas. The 1990s have provided them new opportunities since transnational advocacy networks permitted a better visibility and accountability regarding their protection by the state (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

I term the working poor to be the 50 percent of the population that is below the poverty line (*Justicia y Paz*, 2005). They are in the self-employment, enterprise labour market, primitive labour market, and the household modes of social relation of production. Whether they can achieve class consciousness and sufficient mobilization and resistance to change the present historical bloc is an open question.

The Economic Groups

Another social force has become observable since the mid-1970s. This social force, called by Richani the economic elites, consists of Colombia's fourteen most important economic conglomerates⁵³. They are at the forefront as globalizing agents within Colombia and are promoting its integration into global markets. One of the most telling examples of the latter is how those conglomerates were involved in the internationalization of the state and economic opening in Cesar Gaviria's administration (1990-1994).

Even though these financial groups gradually expanded with capital accumulation in the twentieth century, Kalmanovitz argues that the economic groups consolidated in the mid-1970s in the midst of a crisis. This crisis was caused by neo-liberal policies and the conjuncture of the world economy in the mid-1970s. Indeed, on the one hand the financial disintermediation, that is, the transfer to the private sector of numerous credit functions, granted a larger share of the national market of capitals to those groups and restricted the access to credit for the industrial sector. On the other hand, the liberalization of imports implied the contraction of the industrial sector. Combined with the oil crises, the economic groups concentrated assets and bought out various middle-size businesses in bankruptcy (Kalmanovitz, 1994). Since this period, the economic groups have gradually gained importance with the growth of Colombia's service sector, which now represents half of the GDP (see table 1). In the late 1990s, they accounted for 25 percent of Colombia's GDP (Richani, 2002).

⁵³ Contrary to Richani, I prefer to name them the "economic groups" since it is the term that is frequently employed in Colombia to refer to those dominant groups.

Table 1 - Contributions to gross domestic product by economic activity, 1945-1998*

Sectors	1945-1949		1976-1980		1993-1998	
	A	B	A	B	A	B
Agriculture	45.20	4.30	23.20	4.30	18.80	1.50
Mining/oil	3.40	4.10	1.30	-0.30	4.50	6.40
Industry	17.70	9.40	22.80	4.60	18.10	1.20
Construction	5.20	-5.00	3.30	5.60	3.10	3.60
Services	28.50	9.90	49.40	6.40	55.60	5.30
GDP	100.00	6.20	100.00	5.40	100.00	3.70
State/GDP**	9.70		20.00		34.50	

* A = percentage of participation; B = annual growth, in percentages.

** Total expenditures of the state in relation to GNP.

Source: Safford and Palacios, 2002.

The Organisation of Production

Social forces are engendered by the production process, and like class, they in turn shape the production process and its social relations. Having presented the social forces that shape the social relations of Urubá, it is necessary to observe the evolution of the production process in the countryside⁵⁴. The description of agro-pastoral production first and foremost implies looking at the current conditions under which it is operating. These conditions are the displacement of the rural population and the particular structure of land property. Following the description of these conditions, an analysis of food production will be made, demonstrating a shift of agricultural production away from traditional crops. Finally, another aspect of the organisation of production to be highlighted is the relative impact of disciplinary neo-liberalism⁵⁵, that is, the observation that the neo-liberal reforms imposed on the Colombian economy were a continuation of this state's history of implementing economic liberalism.

⁵⁴ Analysis of the production process is made here observing characteristics of the social structure of accumulation, which includes the social relations of production and the mechanisms of capital accumulation through which economic growth is sustained and increased (Cox, 1987).

⁵⁵ The imposition of market reforms such as the liberalization of goods and capital, along with privatizations, for the subordination of state/society complexes to the hegemonic bloc of O.E.C.D. countries. Stephen Gill draws the concept of discipline from Foucault, and states that "disciplinary neo-liberalism" implies a combination of macro and micro levels of power, and is a concrete form of structural and behavioural power. It combines the structural power of capital with 'capillary power' or 'panopticism' (Gill, 2003: 130).

The organisation of production is shaped by the demography of rural labour. If one observes that 73 percent of Colombia's current population of 45 million is located in urban areas and that the majority of 3.7 million internal refugees have been forcibly displaced out of rural areas, Salomon Kalmanovitz's observation that 20 percent of the rural population is being displaced is plausible (Kalmanovitz and Lopez, 2006). Correspondingly, as the peasantry constitutes the majority of the displacements, agrarian production is affected. Land concentration is the counterpart to the displacements. Concerning the latter, Aurelio Suárez Montoya comments that in 2003, "levels of inequality in the distribution of land had reached quasi unimaginable levels" (Suárez Montoya, 2007: 98). Indeed, as table 2 shows, while 87 percent of the properties covered only 8.8 percent of the total surface, 0.4 percent of total properties had 62 percent of the total surface.

Table 2 - Colombian agrarian property structure, 1996-2003

Hectares	1996			2003		
	Properties (no.)	% of total	% of total area	Properties (no.)	% of total	% of total area
0-20	2091583	86.80	13.00	2330036	87.00	8.80
20-100	255367	10.60	21.50	278215	10.40	14.60
100-500	56187	2.30	20.80	60294	2.20	14.00
500+	7459	0.30	44.60	10140	0.40	62.60
Total	2410596	100.00	100.00	2678685	100.00	100.00

Source: Suarez Montoya, 2007.

Land concentration and forced displacements constitute a historical pattern in Colombia. Prior to the twentieth century, the basic dynamic revolved around large landowners and settlers. Large landowners were adjudicated the titles to the majority of public lands while less than 1 percent of the lands were adjudicated to settlers (Kalmanovitz, 1994). Settlers would first clear land for exploitation but would eventually be displaced by landowners who claimed that the properties were theirs. The history of land colonization in Colombia is the repetition of this pattern, excepting the extermination of indigenous peoples⁵⁶. Even though this dynamic would continue in the twentieth century, conflicts mounted between organized peasants and landowners. An interesting point here is that from the 1930s onwards, landowners increasingly abandoned agricultural production for cattle-ranching, as the latter required less labour and thus meant less conflicts with tenants

⁵⁶ Thus, the displacements analysed in the case of Urabá had already taken place in the 1960s with the formation of the region (García, 1996). On the characteristics of these displacements in Colombian history, see Legrand, 1986.

(Kalmanovitz, 1994). More recently, paramilitary counter-insurgency operations combined with narcotraffickers and agrarian elites have led a process of vacating whole sections of territory to accumulate land⁵⁷ and to pose a final solution to land conflicts. In this recent form, displaced populations do not migrate to colonization areas as they used to, as there are fewer of these⁵⁸, but are relocated to urban areas.

If land ownership is being concentrated and population is vacated from the countryside, there remains the question of the use of the land. On the one hand, various authors have noted the problematic predominance of cattle ranching. Darío Fajardo argues that in 1996 there were 9 million hectares of land suitable for agricultural use but only 5 million were being cultivated⁵⁹. Conversely, 19 million hectares were suitable for cattle-ranching, and 40 million were dedicated to such use (Fajardo, 2001). Another characteristic is related to global trends in food production in peripheral countries⁶⁰, that is, the shift of agricultural production away from traditional crops towards more export-oriented crops such as sugar, cacao, bananas, and more recently, African palm. Hence, towards “...an agriculture of the colonial kind” (Suárez Montoya, 2007: 77).

This shift away from traditional crops had two phases. From the late 1960s to the mid 1980s, the impossibility of achieving an agrarian reform, given the dominance of agrarian elites, led to the policy of the ‘modernization of the countryside’. In this policy, the objective was not land redistribution but growth in the productivity of the available units of production⁶¹. Emphasis for the modernization was placed on commercial agriculture, which for example received 88 percent of the subsidized credits available through the Agrarian Promotion Funds (*Fondos de Fomento Agrario*, 1966-1973). A consequence of this policy was that during this period commercial agriculture came to represent 41 percent of cultivated areas in the mid 1970s, up from 19 percent in the 1950s. Thus, in this period agribusinessmen gained substantial economic importance. In addition, the modernization of agriculture encouraged the introduction of crops designed for exportation. In the mid-1980s, the result of those policies was that while the prime objective of agro-pastoral activity was still food production, food imports had multiplied by 15 since 1950 (Suárez Montoya, 2007).

⁵⁷ “Alejandro Reyes calculated that by 1995, 4 million hectares were bought by narcotraffickers distributed in 409 municipalities constituting about 37 percent of Colombia’s total” (Richani, 2002: 118).

⁵⁸ On colonization areas, see note 8.

⁵⁹ Also important here is that farms of less 5 hectares dedicated 38 percent of their surface to agricultural uses, while properties of more than 200 hectares dedicated only 2.5 percent.

⁶⁰ On those trends, see McMichael, 2003.

⁶¹ Modernization included not only mechanization of productive processes, but also the changes promoted by the green revolution. Seeds were changed to sorts that were more dependent on fertilization and irrigation. Those seeds and their required chemicals’ prices would increase, and could only be bought from transnational firms, thus resulting in a transfer of value to foreign companies and away from producers (Suárez Montoya, 2007).

Another phase of the shift away from traditional crops was associated with the intensification of neo-liberal reforms in Cesar Gaviria's administration (1990-1994). In this period the average rate of taxation of imports (all sectors) declined from 43 to 11.4 percent (Ahumada, 2002). Consequently, agro-pastoral production would grow at half the rate of the rest of the economy, the latter going through three important crises in 1992, 1996 and 1999. Regarding the state of food production, there was a marked deterioration of food sovereignty at the turn of the century: "From a supply which satisfied 92 percent of the national demand of agro-pastoral goods in 1989, according to the FAO, to one that imports 50 percent of its proteins and calories" (Suárez Montoya, 2007). Most importantly, the conditions of social reproduction in the whole country were affected, as the allocation of the principal foodstuffs in kilograms per capita decreased to levels below those of the late 1980s.

In sum, the shift away from the production of traditional crops to exportable crops was a manifestation of the formation of spaces of agro-industry. In those spaces, the economic surplus is directed from agriculture towards industry and finance, and agriculture is subordinated to the urban-industrial sector (Machado, 2002). These changes are observable in other countries of Latin America, but what makes Colombia's social structure of accumulation distinct from other cases is the combination of those changes with peasants' forced displacement and land concentration impelled by the paramilitarization of the countryside.

Neoliberalism in Colombia: Change or Continuity?

The description of the shifts in agricultural production towards agro-export industry permitted the understanding of the emergence of agribusiness as a social class fraction with a material basis in productive processes. As has been the case in other countries, disciplinary neo-liberalism also strengthened class fractions that were favourable to the integration of Colombia's economy to the circuits of transnational capital. Again, the particularity of Colombia's form of state would give various distinct characteristics to the constitutionalization of capitalist imperatives.

Observers have described the details of Gaviria's reforms as the imposition of a neo-liberal model of economics (Ahumada, 2002; Avilés, 2006; Suárez Montoya, 2006; Sarmiento and Libreros, 2007a). Indeed, the early 1990s fit the concept of a new constitutionalism, that is, the articulation of a political project on behalf of large-scale corporate capital which, "involved initiatives, by ... the globalizing élites, to redefine the terrain of politics so as to 'lock in' the power gains of capital and to 'lock out' or depoliticize forces challenging these gains..." (Gill, 2002: 48). For example, the reforms

included the institutionalization of the central bank's autonomy from government agents, the former representing the country in international financial institutions. It also included the prohibition of the issue of government bonds to finance the state's budget, thus forcing the latter to finance its deficits in capital markets. Correspondingly, the government's debt, representing 16 percent of the GDP in 1990, would grow to account for 31 percent in 2007 (Sarmiento and Libreros, 2007a).⁶² It was already argued that those reforms led to acute crises in the 1990s, and as table 3 demonstrates, exports never compensated for the growing imports. At the same time organic intellectuals and political leaders promoting the ideals of the free market and capitalist competition were placed in key official posts and advisory positions to promote those reforms (Avilés, 2006).

Table 3 - Evolution of external agro-pastoral commerce,
1991-2005 (million dollars)

Year	Imports	Exports	Balance
1991	378.60	2,736.20	2,357.60
2005	1,984.33	4,569.00	2,585.00
Growth (%)	424.00	66.00	9.60

Source: Suárez Montoya, 2007.

Observers are right in the sense that the neo-liberal model was consolidated with Gaviria's reforms, nevertheless, these types of market reforms had already been implemented in the mid-1970s. Indeed, as already argued, in a period of decreasing availability of international credit, Alfonso Lopez Michelsen's (1974-1978) neo-liberal policies had promoted financial disintermediation. The inauguration of the privatization of credit in the mid-1970s shows how for Colombia, the new constitutionalism of the 1990s was a proven method. More generally, the conservative corporatism from the 1930s to the mid 1960s was only the partial exception to a history of economic liberalism⁶³. The common denominator in Colombia's economic history is the strict pursuit of the economic doctrine propounded by Washington. Tellingly, the short-lived Keynesian policies of the early 1960s were the reflection of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, which aimed to create an alternative economic model, given the success of the Cuban model. Otherwise,

⁶² Reforms also included privatizations, the "flexibilisation" of labour laws, the shift of the contribution for health care on the population, and so on. (Sarmiento and Libreros, 2007a, 2007b; Ahumada, 1996).

⁶³ This represents the formulation used by Kalmanovitz in the 1980s. Even now that he has turned into a neoliberal economist (Ahumada, 2002), he still recognizes that the implementation of protectionist policies were not profound since the volatility of growth and inflation of Colombia in the second half of the twentieth century was much lower than southern cone countries (with Lopez, 2006). For her part Consuelo Ahumada observes that the level of protectionism prior to the 1990s was relatively weak compared to other Latin American countries (2002).

Keynesian or redistributive policies were always relatively weak, because, as will be seen in the third section, the formerly dominant agrarian elites tended to repression, not concession.⁶⁴

One could argue that those reforms benefited foreign capital, which is partially true. Nevertheless, more importantly, the reforms also consolidated the position of the economic groups⁶⁵. Indeed, these groups had been already among the dominant classes of Colombia since the 1970s.

Partial Conclusion

The social forces that could shape production relations in Urabá were presented. The agrarian elites, paramilitaries, and narcotraffickers have been reactionary forces that combine capitalist and rent-seeking activities⁶⁶. They would not benefit from a more humane development of social relations of production in the countryside, with the possible exception of some segments of the agribusinesses. Conversely, the expansion of the authoritarian type of primitive and enterprise labour market modes that were observed in the first section could lead to the conclusion that those social forces would have an interest in the continuation of the paramilitarization of Colombia's countryside.

The analysis of the organisation of production outlined the material basis of those social forces. The forced displacements of 20 percent of the rural population, and the concentration of land to 'unimaginable levels' conditioned and facilitated the shift of food production away from traditional crops. The ensuing formation of spaces of agro-industry benefited a fraction of the agrarian elites. Most importantly for the ensuing discussion, the expansion of commercial agriculture granted additional possibilities of accumulation for the economic groups and for foreign capital.

⁶⁴ Writing in the 1980s, Kalmanovitz makes the following statement comparing the use of neo-liberalism in Colombia to its imposition in countries of the southern cone. "In Colombia, monetarism has a more modest function: it is not about taking back from the population grand democratic conquests, which were never achieved, but to reduce the little gains that are still retained, such as social benefits, one or another subsidy and a declining amount of social expenditures. It pretends, thus, to roll back the scarce reformist elements and the interventionist economic management that weakly emerged in the 1960s. It is to bury an agrarian reform with modest results. It is also to check the democratic movement by restraining public liberties. That is why the neoliberal model was only halfway imposed" (Kalmanovitz, 1994: 511).

⁶⁵ This affirmation does not circumvent the possibility that economic groups could materially represent the interests of foreign capital. A proper analysis would lead to assess how far and in what ways the economic groups are integrated into foreign or transnational capital, if the latter is found to have theoretical validity.

⁶⁶ On rent-seeking, see Richani, 2002.

In sum, a balance of social forces that includes very important reactionary elements, and a neo-liberal organisation of production that includes land concentration and peasant displacement combine in a specific social structure of accumulation. The latter certainly has been worsening the conditions of existence of the peasantry.

THE COLOMBIAN FORM OF STATE

“A social and economic order based
on the hacienda, unified by the church,
and cemented in inequality of race,
caste, and class”

- Kalmanovitz, 1993, p. 93

Having presented the social forces that were engendered in the production process and are shaping it, I will now turn to the analysis of another ‘limited totality’, the Colombian form of state. I will argue that the state/society complex of the Colombian state presents tendencies to extreme political conservatism and economic liberalism.

First, theoretical considerations have to be elaborated concerning the Gramscian conceptualization of the state. Indeed, for Gramsci the state is not only a set of institutions with control over a population and a territory, the state encompasses the social classes on which it rests as well as the organization of consent and coercion in the society. Second, by looking at specific historical structures of the state, I will argue that the Colombian dominant classes used domination in the twentieth century to secure the control of the state. Third, I will present some characteristics of the state which permit a better understanding of Colombia’s historic bloc.

The Gramscian State

Following Cox’s approach, the description of the form of state should be advanced with a consideration for its historical (diachronic) and systemic (synchronic) aspects. That is, the latter leading to “...seeing the world or society as a system of interrelated parts with a tendency to equilibrium”, and the former permitting an “...enquiry into the ruptures and conflicts that bring about system transformation” (Cox, 2002: 78).

Furthermore, the description of the social forces in the prior section is part of an analysis following Gramsci’s conception of the state. Cox describes the latter in the following way:

... the enlargement of the concept of the state includes the limited conventional idea of the state as a machinery of coercion... it also includes the machinery of organizing consent through education, opinion shaping, and ideology formation and propagation... [which] covers many agencies usually thought of as nonstate or private – aspects of civil society such as political party, the press, religion, and cultural manifestations...

This enlargement makes the strength of the state much more comprehensively intelligible than the narrow coercive notion alone does, but it does not say anything specific about the content of the state, what it is in a concrete historical instance. This “what it is” is conveyed by the notion of the *blocco storico* or historic bloc. The state, for Gramsci, cannot be separated as a technical instrument or agency, whether of coercion or of the organization of consent, from the social classes that sustain it. The historic bloc is the term applied to the particular configuration of social classes and ideology that gives content to a historical state (Cox, 1987: 409, n.10).

The extended conception of the state leads to a better understanding of how power is analysed in this approach. Central here is the concept of hegemony, whereby power is exerted through coercion and the organization of consent.

Diachronically

The following section provides a historical contextualization of the forms that the Colombian state took in the twentieth century. It is possible to present it in three phases: the erosion of the conservative historic bloc by capitalist development, the subsequent resolution of passive revolution with the civil war of the *Violencia* period (1950-1958), and the ceasarist phase from 1958 to the mid-1980s.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it could be argued that a conservative historical bloc was the historical instance of the Colombian state. Its dominant classes included the landlords, the military officials, and an incipient bourgeoisie of merchants. The subordinate classes comprised tenants, a small holding peasantry, and smaller segments of artisans, miners, and vagrants. The organization of consent involved the ideological dominance of the church, and the traditional character of society⁶⁷. In terms of coercion, as was discussed, the *hacienda* provided one of the most important instruments for the dominant classes.

⁶⁷ The traditional character of society implied an elitist mentality which legitimized the mechanisms that kept the masses out of the state power such as the limited franchise, indirect elections, and systematic fraud (Guerra, 1994: 52).

The coffee boom in the 1920s brought the capitalist mode of development, which in turn led to the emergence of new social forces and relations of production. Chiefly, an important part of the subordinate classes would experience the enterprise labour market mode, in the process acquiring a class consciousness, and some of its segments later forming a working class. On the other hand, the bourgeoisie grew and expanded its activities to agro-export and industry, while the landlords were losing their predominance (Kalmanovitz, 1994; Safford and Palacios, 2002; Oquist, 1980).

From 1930 to 1946, the Liberal Party led a reformist and modernizing agenda which attempted to adjust the political institutions to the new patterns of economic development (Medina, 2001). For example, their policies included pro-labour legislation and land reform. The Liberal's social reformism was accompanied by an important level of social mobilization which the radical wing of the party used to legitimize the reforms. Those reforms antagonized not only the landlords. Indeed, some measures also touched the agro-export sector, thus setting the conditions for the formation of a reactionary alliance among the dominant classes. Consequently, in the mid-1940s social forces were polarized to such a degree that a situation of passive revolution could be identified: "an attempt to introduce aspects of revolutionary change while maintaining a balance of social forces in which those favouring restoration of the old order remain firmly entrenched" (Cox, 1987: 192). The passive revolution led to the Conservative regaining state control. They would proceed to persecute liberals and segments of the subordinate classes which could potentially have participated in social mobilization. This process led to a civil war in which 200,000 to 300,000 persons lost their lives⁶⁸.

In 1958, the conservatives and liberals allied to put an end to the violence and implemented a caesarist solution, the National Front:

A caesarist solution – the man of destiny – imposes itself between the antagonistic classes. Caesarism produces order, but it freezes conflict without resolving the issue between the antagonistic forces... the basic antagonisms of capitalism [are] suppressed, not overcome (Cox, 1987: 192).

The National Front was a caesarism without a caesar in which the stabilizing function rested on the alliance between the two parties. It lasted for sixteen years and kept

⁶⁸ Paul Oquist has termed this social process the 'partial collapse of the state': the former social structure of domination had been eroded by capitalist development, and the civil war between the liberals and the conservatives had led to "...a further breakdown of social relations, and the physical absence of the state in large areas of the country, and contradictions within the armed apparatus of the state ... These conflicts came to be expressed in more and more violent forms ... more important, however, the partial collapse of the state conditioned an entire series of social contradictions into conflicts with a high potential for violence" (Oquist, 1980: 12).

the social forces of the subordinate classes out of the state, as the two parties shared executive, legislative, and administrative posts.

The National Front constrained the opposition of subordinate classes to the margins of the political system. Subordinate classes could thus only reach the state's political institutions mainly through clientelist networks and limited corporative channels. From 1974 the national front continued to function informally until the mid-1980s, with more flexible rules for its partners, but more rigid ones for popular movements and the opposition. Consequently, this form of state emphasized coercion and radicalized the opposition, encouraging the formation of insurgencies.⁶⁹

The period from the mid-1980s has been marked by repeated attempts to shift to politics of hegemony. Indeed, the peace process and the political reforms initiated by Belisario Betancourt's government implied the project of a different form of state, one described by William Avilés as a 'low-intensity democracy' : "the institutional reforms of the late 1980s and early 1990s were in part a response to increasing levels of social agitation for political change, as well as escalating political and social violence that the Colombian state found difficult to control. Relatedly, Colombia's international context consisted of the regional diffusion of free market democratization" (Avilés, 2006: 21). As was discussed in the second section, the reforms included neo-liberal policies. They also reflected "the regional trend of establishing elite rule, as political liberalization has only gone so far, largely restricted to shifts in institutional prerogatives and the formal expansion of civil/political rights" (Avilés, 2006: 22).⁷⁰

Synchronically

Following the approach I adopted in this essay, the definition of Colombia's form of state should come from prior considerations related to the level of social forces, and to the

⁶⁹ More specifically, until the mid-1980s this period would involve politics of supremacy rather than hegemony, that is, "...rule by a non-hegemonic bloc of forces that exercises dominance for a period over apparently fragmented populations until a coherent form of opposition emerges..." (Gill, 2003: 60). How those populations are still fragmented will be treated below. In terms of the opposition, any legal opposition was formally blocked from power first by the National Front, later by its informal continuation, and in the 1980s by the recrudescence of violent repression towards popular movements and opposition (the elimination of the *Unión Patriótica* is a case in point). As for the guerrillas, they could not take power for strategic reasons: US promoted counter-insurgency prevented any successful revolution. On counter-insurgency in Colombia see Stokes, 2006.

⁷⁰ as legal and extra legal opposition continued, so has the state in its repression, "... political violence by the state and paramilitary forces have represented one of the many responses to this resistance, as a 'dirty war' was, and continues to be, launched against the perceived supporters and sympathizers of the guerrilla insurgency, as well as representatives of popular movements" (Avilés, 2006: 22).

historical examination of the state. Libardo Sarmiento and Daniel Libreros synthesize accurately the historical characteristics of the contemporary Colombian form of state:

... since neo-liberalism has not been able to find a political format which would permit the stabilization of its model, as happened in the prior phase of capitalist development with the welfare state in metropolitan countries and nationalist populism in the peripheral ones, the tendency is to reinforce the apparatuses of repression, justice, prisons, army, and police (Sarmiento and Libreros, 2007a: 31).⁷¹

I will thus reformulate the findings in this essay to conceptualize the form of the Colombian state following Cox's theoretical approach.

Following an examination of different social forces, forms of states, and world orders, Cox offers a series of analytical propositions which will serve as heuristic guides for the better understanding of the Colombian state⁷². Based on those analytical propositions, it is possible to make four theoretical deductions.

First, if the form of state depends on the configuration of class, and is about in/exclusion from decision making (propositions 1 and 2), a valid question would be: what has been the balance in the class structure? The second part of this essay responded partially to this question. In sum, since the 1990s, one of the most important social forces among the dominant classes has been the economic groups (Richani, 2002). This social force is part of the dominant classes as much as the agrarian elites, the paramilitaries, and the narcotraffickers, but it does not share a number of their characteristics. Materially, it is rooted in services and finance, and it shares an ideology more typical of capitalist classes

⁷¹ In Spanish: "... dado que el neoliberalismo no ha podido encontrar un formato político que le permita estabilizar su modelo, como ocurrió en la fase anterior del capital con el estado benefactor en los países metropolitanos y el populismo nacionalista en los periféricos, la tendencia es la de fortalecer los aparatos de represión, justicia, cárceles, ejército y policía."

⁷² Relevant propositions in this case are the following:

1. The form of state depends on the configuration of class within a historic bloc, and the permissiveness of the world order;
2. Class struggles leading toward a transformation of states take a political form, they are about the in/exclusion from decision-making;
3. Class conflict in the formation of new historical blocs can lead either towards states that are autonomous in relation to civil society, or to states that are the mere instruments of divergent social forces. In the case of the former, it may rest on a hegemonic society, or it may bind together a society in which no hegemony has been achieved;
4. The state gives a legal-institutional framework for the economic practices of the economically dominant class i.e. the class that sets the development of production relations;
5. The legal-institutional framework set up by the autonomous state lays down the conditions for the development of the predominant social relations of production;
6. Hegemonic world orders tend to limit forms of state in their choice of economic-productive structures, while nonhegemonic orders permits the emergence of alternative forms of state and social structures of accumulation.

(Avilés, 2006; Richani, 2002). It has been represented through the economic and planning ministries, and in the executive. Conversely, the other dominant classes have manifested a more conservative and nationally oriented ideology, and they have had their material power based in their social control of local spheres, primarily through coercion, and in their control of land. As for the subordinate classes, even though in some conjunctures they have been able to obtain meagre concessions through mobilization and armed pressure, they have been mostly excluded.⁷³

Contrary to Richani's argument, economic groups are not the preponderant class fraction among the dominant classes by virtue of the recent importance of the service sector in the economy. Indeed, the first part of this essay showed how the agrarian elites can turn the tables from the regional level if their interests are not taken into account by other social forces. Specifically, nevertheless, the economic groups have been gaining preponderance because of the increasing structural power of capital at the three levels of production, state, and world order.

The power of capital comprises the two aspects of direct power and structural power. Direct power refers to its behavioural dimension, where co-optation is observed among actors with political agency, more specifically, by fractions of capital which may or may not be cooperating or coordinating (Gill, 2003). In this sense, the power of capital was observed in Urubá in its direct form by coordination among corporate and paramilitary groups for social control of labour and accumulation of land. Structural power refers to its structural dimension as the historical accumulation of *gestes répétés*:

The structural aspect is associated with both material and normative dimensions of society (such as market structures and the role of ideology) which may or may not be mutually reinforcing. The tenacity of market structures is illustrated by how, in modern economies, consistently higher priority is given to economic growth relative to other goals (such as conservation) (Gill, 2003: 98).

Thus, the structural power of capital is tilting the balance of social forces towards a capitalist oriented class. However, an analysis of the context of Álvaro Uribe's administration (2002-present) is necessary to show how far and in what ways this balance is tilting.

⁷³ The subordinate classes have in different conjunctures formed social forces. For example, the FARC's origins lie in the important persecution of the peasantry since the 1940s. Their material capability is in their nature as a guerrilla army, in their exploitation of narcotraffic, and in other strategies of accumulation such as taxing, robbery and kidnappings. Social movements and trade unions constitute alliances that form social forces and recently are gradually finding material support through transnational alliances.

When Andres Pastrana's government initiated a peace process with the FARC in 1998, the dynamics observed by Romero with regard to the peace process of the mid-1980s were repeated, except in this instance territorial control by paramilitary groups was much greater, as was the US government's involvement (Hylton, 2006). Indeed, the agrarian elites, paramilitaries, and the army used their regional social and political control to block the negotiations. The interesting point here is that economic groups, whose activities depend on a safe business climate, were in favour of a peace arrangement, but they could not transfer economic importance into political leverage that would counter the reactionary alliance.

Conversely, Uribe's administration represented a compromise between dominant social forces. Uribe could relate to the agrarian elites. He had a history of important relations with narcotraffic and was the governor of Antioquia during the paramilitary expansion in Urabá (1995-1997). For those reasons, with law 975 of 2005, he delivered a demobilization process to the paramilitary groups with that in fact did not require them or any segment of the agrarian elites to return the lands that were accumulated during their expansion. On the other hand, his administration also responded to the interests of the economic groups with the intensification of the military presence in economically important areas, and the military consolidation of areas already occupied by paramilitary forces. His program thus permitted the establishment of a safe business climate. This worked in the interests of the economic groups, but it also responded to an imperative of contemporary world order. Thus, the current conjuncture shows that even though the new social configuration of the dominant class is now tilting toward the economic groups⁷⁴, Colombia's form of state also rests on the dominance of the agrarian elites.

Another theoretical deduction is that the Colombian form of state is relatively autonomous relative to civil society, and that under Uribe it is resting on a hegemonic society (proposition 3). How this hegemony has been constituted is related to the nature of the separation between urban areas and the countryside. As 73 percent of the population is located in the urban areas, a social basis is provided for the dominant classes, and violent repression can be maintained against a minority of peasants in the countryside⁷⁵. In the urban areas, hegemony has involved a distinct form of organisation of consent that could be associated with the concept of panopticism, as related by Gloria Cuartas comments' on Uribe's democratic security policy:

⁷⁴ On this argument, see Richani, 2002; see also Avilés, 2006.

⁷⁵ Research would be needed to clarify this aspect of hegemony. Nevertheless, hints of the importance of the relationship between urban and rural areas are found in various works. For example, García argues that other than the worker-employer conflict, the constitution of social actors, and the conflicts it leads to, is shaped by the urban and rural scopes of social life. In addition, Fajardo treats of "two velocities", an urban sector linked to modern components of the economy and a rural sector where inequality and a precarious presence of the state prevail (García, 1996; Fajardo, 2002).

Our suburbs and rural sectors are not the same, they have been converted to another point in the chain of social control of ‘democratic security’. A profound change in social relations is being configured, the delegated security of the state in the form of unarmed paramilitarism, in the figure of the ‘panopticon’, watches and observes the minute, the everyday, and enters private spaces in the hairdresser, in the bakery, in the park, in the university, it screws-up the youth from sports to the *rumba* (Cuartas and Rico Chavarro, 2007: 37).⁷⁶

Recently, paramilitaries have formally demobilized, but they are present in local spheres and exert a mafia-like form of social control. In this context, clientelism has been renewed in another form, thus generating votes for the candidates chosen by regional elites (Hylton, 2006).

A third theoretical deduction is that this autonomous state gives the legal-institutional framework for the economic practices of the economically dominant class and lays down the conditions for the predominant social relations of production (propositions 4 and 5). Indeed, for Lara Coleman, Uribe’s “economic development strategy involves a repeated emphasis on the need for competitiveness and flexibility” (Coleman, 2006: 209). As argued in the second section, this legal framework advantaged commercial agriculture and economic groups. For example, even though the government reported 300,000 hectares of African palm in cultivation in 2005, it aimed to reach 6 million hectares (*Justicia y Paz*, 2005). Given the fact that paramilitaries have accumulated more than 4 million hectares of land, this plan benefits agribusinesses and paramilitary groups⁷⁷. At the same time, laws are recurrently proposed to modify private property to the advantage of the parties that are occupying lands formerly owned by peasants (Fajardo, 2007)⁷⁸. In addition, regarding social relations of production, the first section of this essay demonstrated that the state has laid the conditions for the development of the enterprise labour market, with a massive expansion of the primitive labour market.

A fourth and final theoretical deduction is that if hegemonic world orders tend to limit forms of state in their choice of economic-productive structures (proposition 6), throughout its history the Colombian state has embraced this limitation. This was most

⁷⁶ In Spanish: “... nuestros barrios y sectores rurales ya no son los mismos, se están convertido en un punto mas de la cadena de control social, de la política de ‘seguridad democrática’. El objetivo de esta política es desestructurar los movimientos locales e históricos. Se está configurando un cambio profundo en las relaciones sociales, la seguridad delegada del estado en una forma de paramilitarismo sin armas, que con la figura del ‘panóptico’, vigila todo y observa lo pequeño, lo cotidiano, y se adentra en los espacios privados, en la peluquería, en la panadería, en la iglesia, en el parque, en la universidad, que enreda a los jóvenes desde el deporte, y la rumba”

⁷⁷ Another objective is the ‘reincorporation to civil life’ of paramilitaries in African palm agro-industry.

⁷⁸ The acquisitive prescription of domain in favour of whom occupied the land for 5 years, supposing it is public land (Fajardo, 2007: 16).

apparent in the organisation of production, whence officials would consent to the International Monetary Fund's 'recommendations' from the 1950s onwards. Another aspect has been the comprehensive implementation of counter-insurgency. From the 1960s, counter-insurgency has been justified with anti-communism, counter-narcotics, and most recently, counter-terrorism (Stokes, 2005). But, what was being countered was the formation of an alternative form of state.

CONCLUSION

Through the case study of Operation Genesis, the first section provided a clear illustration of the changing relations of production that are affecting Urubá's peasantry. To understand these changes, it was necessary to contextualize them by looking at the conjuncture of paramilitarization in the region, that is, a territorial expansion of paramilitary groups accompanied by the increasing dominance of social forces supporting them. This case of paramilitarization differed from other cases such the Magdalena Medio or Cordoba, since a segment of banana workers and the EPL were included in a reactionary alliance. Thus, it showed how hegemony is sometimes achieved with concessions. Following this, the paramilitary imposition of social control brought the expansion of capitalist social relations, while the subsistence mode's disappearance was accelerated.

The second and third sections sought to contextualize this evolution by broadening the levels of analysis following Cox's historical materialist approach. The presentation of the most important social forces in the Colombian countryside showed materially and ideologically important reactionary and expansive agencies. Though regionally differentiated, they are pushing the balance towards a strengthened subordination of the already impoverished working poor. Those social forces have emerged out of the production process. An analysis of agro-pastoral production showed how 20 percent of the rural population is being displaced increasingly to urban areas and land is concentrated by narco-traffickers, agrarian elites, and paramilitaries. These conditions generated an erosion of social reproduction as a shift in agricultural production was made towards the exportation of non-traditional crops. Accordingly, these changes are favouring the emergence of the economic groups in an ever more important service sector. More generally, these accelerated effects of disciplinary neo-liberalism in Colombia are occurring within a history of economic liberalism.

The presentation of the organisation of production permitted me to sketch the form of the Colombian state. This form of state is rooted in its history of repression of political opposition and elitist stratification. Nevertheless, recent changes in production and world order brought a different social structure of accumulation in which economic groups constituted a separate social force. The latter are in a contradictory relationship with other dominant social forces in Colombia, since in certain instances, war is not to the advantage of the economic groups (Richani, 2002). This situation could be sustained in a precarious way, be it through the caesarism of the National Front or the emphasis on the politics of supremacy in the subsequent conjuncture. Nevertheless, hegemony was achieved with

Álvaro Uribe's election in 2002. Conditions for the stability and autonomy of the state were found when this administration understood and accommodated the economic groups and the agrarian elites. At the same time, the urban areas now constitute a social basis for the homogenization of society in capitalism, while commodification, in the form that was presented here, continues in the countryside.

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- Interamerican Commission of Human Rights: <http://www.cidh.oas.org/DefaultE.htm>

The ‘lower chamber’ before a case is sent to the Interamerican Court, issues reports and precautionary measures.

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