

Editorial. We Want to Build Our Territories.

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Abstract.

The pendulum of violence and the new displacements are back in Colombia, which are now promoted by the advent of “development,” which is manifested in the strong alliances between multinational corporations and the State, which not only expel inhabitants from their territories, but also, degrade nature. In both cases, this happens under the protection of Institutionalality and the regulation. This is the concrete case that diverse regions experience in Colombia.

Key words. Development; Human Rights; Armed Conflict; Eastern Region of Antioquia.

The world, in the face of a great marked economic crisis by the global events of the year 2008, seems not to learn from and not to realize the imminent danger in which it has been placed itself. Its model of life, culture, economic approach, which favors, on the one hand, the economic growth under the logic of the rise in the production, on ascendant scale, an action that repeats itself, no matter what, and on the other hand, the rise of a voracious consumption, has become today a serious problem for the sustainability of the human life.

This is a model, which rests on two basic needs: to extract at a higher speed, in large quantities, and at a low cost, the raw material required to maintain the engine of a given model: minerals, water, energy, timber, biological resource of all kinds, human talent, etc. On the other hand, it is required to build individuals not connected to their environment, but a kind of individuals, whose happiness is based on purchasing, having, spending, wasting, generating more contamination and waste. An individual without history, without a past, without a present, without a future, but connected to the world media network. These two rationales feed off each other, especially, in an ascending order: the greater extraction, the greater stupidity.

This dynamics degrades the planet, and of course, the human being does, too.

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This model has stepped on the gas pedal and the inhabitants of the southern-global, are experiencing it. On the one hand, I am shocked by a sort of reconquest and expropriation of territories rich in those “raw materials,” which for us, is nature, and building up, thanks to the great global school of the large mass communication media, which do know how to adjust new generations, which lack sense, who focus their weekend happiness, thanks to the fun and tours, around huge shopping centers.

This reality impacts what could be called the very context of those, who inhabit those territories, in dispute. A concrete case, which we have been accompanying for a long time thanks to diverse types of research, which makes sense, is the Eastern Region of Antioquia.

This is a region, which has withstood the armed violence. The Center of Historical Memory (2011) gives an account of the dimension of such a violence. It has recorded, in just the Municipality of San Carlos, 33 massacres, between 1995 and 2005, carried out by diverse armed actors: 22 by paramilitary, 6 by the guerrilla of FARC, 1 by another guerrilla (presumably by ELN (National Liberation Army), and finally, 4 by unidentified armed groups (presumably Security Forces or paramilitary groups). The death toll of those massacres stood at 220 (194 men and 26 women). Besides, It has recorded a total of 152 missing individuals (Olaya, 2012), 178 landmine victims, about 634 people, who were killed or missing by the diverse actors of the armed conflict (Olaya, 2012). All of this, together with the subsequent wave of terror and displacement. All of them are human rights and international humanitarian law violations.

This is a region, whose individuals have seen and felt themselves as alien to their homeland, who define and dispose of their present and future. Some of them have done it through the force of arms. Others, by the force of some Laws consistent with the interests of domestic and multinational companies, but all of them advance upon the control of these territories for the implementation of energy, mining, and agro-industrial megaprojects. It is about a dispute, which advances of those interests, without a previous consultation, or at least, with a fair compensation for that.

Today, with anguish and uncertainty, new mining and energy projects are appearing and are being announced in the region; external interests, which advance, without any problems. Both the companies and the State are gathering the inhabitants of this region, “to tell” them about the benefits that the “development, which will reach them,” will bring them about, what those companies will do in their territories and how it will be implemented. However, strictly speaking, it is not about a consultation, but a linear, unidirectional, communication, of power. It is about a message, which goes from the company to the communities, not to the communities to the company or the State: “to tell the communities what will happen in their territories and how they, can progressively adjust to this new, imposed reality.”

And even, “we are promised with agreed compensations secretly, we are convinced with little donations to schools or hospitals, it is a task, which corresponds to the State. These, among

some other actions, could lead to confusion. It is a deception.” (Leader of the Municipality of San Carlos).”

Little by little, they notice how their mobility is restricted in their own territory. Since they already have areas that they do not have access to or make any productive labor like they used to do in the past.

It can be noted that,

a development model, to be considered as such, must meet the community’s needs, securing a dignified life, in which the goal must be and provide maximum well-being and happiness, making habitability of the territories possible, in a healthy coexistence and harmony with nature. This must be the basis of the debate dealing with the social and environmental issues provoked by the so-called locomotives of development; this is the case of the Eastern Region in Antioquia (Colombia). Nevertheless, the development plans do not show solutions or the real expectation of the community (Olaya Rodriguez, 2015).

That is why the communities are being organized, articulating, expressing their thoughts, strengthening the social fabric in every village and municipality. In this order of ideas, they have been meeting every year at the Festival of Water for the Defense of Life and the Territory; it has been 8 years in a row that these scenarios of community participation have been carried out.

That is why on October 22nd and 23rd this year, in the Municipality of San Luis (Antioquia, Colombia), the 8th Festival of Water for the Defense of Life and the Territory was carried out. Over one thousand participants coming from different delegations of the municipalities of this sub-region: Sonsón, Carmen de Viboral, Rionegro, Medellín, San Luis, San Carlos, San Francisco, Argelia, Nariño. Diverse municipalities of the Eastern Region of Antioquia met together to think of themselves as a region, to talk about their main issues and to define routes of articulation and action in order to deal with myriad threats.

In this last festival, the participant communities warn about isolated cases of vulneration in their regions. However, at the same time, they show advances in the struggles for the defense of life and their territories.

The following table shows some of the most affectations, which were socialized in the Festival.

Table 1: Affectations expressed by the participant communities to the Festival. Eastern Region of Antioquia (2015-2016).

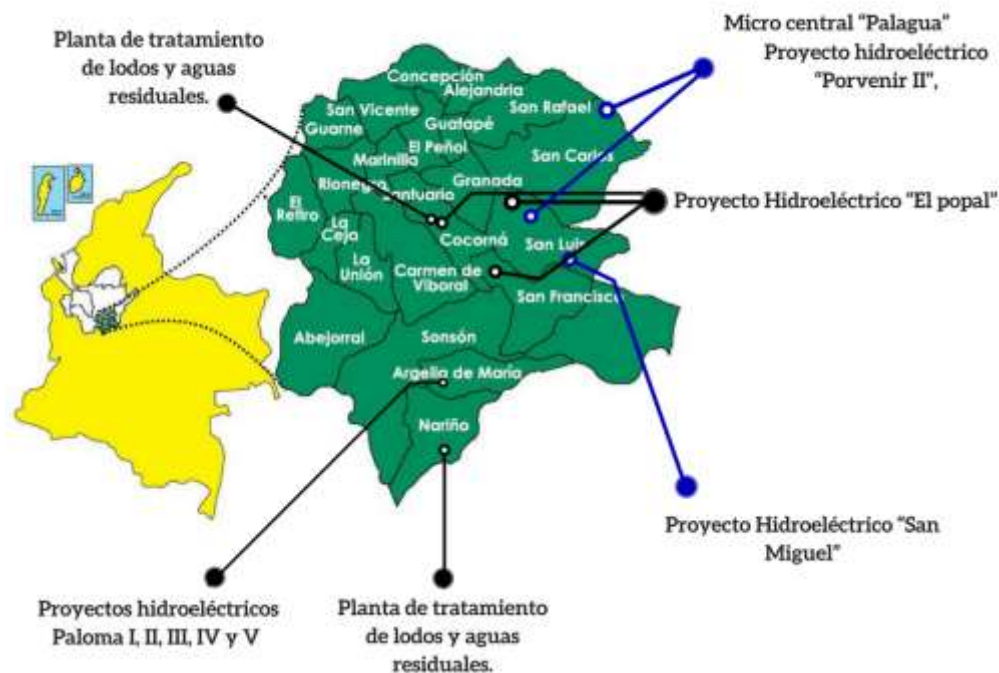
Municipality	Project
San Luis, San Francisco, and Cocorná	The “El Popal” Hydroelectric Project.
San Luis	The “San Miguel” Hydroelectric Project.
San Carlos, San Luis, Puerto Nare, and Caracolí	The “Porvenir 2” Hydroelectric Project. PMH Palaguas Project.
Nariño	The Consult S.A.S. Company aims at building Pocitos I and II Hydroelectric Power Stations on San Pedro River. These projects, which would generate 13,78 and 15,67 MW respectively, were declared public utility, whereby, at any moment, expropriations in the lands of influence can be started, specifically in the Villages of Puente Linda and the El Carmelo, and Damas, and La Valvanera Hamlets.
Argelia	The Paloma I, II, III, IV, and V hydroelectric projects form a serious threat to this territory. The studies for these projects of ownership of EMGEA were conducted without considering the impact, which would be caused in the La Paloma, Rancho Largo, Zancudo, San Luis, Guadual, La Plata, La Arboleda, El Oro, and La Arabia Hamlets.
San Francisco	Hydroelectric Power Stations on the Santo Domingo and Melcocho Rivers. In the community, uncertainty reigns due to the manners EPM behaves, which is one of the owners of the Project, along with EADE. Initially, they arrived in the area, impersonating any fishermen in order for them to conduct studies. Around mid-2016, they hoist flags in different parts of the territory, without the local settlers being aware of their purpose.
Cocorná	In the Los Cedros environmental park, a sludge treatment plant was installed, where the wastewater of the Eastern Region of Antioquia is deposited, causing dumping in the Viaho Stream, by which people have lost the enjoyment of the puddles, which was an important source of revenue for the tourism community. In addition, the inhabitants of the El Viaho Village denounce allergies, diseases, and insecurity with health issues, in general.
Sonsón.	Besides the hydroelectric power stations, which are projected to be built on the Arma River, in the Naranjal Abajo and Naranjal Arriba Villages of the Alto de Sabana Hamlet, the Little Naranjal Hydroelectric Power Station is being built on the Aures River, in charge of Capital S.A.

-Jerusalén Village	It is a mining area of limestone and kaolin, which is property of Sumicol-Corona, Argos S.A and Omiandina. By the expansion of the mining rights of these companies, the town is facing a relocation process.
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Source: Own. Data were taken from the 7th Festival of Water and the Defense of the Territory and of Life in the Eastern Region of Antioquia (Olaya Rodriguez, 2015) and data from the 8th Festival of Water, 2016 (Olaya Rodriguez, Justicia ambiental: que las aguas fluyan hacia la Paz., 2016).
(Environmental justice: let the waters flow into Peace).

These are some of the multiple problems, which distress the communities, a fence to the territory, to the water and life by a broad list of megaprojects and interests of multinational companies that, as an avalanche, have arrived and are imposed in the region. (Arias Moncada, 2016).

Image 2: Projects in the East of Antioquia.



Source: self made.

The communities clearly warn.

"... before it was the armed violence, now we live uneasily by the hydroelectric and mining projects." (Eastern Region of Antioquia).

The arrival of multinational companies, which have begun the implementation in a domineering manner, and sometimes, without consultations, of megaprojects of great socio-environmental impact, has become a threat in the region.

Likewise, they realize about the lack of a well-informed consultation, access to certain truthful data and about the impacts of these megaprojects, companies disseminate partial information and a technical language from which the thinking of communities is invalidated. Similarly, the advances of work not only impact the territory, but they also limit the community the access to certain areas of their territory, where their productive livelihood activities, such as fishing and artisanal mining, are derived. All this scenario is changing the dynamics and productive logic of the region, emphasizing the loss of sense of own future, among other issues.

The claim of communities to State authorities for failing to protect the interests of populations is reiterated, giving priority to foreign interests. This, without measuring the derived social and environmental consequences, among them, the adverse effects for the conservation of water sources, stand out.

The voice of populations has not been taken into account, in a binding way, so that the effective participation is still very much in doubt, as the State, its institutions, in the local, regional, and national scale, do not prioritize the decisions and discussions given in hamlet, village, and municipal scenarios have limited to convene to inform what the companies inevitably will make, not leaving more options than to sell and to sell their lands badly. Additionally, in their socializations, they use a technical language, which seeks to invalidate the knowledge of communities.

The Law of Justice and Peace has a spirit centered on principles of truth, justice, repair, and Not repetition. From these, mainly the one of NOT repetition, should prevail over the concept of utility public, insofar as these megaprojects now will cause, new expulsions through legal means, and the region has communities, which have recently come back progressively, rebuilding their lives, their social networks, their links with the territory, their dynamics of production, among others, after the brutal violence that they experienced in the 80s, 90s and entering the new century (Insuasty Rodriguez & Grisales González, 2016).

Both the discussion and proposals in this Festival, on the role of women, youth, boys and girls, the continuity of life, and peasant culture, claims to urban dynamics and culture for not taking into consideration the importance of peasant production, among some discussed issues.

Likewise, actions to be developed, were woven.

“What we want is to defend water, life, our customs, and peasant values; that is what we want, and for us, the land, for example, does not have any economic value. It is our roots, where we have made family, community.” Community leader of the Eastern Region of Antioquia.

“It has been more than 30 years that we have been giving our wealth to the country without having a fair compensation, we suffer. On the contrary, the displacement forced by violence.

Today, given the new megaprojects, we will be expelled through legal means.” an inhabitant of the region, with regard to Territorial Peace.

That is why we need and propose in this 8th Festival of Water for the Defense of Life and the Territory:

- Strengthen community organizational capacity and active and purposeful resistance,
- Multiply rural schools,
- Strengthen village processes training,
- Increase clean production projects,
- Advance in the consolidation of a regional economy, based on solidarity, exchange, custody of seeds, peasant vegetable gardens, etc.,
- Expand the proposal from and for the young, women, peasant boys and girls,
- Enhance peasant vocations in the region,
- Demand the State about the fulfillment of its role as a protector of the communities and the environment,
- Extend peasant and political training processes,
- Build collective agendas in the region, from below, based on who we are,
- Broaden community participation.

Many proposals emerged. Likewise, Kavilando proposed to systematize the 8 already Festivals of the Water, in order to make their achievements, scopes, and difficulties more visible. It was also suggested that every festival should generate detailed proposals by regions, with the persons in charge and times of execution, so that each festival could evaluate such commitments, and in doing so, continue advancing in the construction of a social common agenda, which can be asserted, in the region.

The event was a mobilization in defense of water, the territory, and life. It was a cultural event, and on the second day, it concluded with a symbolic event, which resumed and bound both community commitments and nature.

It is worth highlighting that these struggles have had some progress and meaningful achievements, as it is the case of the achievement reached by the inhabitants of San Carlos, Antioquia to achieve to stop the project of the La “Chorrera” Hydroelectric Power Station, as well as the inhabitants of the Municipality of San Luis, who thanks to the mobilization, and the collective work, promoted by the Lookouts of the Dormilón River, revoked the license for two run-of-the-river hydroelectric power stations, on this river, Thus, it can be shown that the social mobilization is effective for the defense of the territory.

Conclusion.

It is worth noticing that participation implies the empowerment of subjects so that they are part of social, political, developmental processes, among others, assuming themselves as social actors, who have an incidence on the public life of their town. Even this, the daily practice of the government intervention projects and those of the operators in which their action is outsourced, has led us to problematize the concept of "participation," since in the context, according to people's accounts in this research; despite the multiple scenarios and institutional "evidence," which state that are open to participation, what seems to happen is that it is more of a deficit in the social and political dynamics of the municipality. (Villa Gómez & Insuasty Rodríguez, Significados en torno a la indemnización y la restitución en víctimas del conflicto armado en el municipio de San Carlos, 2016).

It is important to highlight that we are witnessing a social stage that talks about peace, and aims at opening scenarios in order to build, with everybody's help, peace with changes, with social and environmental justice, a scenario, which opens and enhances the challenges of participation that while they can be understood as a possibility for the community to express and to impose conditions. Besides, we can fall into the instrumentalization of such scenarios, by the establishment, that is why it is urgent to overcome those "illusions of the partition," "you meet together, but I am the one who decides," which is a convenient logic, which develops more as an informational act, and at most, as an advisory one.

It is necessary to move towards a real participation, which implies the empowerment and public action in stages of construction of power, which requires an appropriation of the public and a sense of the collective; in such a way that leads to a comprehensive and human development of individuals, families, and communities, in scenarios of real democracy and self-determination.

That is to say, an exercise of the organization and the participation with a clear sense of resistance in contexts of domination and exercise of the vertical powers, which tend to exclude and to press others, for whom violence was a means of intimidation. But from the processes, which we managed to recognize in this research, we risked to say that, largely, many people of San Carlos managed to keep the collective and organizational spirit alive, which provides it with elements to participate and to act, not from a place of subordination, but one of empowerment and dignity. Even so, in the midst of the complexity that it has lived, there are many limits and difficulties; without this implying that the steps are not being taken to rebuild the organizational tissue, which gives the support to the participation and exercise of power from below.

Anyway, all this process, which has not been easy, and, which has involved conflicts, difficulties, and setbacks, allows that people continue being recognized in the resistance, in the need of a collective action in order to protect the territory, to remain in it, so that this land, which they inhabit, continues being their home.

For this reason, the resistance of the past are memory and strength for the struggles of the present, especially when political and economic interests are still raising on the territory.

There are many scenarios and multiple possibilities, Are many those scenarios and multiple the possibilities. Also, not a few threats, especially by the so-called “development projects,” which do not take into account life, culture, the dynamics and the organization of the people. Thereof the importance of this collective conscience and of this epic story, which is necessary so that the required resistances continue being deployed and achieve justice, equity and dignity in its territory.

The stories and experiences give us an account of the processes and actions, through which the people are not simply a passive subject of the State actions, of external supports, which deepen their dependent condition and can install it in an identity of a victim. By contrast, it has been evident the immense capacity to withstand and to rebuild, in order to keep his dignity, and even for developing parallel actions, which let them to transcend the place of the victim and empower them as subjects of right, as social actors, protagonists of their own development and overcoming of their consequences that the war left them.

As it has been seen, these actions of resistance and dignity, these social struggles have been the key of the reconstruction of the social fabric in the municipality and are fundamental for the recovery of the social, political, and economic life, which has revitalized the region. In this frame of sense and interpretation, that many of those, who participate in this research make, the intervention of the State has been a mere complement and in some cases, an aid, but in others, with not little frequency, they have become an obstacle before which the communities and the people, have had to overcome (Villa Gomes & Insuasty Rodríguez, 2016).

Thus, the welfare and generating logic of dependence of the State, NGOs, from different external organizations, have delayed, in many cases, the strengthening of collective processes, insofar as, on the one hand, they take the pace of communities, speak on their behalf, decide what is more convenient for them, whether companies or NGOs, these are attitudes, which end up in divisions, which crack relations or prevent the empowerment of subject or collective to develop their own management strategies, which is coherent with the forms of power and domination, which have been developing historically in Colombia, where the State rather than from the community, the various actions have responded more to different, external interests, which are used as a mediation to execute dominion and control, in addition to exclusion and violence (Gonzalez, Bolivar, & Vasquez, 2002).

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