

Peasant economy and voluntary substitution of illicit crops, municipality of Briceño (Antioquia).

Peasant economy and voluntary substitution of crops for illicit use, municipality of
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ABSTRACT

The armed conflict, the crisis of the agrarian model and the expansion of illicit crops in Colombia have produced a reconfiguration of the territory, reflected in the peasant economy and the transformation of productive practices in rural areas. Such is the case of the village of Pueblo Nuevo, municipality of Briceño (Antioquia), which suffered the expansion of armed conflict scenarios that affected its peasant economy, displaced in the search for an activity that would guarantee a minimum of wealth, suffering violent transformations in economic, social and cultural relations.

In this sense, the research sought to understand how the peasant economy has occurred in the framework of the Havana Peace Agreement, specifically the process of substitution of illicit crops in Pueblo Nuevo and its relationship with the social construction of the territory in the period 2016-2019. This was approached from the peasant economy and deepened the main Latin American interpretative categories showing its evolution, permanence and configuration of particular rural contexts, which link illicit crops as an alternative to traditional production processes. In this context, the persistence of traditional production systems in the contemporary world is recognized as an alternative for the reconfiguration of rural territories, the search for peace and the collective affirmation of peasants in Pueblo Nuevo as subjects with deep roots in their territory and forms of production, as well as with the processes of memory as a consequence of the experience of the conflict.

Key words: peasant economy, rural territorial development, illicit crops, territorial construction.

RESUMEN

El conflicto armado, la crisis del modelo agrario y la expansión de los cultivos de uso ilícito en Colombia ha producido una reconfiguración del territorio, reflejada en la economía campesina y la transformación de las prácticas productivas en la ruralidad. Tal es el caso del corregimiento de Pueblo Nuevo, municipio de Briceño (Antioquia), el cual sufrió la expansión de los escenarios de conflicto armado que afectaron su economía campesina, desplazada en la búsqueda de una actividad que garantizara un mínimo de riqueza, sufriendo transformaciones violentas en las relaciones económicas, sociales y culturales. En este sentido, la investigación buscó comprender cómo se ha dado la economía campesina en el marco del Acuerdo de Paz de La Habana, específicamente el proceso de sustitución de cultivos de uso ilícito en Pueblo Nuevo y su relación con la construcción social del territorio en el periodo 2016-2019. Esta se abordó desde la economía campesina y profundizó las principales categorías interpretativas latinoamericanas donde se muestran su evolución, permanencia y configuración de contextos rurales particulares, los cuales vinculan los cultivos de uso ilícito como alternativa a los procesos productivos tradicionales. En este contexto se reconoce la persistencia de los sistemas de producción tradicional en el mundo contemporáneo como alternativa para la reconfiguración de los territorios rurales, la búsqueda de la paz y la afirmación colectiva de los campesinos en Pueblo Nuevo como sujetos con profundo arraigo en su territorio y formas de producción, al igual que con los procesos de memoria como consecuencia de la vivencia del conflicto.

Palabras clave: economía campesina, desarrollo territorial rural, cultivos de uso ilícito, construcción del territorio.

1. Introduction

Colombia is currently in the midst of a post-agreement derived from the peace process signed in 2016 between the National Government and the FARC-EP1 guerrilla for the termination of the conflict and the construction of a stable and lasting peace, which seeks to close a historical cycle of armed confrontation. In this transition, it is essential to comply with the terms of the 2016 peace agreement in order to guarantee the reconstruction of the country, since conflicts do not end with the laying down of arms. The implementation of the agreement thus becomes an opportunity for rural territories that have served as scenarios of armed conflict. Such is the case of the village of Pueblo Nuevo (municipality of Briceño), located in the northern sub-region of the department of Antioquia, where for 20 years confrontations and disputes over the strategic value of the territory were unleashed, as well as situations inherent to the war that led to changes in the local order and linked the transformation of strategic sectors such as the traditional productive sector.

Thus, coca produced a substantial modification in the productive dynamics of the growers and in the daily life in the village, and represented for the farmers a particular experience of capital accumulation. On the other hand, it constituted a school of technical training in the transfer of knowledge and agronomic practices due to its proximity and relationship with traditional agricultural production processes in operational, cultural and management matters, linked to traditional knowledge that replaced the absence of modernizing patterns in the initial production system (planting and harvesting) and some type of collective management work (associativity).

The moment that rural development is going through since the implementation of the agreements, specifically the PNIS, demanded an approach to understand how the peasant economy has taken place in the framework of the Havana agreements, specifically in the process of substitution of illicit crops in Pueblo Nuevo and its relationship with the social construction of the territory in the period 2016-2019. This links the peasant economy, which shows the historically determining elements, as well as its evolution, permanence and recomposition in particular rural contexts, linked to illicit crops as an alternative to traditional productive processes under the logics of land use and exploitation, management of the rural unit and its relationship with the market. This approach also links the theoretical approaches of rural territorial development, which favor the understanding of the village of Pueblo Nuevo, where the study is

developed. This has been intervened by groups that have given it specific connotations of necessary knowledge, understanding and valuation, considering that the territory has been defined and signified by social processes for more than 20 years and on which an approximation was made in the field work.

Part of the commitment assumed in the thesis is to socialize the results in broader academic and professional contexts so that the country knows a version of what happened in the municipality of Briceño in which a peace exercise was made possible with the development of the PNIS. Finally, this work was carried out within the framework of the Master's Degree in Development of the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana and on which an outstanding qualification was obtained with the possibility of obtaining an honorable mention.

The purpose of the research carried out is to understand the peasant economy in the municipality of Briceño, township of Pueblo Nuevo, in the context of voluntary substitution of illicit crops and the social construction of the territory in the period 2016-2019, achieving to know the experience of the township of Pueblo Nuevo facing the establishment and substitution of illicit crops during the period 1999-2016, which allows detailing the process of transformation and strengthening of the peasant economy in the township of Pueblo Nuevo from the process of voluntary substitution of illicit crops during the period (2016-2018), managing to outline from the voluntary substitution of crops the social construction of the territory in the township of Pueblo Nuevo.

The peasant economy began its debate in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century, when it became evident that the development of capitalism had not succeeded in homogenizing the social relations of production within agriculture. However, the promotion of modernization as a development model in underdeveloped continents produced a complex heritage that triggered a relative devaluation of the peasantry, which affected its social recognition and the construction of its own subjectivity.

In their characterization, Schejtman (1980), as well as Vargas (1987), Machado (1993) and Bejarano (1998), identify the peasant economy as sub-family units with low levels of modernization and access in their modes of production, a situation that promotes dependence on external sources of income, especially wage labor. Consequently, this economy is almost exclusively a producer of food for direct consumption, whose surplus is cross-cut by unfavorable terms of trade for producers, making it impossible to generate higher levels of income to represent an emerging middle rural class.

From the above, Pérez (2001) highlights the relative loss of the economic and social significance of the primary and secondary sectors in rural areas, in which activities such

as extractive, agro-industrial, infrastructure and illicit crops are privileged. In this context of profound changes, Berry (2017) makes a bet by observing how the peasant economy can be positioned as a sector of strategic value in the search for peace and equity in the country

For Berry (2017), the formal sector today offers employment to less than half of the labor force and that formal employment is slowly increasing. For this reason, it is inevitable to conclude that in the coming decades in Colombia the informal sector will have the possibility of offering between 40 % and 50 % of the country's jobs. From this fact we can deduce the great importance of the productivity of the peasant economy in order to revalue "peasants as a strategic potential for the nation. Despite their weakening, in the most recent records peasants still sustain a relevant participation in the food supply" (Fajardo, 2018, p. 38).

Rural Territorial Development Historically, rural development strategies were marked by different paradigms that were mainly based on the idea of land and agriculture. However, more and more frequently, these strategies point to territorial approaches that, according to Lambí (2012), address a diversity of agendas, in which the territory becomes the object of focus of rural economic, social and political strategies.

Schejtman and Berdegué (2004) propose RTD as an approach that makes it possible to propose significant changes in rural development strategies, defining it as a process of productive and institutional transformation of a given rural space, aimed at reducing rural poverty. For Lambí (2012), like Schejtman and Berdegué (2004), the territorial approach to rural development incorporates the analysis of the links between the biophysical context, the systems of production of goods and services and rural societies, links mediated by market regulatory institutions, the State, parastatal agencies and civil society organizations.

Territories, according to Mancano (2013), are recognized as a living space, instituted by subjects and social groups that affirm themselves through it, becoming the sphere in which the peasantry deploys its reproduction strategy, appropriating, transforming and building it from the contradictions, conflicts, disparities of natural conditions, institutions and economies. These territories are heterogeneous and organized on the basis of different social relations for their existence, requiring the development of the dimensions of life.

The social construction of the territory is a dynamic process from which illicit crops are reconfiguring rural territories and substantially the production systems, water uses, agricultural practices and social relations, according to the individual or collective subject that experiences it from their own conditions of power, social location, gender,

age and ethnicity (Velásquez and Ferro, 2009, p. 30), which have defined the social construction of the territory and influenced the rural from aspects such as the peasant economy and the territory.

2. Materials and Methods

The paradigm of this research is qualitative, the methodological approach used is the phenomenological hermeneutic, which "is framed in the understanding and interpretation of the given phenomenon; which implies a rescue of the elements of the subject over those facts external to him" (Carcamo, 2005, p. 211). In this sense, the research takes the process of interpretation as the central axis of the analysis.

The selection of the participating subjects was of 13 peasants, referents of the illicit crop substitution process, with experience of more than 10 years of life in the study territory, with representation of rootedness and socio-territorial identity, experience in the process of transition from traditional crops to coca and leadership. This was developed in two moments, the first one on documentary review and analysis and field work in which several information gathering techniques were used, supported by particularist ethnography, based on semi-structured interviews.

In addition, the researcher kept a field diary, which recorded the daily experience in the field, including work in their production units, homes and the expansion of some contextual elements around the peasant economy, evidenced in a series of photographs that show the participation in PNIS spaces, territorial transformations and some changes in the production units.

The information collected through the data collection techniques and instruments was categorized through a matrix in an information system, particularly Excel. This was organized in a categorical matrix on the information obtained in dialogue with the farmers. Each category had a set of questions asked to the interviewees in order to have a general view on the aspects of the peasant economy, the substitution process and the social construction of the territory. At some moments, given the specific characteristics of the information technique used, complementary questions were asked about issues that emerged in the dialogue and were of interest to the researcher to deepen. The same happened with the elements of theoretical conceptualization, which, interrelated, made possible an in-depth understanding of the situations studied.

The analysis plan had two moments, a descriptive one based on the use of a first database with all the communications of the interviewees in their natural form. In the second, a second database was created, in which the information was recoded by means of interpretation units to group some key categories and, subsequently, some common issues where the most significant and representative phrases of the farmers' situation were extracted.

3. Results

This study addresses a current issue in the history of the country marked by the fundamental fact of the implementation of the 2016 Peace Agreement. It requires a broad reflection on the factors that influenced coca-producing municipalities such as Briceño and its township Pueblo Nuevo, as well as the relevance and review of the territorial and development context conditions on which the processes of productive transformation marked by the displacement of the traditional peasant economy arise.

The study oriented by this research targets the corregimiento of Pueblo Nuevo in the municipality of Briceño (Norte de Antioquia) with 8,702 inhabitants, of which 40% live in the urban area and 60% live in the rural area (Alcaldía de Briceño, 2019). The population of Briceño presents characteristics of low population density in some areas and dispersed settlements that are difficult to access. Figure 1 shows its geographic location:

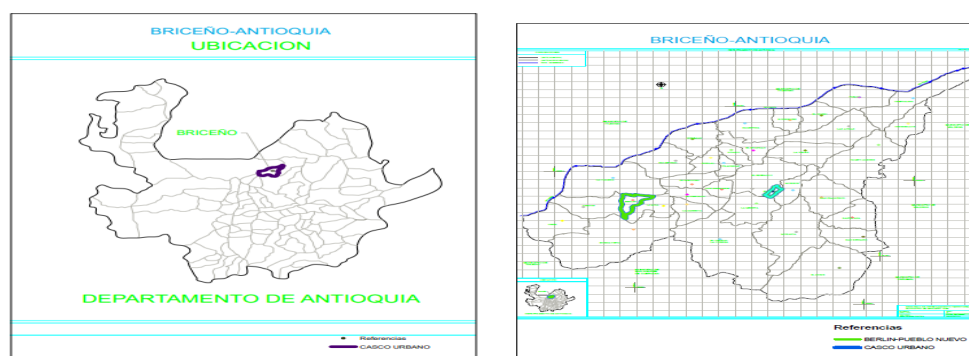


Figure 1. Geographical location - Administrative map of the municipality of Briceño. Source: IGAC, 2020, digitized Fernando Cortés.

Since 2002 Briceño suffered the expansion of conflict scenarios, which generated more than 3,048 victims (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2018), who have been subject to criminal actions such as landmines, homicides, confinements, dispossessions and forced displacements (Fajardo, 2002), a situation with a crucial effect on the relative stagnation of the agricultural sector represented in the abandonment of land.

The territorial characteristics of the municipality of Briceño, specifically the village of Pueblo Nuevo, are varied in relation to the economy as an indispensable element in the social reproduction of the peasantry, in particular, its contribution to economic income. These activities in the township historically converged on the basis of the peasant economy, defined as that sector of the national agricultural activity, where the productive process is developed by family type units, in order to ensure, cycle by cycle, the reproduction of their living and working conditions or the proliferation of the producers and the production unit itself (Schejtman, 1980, p. 123).

However, the peasant economy based on traditional production was displaced in the search for a mechanism to guarantee accumulation, in response to the low profitability of traditional crops, a situation that allowed the introduction of illicit crops (planting and processing of coca leaf) into their production system. According to Reyes (2013), coca is the only product integrated into efficient trade chains aimed at the international market, capable of creating value for farmers and drug-trafficking entrepreneurs.

This complex situation is related to a variety of factors and circumstances historically determined by social, economic, political and cultural characteristics reflected particularly in the agrarian problem, as a result of the trends imposed in the eighties and nineties in economic policy, such as macroeconomic management, particularly the revaluation of the peso, economic liberalization, climate change and the impacts of the armed conflict (Fajardo, 2002, p. 4).

According to Loaiza, Y. L., & Perdomo, M. F. P. (2021), it is possible to recognize how the visibility of the trajectory and the formative components are associated with the social and cultural dynamics of each actor, another element to consider in the territorial dynamics of the township of Pueblo Nuevo, related to the peasant economy, is the access and tenure of land. This is determined by a high level of informality in property rights, constant expansion of the agricultural frontier and proliferation of smallholdings (small properties), which are not sufficient to undertake a profitable productive project. Properties that in their constitution are from 1 to 10 hectares (has) on average (Peace and Post-conflict Unit Leader, personal communication, August 2017)¹.

¹ These data are difficult to analyze in depth, due to the lack of detailed institutional information such as the existence of an updated land registry.

Additionally, the entry of coca put food security at risk in the township due to the trend towards monoculture, which caused a deep dependence on income from this activity (Cruz and Chaparro, 2017, pp. 47, 48). The coca bonanza resulted in farmers no longer cultivating bread to buy the vast majority of basic foodstuffs, solidifying the loss of productive vocation, as well as the rising cost of living.

Something similar occurs with the supply of public goods by the State in territories such as the municipality of Briceño. These territories are discriminated against because of the presence of an illegal activity persecuted by public institutions. The presence of crops makes them the object of repressive policies, supported by the international community and the central State, a presence reduced to that of the armed forces to repress such activities (Cruz and Chaparro, 2017, p. 35). The provision of essential public goods such as road, school and health infrastructure have lagged behind in the corregimiento. Therefore, the territory is a key factor for the promotion of rural development policies, ambitious policies safeguarded today after the signing of the peace agreement between the FARC-EP guerrillas and the Government of Juan Manuel Santos. One of the main objectives of this agreement is to structurally transform the countryside in order to boost the country's development. Briceño is part of this ambitious project as it is the subject of multiple pilots derived from the Havana agreement, such as humanitarian demining, formalization of rural property and the Program for the Voluntary Substitution of Illicit Crops, which has eradicated 97% of the leaf in the municipality.

In other words, there is a rhetorical renewal, which is not yet reflected in institutional transformations or in methods and instruments used for sustainable productive reconversion in territories such as the village of Pueblo Nuevo. In this order of ideas, and following the course of this research, the synthesis question of the problem statement is: How has the peasant economy in the municipality of Briceño, township of Pueblo Nuevo, been in the context of the voluntary substitution of illicit crops and its relationship with the social construction of the territory?

In Colombia, there has been little recognition of the importance of the rural world for the country's development. However, the signing of the peace agreement has brought to the public debate the transformation of the countryside as a fundamental issue for the end of the armed conflict and rural development. As a result of this, there is the program of voluntary substitution of illicit crops, as a development strategy that promotes legal and stable income alternatives for rural communities. From the above, this research will seek to understand how the peasant economy has been in the municipality of Briceño, Pueblo Nuevo, in the context of the illicit crop substitution process, and its relationship with the social construction of the territory (2016-2019).

As for the research, it justifies its realization in the intention of contributing to the construction of an integral dimension of development from the generation of scientific knowledge to strengthen academic reasoning, related to solutions to the structural problems of the Colombian rurality from the rural and agrarian public policy, because the policies aimed at the promotion of the peasant economy insist on providing a social treatment to poverty, without taking into account the development potential of the territories and global changes.

The relevance of development and territorial peace-building arises from the motivating understanding of the rural problem, which still links municipalities such as Briceño to a peripheral development model historically affected by the armed conflict, institutional segregation and the effects of the dynamics of illicit crops, which promote the presence of legal and illegal armed groups. These elements have produced a territorial transformation expressed in the displacement of traditional economic practices in the rural sector. Consequently, the research will become a guiding product, suggesting guidelines that international, national, departmental or local organizations should keep in mind for the understanding of rural areas as a diverse, multifunctional and complex world.

4. Conclusions

The evident stagnation of the traditional economy and the persistence of the armed conflict in the township facilitated the community's rupture with the traditional economic circuit, which made possible the transition to the economy of illicit crops, specifically coca, given its ease of accumulation. Thus, the productive factors (land, family labor and knowledge) were placed at the service of the coca economy and generated a change in the commercial model of traditional crops towards a business model motivated by yield, productivity, expansion of the agricultural frontier for accumulation and, in some cases, development of their own technologies for the transformation of coca leaf.

With coca cultivation also came changes in the social dynamics of the corregimiento, most of them conflictive, violent, of force and power relations that triggered confrontations and disputes over the strategic value of the territory. As a result, peasants recognize a product that stimulated violence, homicides, displacement, isolation, militarization of daily life and fear, which drastically transformed peasant social values of collectivity for individualistic values.

On the one hand, the PNIS gave content to the peasant economy and recognized the persistence of traditional production systems in the contemporary world as the only

alternative for the reconfiguration of dispersed rural territories, the search for equity and peace. In this sense, peasants persist in identity characteristics that highlight their value and commitment to legal traditional economic activities linked to collective knowledge, memory and dreams confronted with the specific spaces where they work for love of the land.

On the other hand, a change was generated in the peasantry, reaffirming themselves as social subjects committed to territorial change through substitution and without fundamental resistance that would impede compliance with the agreement; on the contrary, they vindicated their historical struggles for integral wellbeing, the construction of peace in the country and the reestablishment of relations with the State in the hope of having profound transformations in the territory.

However, this contrasts with the absence of a long-term national political agreement for rural development that guarantees what was agreed in 2016 and the bases for a sustainable post-agreement, currently affected by the disinterest of the current government and specifically evidenced in the discourse of stigmatization, defunding of the implementation that affected determining stakes such as the PNIS, the implementation of the PDETs in the corregimiento and the opening to old ideas such as aerial spraying and forced eradication.

This being said, due to non-compliance in the corregimiento, the absence of a sufficiently dynamic economy for the generation of income for the peasants is a priority, which stimulates the uprooting and impoverishment of the population. This situation allows the reappearance of violence as a determining factor in the change of productive conditions, something evident at the time of collecting information in the field.

With respect to the development framework, historical tax positions that facilitated the articulation of peasants with the dynamics of illicit economies are evident. Consequently, other forms of development alternatives are proposed to link them with the legal world and the national project. These models somehow recognize some variables of alternative processes or development models that in recent years have suggested emphasizing cultural and sociological explanations of human development.

The PNIS must be an articulated commitment to the national political project, to achieve integral rural development and transform the current conditions of rural territories immersed in innumerable rhetorical modifications that do not guide the practical determinations for change.

Policies such as the PNIS must have a long-term social accompaniment with the peasants committed to this task and with a broad leadership of local actors (departments,

municipalities). Taking into account that when these actors are left in a scenario of uncertainty, they experience a deeper delegitimization of the State.

It is necessary to continue thinking about alternatives to protect the bases on which the peasant social and political organization model is built within the framework of initiatives such as the crop substitution process.

The research process marks a starting point for understanding other phenomena surrounding the peasant economy and the profound contemporary transformations, which involve understanding new phenomena such as climate change, extractivism, the need for sustainable productivity, emerging markets, structural failures of the state apparatus and their possible consequences on traditional forms of production.

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