
FORCE MULTIPLIERS

THE INSTRUMENTALITIES OF IMPERIALISM

The New Imperialism, Volume 5

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Chapter 3

COCAINE BLUES: THE COST OF DEMOCRATIZATION UNDER PLAN COLOMBIA

Robert Majewski

Colombia has had continuous relations with the US since 1822, yet US interest in the country increased during the Cold War era when insurgent groups emerged and became a threat to the kind of democratic model that is preferred by the US (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, 2013). Particularly, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC) has been the stated source of worries for US officials. The FARC was seen as a threat to the established political order and has continuously been accused of having a direct link to drug production operations (Labrousse, 2005). Following decades of covert and overt interventions justified by counterinsurgency missions and anti-drug campaigns, US president Bill Clinton and Colombian head of state Andrés Pastrana combined their efforts into a plan that aimed to eradicate drug production once and for all and stabilize the Colombian economy while strengthening the country's democracy (Council on Foreign Relations [CFR], 2000). Plan Colombia was introduced in 2000 and was unsuccessful in attaining its goals for the reduction of drug production, yet it has had repercussions on the economic, political and social spheres of the country. Economically, it assures a free flow of capital between the global South and the global North, ensuring that Colombia enters successfully into the free market, thus pleasing US investors and aligning with imperialist interests. What US foreign policy fosters, as perpetuated under Obama, is "a complex balance between stability and instability that maintains the region's overall dependence and, therefore, its status as a source of

U.S. wealth and power” (Delgado-Ramos & Romano, 2011, p. 93). Politically, it ensures through militarization a strong counterinsurgency program for fighting actors that pose a threat to the US-backed model of democracy and the neoliberal agenda (Delgado-Ramos & Romano, 2011; Mondragón, 2007; Villar & Cottle, 2011). More tangibly, fumigation of peasant crops and massive displacement have also affected the population and can be interpreted as a symptom of Plan Colombia and more generally, imperialism itself (Ballvé, 2009).

In this chapter I will therefore argue that US-Colombian relations have been shaped by the imperialist project of the US: through the humanitarian discourse of help and cooperation, and the battle against the FARC under the umbrella of the “war on drugs,” the US has legitimized its military intervention in Colombia to ensure its legitimacy and its presence in South America. Furthermore, through US-style democratization and the implementation of the rule of law, the US has ensured in Colombia a safer haven for foreign capital and opened the doors for the implementation of a free market system.

Setting the Scene: Colombian Internal Conflict

Colombia’s geographic position makes it a strategic point of control over the South American continent and more particularly its neighbouring countries. Indeed, bordering Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil, Colombia presents itself as the entry way to South America and the launching point of many US military operations in the region (Salazar & Acosta, 2001). Furthermore, in the entire region and also in Colombia, since the end of WWII leftist movements have blossomed due to disenchantment with the promises of industrialization and the burgeoning national security states, and offered alternatives that took into account peasant struggles and the demands of the impoverished masses. The Cold War era saw a dichotomy between the growing capitalist force of the US and the communist politics of the Soviet Union. So-called “Third World” countries witnessed a rise of revolutionary movements that offered alternatives to right wing politics. An example of this is the FARC, which was formed as a result of peasant military organization that had previously fought during *La Violencia* (Metelits, 2010, p. 93). This period of violence (1948-1966) cost more than 200,000 lives, and was a result of the political confrontations between the Conservative and Liberal Parties (Sánchez in

Metelits, 2010, p. 88). Policies on land issues were heavily contested, which led to the dramatic turning point of the assassination of Liberal party member Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Gaitán had been pushing for land reforms and wealth redistribution, causes that gained popularity among the masses (Metelits, 2010, p. 88). During this period, peasants were forced to leave their lands and many of them joined guerrilla groups that took up arms to fight against large landowners (Metelits, 2010, p. 91). These groups gained political importance as they grew into a menace for the governments in place. In 1964, the FARC was officially formed and quickly established its political legitimacy as a revolutionary group defending peasant rights and as a force fighting against the political elite.

US officials rapidly acknowledged that the FARC was a force to be reckoned with and that the political power they held was a direct menace to US imperial dominance in Colombia that also had implications for the rest of Latin America. Parallel to the rise of the FARC, narco-traffickers were also gaining ground. Indeed, the 1980s in Colombia were characterized by a rise in cocaine production along with drug traffickers finding their way into Colombian political, financial and legal institutions (Villar & Cottle, 2011, p. 55). The lines were blurred between the government and the drug cartels; the new “narco-state” opened the way for the “narco-bourgeoisie” whose interests were in turn protected by the Colombian state. Having acquired great wealth through the drug economy, this new economic class was the main investor in Colombia. The money generated was subsequently laundered in US financial institutions (Villar & Cottle, 2011, p. 55). Yet another important actor arose to protect the drug cartels: the paramilitary forces created by the drug cartels themselves were an even more violent alternative to the Colombian army, both having similar interests in protecting the dominant class. Opposing these groups were the FARC who were targeted and depicted as a threat by the governments of Colombia and the US.

The Colombian military in the 1970s and 1980s was funded in large part by the US government. The military training and assistance that the US provided were allegedly used to counter political opponents such as the FARC rather than the emerging drug lords (Villar & Cottle, 2011, p. 45; also see “foreign internal defense” in the Introduction to this volume). The CIA on the other hand played an important role in centralizing drug traffickers through meetings that they organized in Colombia resulting in the creation of the important Medellín drug cartel led by the infamous Pablo Escobar (Villar & Cottle, 2011, p. 47). Escobar’s rule did not last

long as he was killed in 1993 and replaced by Carlos Castaño from the Cali drug cartel, also with the help of the CIA (Villar & Cottle, 2011, p. 78). This change of actors further engrained drug production into the Colombian political system and opened the door for the strengthening of relations between drug cartels and US agents (Villar & Cottle, 2011, p. 79). Seven years later, Plan Colombia was authorized by Bill Clinton, legitimizing and authorizing US interventions in Colombia under the same banner of the drug war.

Historical Development of Plan Colombia

Former Colombian president Andrés Pastrana Arango introduced in 1998 a national development plan called “Cambio para construir la paz” (Change to construct peace). This plan aimed to promote the economic, social and environmental conditions necessary to achieve national peace (Salazar & Acosta, 2001, p. 44). In the following year a second version of the plan was proposed and included elements of political reform and projects for alternative agricultural development for coca producers. In September of the same year, the third draft was presented but was skewed significantly toward responding to US interests in the region. Rather than social development, the emphasis was put on exposing the links between drug production and rebel groups such as the FARC (Salazar & Acosta, 2001, p. 45). Furthermore, strengthening Colombia’s armed forces and assuring the rule of law were also put in the foreground as solutions for resolving the country’s political crisis (Avilés, 2008, p. 418). As Avilés (2008) argues, these changes were in fact “pragmatic shifts in emphasis in order to obtain US support” (p. 419). It is in this context that we can understand the fourth draft of the plan, officially named “Plan Colombia” and backed by the US. Officially the Plan promoted, “an integrated strategy to meet the most pressing challenges confronting Colombia today—promoting the peace process, combating the narcotics industry, reviving the Colombian economy, and strengthening the democratic pillars of Colombian society” (CFR, 2000).

Economic Democratization

“The current round of imperialism,” writes Mooers (2006, p. 5), “has as its goal the export and entrenchment of capitalist social-property relations throughout the world; it is about the universal-

zation of capitalism". When reading Plan Colombia's objectives of "reviving the Colombian economy, and strengthening the democratic pillars of Colombian society" (CFR, 2000), there is a need to delve deeper into the true meaning of these objectives. The first matter of interest will be the latter part of this objective (reviving the Colombian economy). In order for foreign corporations to be interested in Colombia as a potential ground for investment, it must be perceived as "safe". As Wood (2006, p. 14) notes, "a stable global system of multiple states" is required "to maintain the kind of order and predictability that capitalism—more than any other social form—needs". The promotion of democracy in the war on drugs can also be understood as part of the expansion of international trade and implementation of a free-market economy (Avilés, 2008, p. 415). Yet, as Wood further argues, benefits are to be had from the instability of national economies, permitting exploitation of resources and cheap labour (Wood, 2006, p. 14). There is thus a subtle negotiation of security/insecurity that takes places to maximize foreign investment, while upholding conditions of constant instability.

In the case of Plan Colombia, it is therefore not surprising to find investors and representatives of transnational corporations (TNCs) on boards and committees selected to draw up policies of intervention (Avilés, 2008). An example of this is the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), whose members have upheld an agenda directed towards capitalist globalization and economic development in the developing world (Avilés, 2008, p. 420). Domhoff explains that the "CFR obtains most of its resources from contributions from TNCs and business leaders make up the greatest proportion of its memberships" (as cited in Avilés, 2008, p. 420).

The case of Occidental Petroleum (OP), a US-based oil company, demonstrates the nature of the priorities of the US in Plan Colombia. The Department of Putumayo in the south of Colombia was chosen as a pilot zone for testing the efficiency of Plan Colombia. The region was indeed controlled mainly by the FARC and had a high concentration of coca crops, yet it was also a region in which the US had many interests. OP was also developing an exploration project in this region where a high density of natural resources can be found (Salazar & Acosta, 2001, p. 46). The company had been subject to attacks throughout the 1990s and reached out to the US government for help. OP spent US \$8.6 million between 1996 and 2000 in lobbying the US government to boost its military presence in Colombia. The fruit of this investment was seen some years later when President George W. Bush

granted the company a US \$100 million subsidy for forming a protection brigade for the company's pipeline (Avilés, 2008, p. 425). As argued by Panitch and Gindin (2006, p. 21), contemporary US imperialism,

“is characterized above all by economic penetration and informal incorporation of other capitalist states, but at the same time it both permits and requires imperial policing and military intervention in a ‘rogue state’ which has not been incorporated into the neoliberal capitalist order”.

While Colombia as a nation-state was never identified by the US as a “rogue state” (reserving such terms for outright “enemies” such as North Korea), Colombia was however deemed insecure and in need of policing, because of internal “rogue” elements such as the FARC. The military aid sponsored by USAID was intended for that matter. Speaking in US terms, what renders a state unsafe or “rogue” is amongst other things “terrorism”. To quote the US Bureau of Public Affairs (2008): “strong law enforcement institutions, rooted in democratic principles and protective of human rights, are vital to preventing transnational threats, from drugs to organized criminal activity to terrorism”. Thus it can be understood that an effective way of fighting terrorism is promoting democracy.

After 9/11, counter-terrorism became a paramount preoccupation for the US government. Moving from a counter-narcotics intervention in Colombia, US officials explicitly described Plan Colombia as a counter-insurgency initiative that would defeat the FARC (Elhawary, 2011, p. S393; see Figure 3.1). Groups such as the FARC would no longer be framed as guerrilla movements, but would instead be described as, “terrorist movements financed by the drug trafficking” (Pizarro & Gaitán, 2006, p. 61). Direct combat against such groups could thus be easily legitimized by the US state (Pizarro & Gaitán, 2006, p. 62). In this process of demonization, the FARC was described by Francis X. Taylor, coordinator for the State Department's Office of Anti-Terrorism, as the “most dangerous international terrorist organization based in the hemisphere” (Pizarro & Gaitán, 2006, p. 62). The perception by the former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe that the guerrilla group moved away from its formally promoted political motivations towards an exclusively profit-oriented logic led to the cessation of negotiations and to an openly counter-terrorist action plan (Elhawary, 2011, p. S394). By framing the FARC as a terrorist group, the US also succeeded in putting through the idea that the intervention in Colombia was an issue of national security. Indeed, military in-

tervention abroad is often justified by problems at home, as it is the case with Colombia: “the social consequence of drug abuse in the USA (crime, unemployment, addiction, etc.) has earned it a place as a national security threat and US hegemony allows its perceived national security interests to dictate counter-narcotics policy for Latin America” (Avilés, 2008, p. 411).

Figure 3.1: Colin Powell Supporting Plan Colombia



Then US Secretary of State, retired General Colin Powell is shown on an official visit to Colombia in 2004 in support of “Plan Colombia” (Photo: The White House.)

Democracy was to be instated as an effective way to fight against the “terrorist” group that controlled a considerable part of Colombian territory containing valuable natural resources and bordering with neighbouring countries (Pizarro & Gaitán, 2006, p. 56). These territories were also framed as “lawless,” where the state’s tentacles could not reach (Marcella, 2009, p. 13). The US thus vowed to bring law and order to Colombian society, by the same channels instituting the legal means to implant their dreamed-of democratic system.

Rule of Law

A major objective that the US aimed to achieve in its intervention in Colombia was the implementation of the rule of law. In its quest

of creating a US-style justice system, the US has provided over US \$150 million in aid in order to create conflict resolution centres, training of public defenders and other juridical activities (US Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2008, p. 57). As righteous as they may seem, these measures fall under the banner of cultural imperialism at the juridical level, where Colombia is perceived to be a lawless society in need of the correct (i.e., US-constructed) judicial reform. It is indeed not easy to oppose such an ideal, for “the rule of law is the kind of idea that everybody places on a sacred pedestal, protected and defended on almost every side” (Mattei, 2010, p. 91). As Mattei further explains, the notion of the rule of law is entirely malleable, ranging from the protection of the weak and exploited to the defence of transnational companies that have acquired land thanks to privatization measures (2010, p. 92). Indeed, in the Colombian case, “the rule of law” has been understood as “acceptance of investment guarantees, protection of property rights, and the sanctity of contracts” (Mattei, 2010, p. 93). The idea is understood as both the protection of (individual) human rights and of property rights, where capital accumulation through possession of property is to lead to liberty on the personal level, liberty here being understood, amongst other things, as the freedom of consumption. In the imperialist and neoliberal logic, human rights are presented as synonymous to capital accumulation and supersede other freedoms such as the protection of basic human needs. This logic leads to scenarios where for example natural resources in the “Third World” are being privatized by transnational companies who are protected by property rights (Hanieh, 2006). Unfortunately for “basic human needs,” the rule of law has been in most cases understood as the legal defense of the free market, capital accumulation and liberal democracy (Waldon, 2011, p. 3).

The prestige around the ideal stems, at least in part, from its seemingly benevolent and successful implementers—the US, for example—who at least appear to have a strong and well-rooted constitution and whose idealized democracy was historically upheld by law and order (Mattei, 2010, p. 91). The US has emerged as a hub for lawyers, where US law schools are highly praised worldwide and the perception of the US lawyer in many older Hollywood movies is one of prestige, integrity, and an intrepid determination to get at the truth. Law is so deeply engraved in US (high) society, such that lawyers “enjoy a legal culture and discourse that is broader than jurisdictional limits” (Mattei, 2003, p. 391). Mattei (2003) further frames the rule of law as an *imperial law*, one that is a dominant layer of the world-wide legal system whose best

ally and vehicle is predatory economic globalization (p. 383). In the case of Colombia, the implementation of the imperial rule of law was not entirely “forced” upon the country in any direct sense. Indeed, a professional elite was already in place to back such hegemonic policies that they internalized beforehand as being in their own interests (Avilés , 2008, p. 413). Though this measure of Plan Colombia was aimed at giving resources to those “in need of law,” Ginsburg (2011) frames the issue in the opposite way, “even if a country would be better off without support, the ruling coalition will certainly not be. There is little political incentive to ‘graduate’” (p. 229).

In short, “the rule of law” is the discourse that legitimizes a given international dynamic of power (Mattei, 2003, p. 386). In our present system, where capitalism grew and is still growing towards world economic domination, nations must “change the law according to western standards in order to get access to the international market and to remain economically viable” (Mattei, 2003, p. 383). Yet to avoid forceful implementation of capitalism and shun resistance, the necessary tools must be in place:

“Imperialism requires an ‘imperial ideal’, a stronger ideological apparatus that can be reached only by means of strong and well-developed ‘ideological’ institutions. The ideals of a global market, of international human rights, of freedom throughout the world, and most notably of the ‘rule of law’ perform this ideological role”. (Mattei, 2003, p. 402)

Although there is ideological acceptance from the elite spheres of society, the rest of the population also has to be convinced, this being often done in a forceful and thus unconvincing manner.

The US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement

Flowing from the installation of the “rule of law,” in 2012 the US and Colombia officially implemented a free-trade agreement or FTA (Embassy of Colombia, 2013). Negotiations had commenced in 2006, yet before signing the official version Colombia was forced to comply with a number of US demands for securing the ground (Office of the United States Trade Representative [USTR], 2014). Many issues since 2006 arose in the public sphere addressing concerns about the economic disadvantage that Colombia had relative to the US, namely, US farmers benefit from government subsidies giving them an unfair advantage in the context of international

trade, so that products exported from the US end up being cheaper than those produced locally. It also has the effect of inhibiting exports coming from Colombia to the US (Garay Salamanca et al., 2009, p. 27). In short, while the subsidized competitiveness of US farmers is rising, Colombian *campesinos*' vulnerability is also on the rise. A brief glance at the past can be relevant in predicting the future. The economic neoliberal transitions that affected Colombia in the 1980s and 1990s and the country's steady integration into the global capitalist market caused a severe drop in coffee prices, the main national export, and forced many agrarian workers to turn to the cultivation of coca crops (Avilés, 2008, p. 417). The peasant movement that is voicing its concerns with the FTA in Colombia is gaining ground and is slowly being recognized by the government as one that has legitimate concerns. Nevertheless, the Colombian state continues to fail to satisfy the demands formulated by peasants. Notably, most peasants are concerned with the impact that the FTA will have on local economies and rural Colombia as a whole. As one farmer testifies, importing a chicken from the US is cheaper than one that is Colombian-raised (Ospina-Valencia, 2013). Local groups such as the *Red Colombiana de Acción Frente al Libre Comercio* (the Colombian Action Network against Free Trade, or RCAFLC) are organizing both on the ground but also producing academic work with the aim of trying to find alternatives to the FTA, showing that solutions are being developed from within (RCAFLC, 2014).

With farmers relying on their crops as their main source of income, the FTA is directly inhibiting the chances of farmers to live off the land. Furthermore, Law 9.70 under the intellectual property rights integrated in the FTA, forced farmers to buy seeds from state approved companies and criminalized keeping seeds from one year to another. This is a clear example of how the "rule of law" can act to the detriment of lower classes and disregards traditional understanding of agriculture (for related and parallel cases in Africa, see chapter 2 in this volume). A series of protests and strikes were held in the country to oppose the commodification of seeds. The strikes succeeded in suspending law 9.70. These events pay tribute to the grassroots mobilization that can take place locally to solve local problems (Charles, 2013). The case of the intellectual property rights law implemented by the US with the FTA serves as a clear example of the contradiction between one of the legislative acts under the FTA and Plan Colombia. On one side, the US promotes rural development and alternative economies to coca crops through Plan Colombia, yet it then does the contrary through its

actions with the FTA. Indigenous and Afro-Colombian peasants were particularly concerned with the passing of the FTA as it would impact the relative autonomy from which they benefited and would change the way in which they relate to their crops and their land (US Office on Colombia, 2011). If small farmers see their harvest devalued by competing foreign products, they will have to turn to alternative ways of subsistence. Again a look to the past is telling of possible outcomes of such aggressive legislation. The alternative economic development proposed by Plan Colombia consisted in subsidizing mega agro-projects such as the palm oil industry (Mondragón, 2007, p. 24). Large land owners were encouraged to partner up with *campesinos* and offer them an alternative to coca production. The benefits for the US of encouraging palm oil production in Colombia can be explained by the fact that half the production is exported to the US and Europe (Mondragón, 2007, p. 26). Furthermore, it has been shown that palm oil companies such as Urapalm have not only cultivated stolen land previously taken away from peasants by narco-paramilitaries, but have been an effective way for narco-traffickers to launder their drug money (Mondragón, 2007). Indeed, paramilitaries have forcefully removed peasants from their land to make way for coca cultivation (Quintero & Posada, 2013, p. 374), but they have also been displaced by “paramilitaries paid by rich African oil palm growers, [who are] intent on expanding their holdings and increasing their production for world markets” (Escobar, 2004, p. 19). Along with fumigation, coca production and palm oil plantations have caused massive displacement of rural people in Colombia, as shown by Escobar (2004, p. 19):

“It is little known that Colombia today has about three million internally displaced people, constituting one of the largest refugee crises in the world. Over 400,000 people were internally displaced in 2002 alone. A disproportionate percentage of the displaced are Afro-Colombians and indigenous people, which makes patently clear a little discussed aspect of imperial globality, namely, its racial and ethnic dimension. One aspect of this is of course that, as in the case of the Pacific, ethnic minorities often inhabit territories rich in natural resources that are now coveted by national and transnational capital”.

In light of the history of previous measures of economic liberalization and the regrettable realities that vulnerable populations have to face in the name of development, it is doubtful that the FTA could ever bring a viable solution for Colombian problems. It

is far more likely that it will only benefit the higher classes of society and exploit those who seem to have less and less. Briefly, the US is benefiting economically from palm oil plantations and the fact that such companies are indirectly fuelling drug production does not seem to be understood as any sort of contradiction with Plan Colombia that is financing and promoting such operations.

Militarization and the Privatization of the Conflict

Borrowing from one of Louis Althusser's basic theses, we can understand that when the ideological state apparatus is not sufficient in fully inculcating the ideas it authorizes, use of force is called upon to enforce hegemony (Althusser, 2006). Most of the funding for Plan Colombia was directed to military and police assistance. With its aid, the US contributed greatly in militarizing the Colombian conflict. Indeed, between 1997 and 2003, the military component of US aid to Colombia amounted to over US \$2.36 billion. These funds were directed towards the education and training of the Colombian army by US forces (Pizarro & Gaitán, 2006, p. 68). Yet as the US is pouring money into the Colombian military it seems to be somewhat disregarding the fact that this army has a long history of collaboration with the Colombian paramilitary organizations, and by the same token, major narco-traffickers (Avilés, 2008, p. 412). In addition, Private Military Security Companies (PMSCs) are embedded with the Colombian military to enforce laws and carry out military missions. As noted by Peacock, US \$3.1 billion were spent by the US government between 2005 and 2009 on counter-narcotics programs in Latin America, DynCorp being one of the principal beneficiaries receiving more than US \$1.1 billion for its operations in Latin America (Hobson, 2014, pp. 1443, 1444). DynCorp was one of 25 PMSCs acting in the country by 2006 (Hobson, 2014, p. 1444). The intervention in Colombia was framed as a testing ground from which lessons were to be learned regarding challenges that the US government would face elsewhere (US Embassy, Bogota [USEB], 2009/10/23) this particularly applying to private military contractors (Hobson, 2014, p. 1442).

The secrecy of these companies is highly praised by the governments that contract them, especially as the media coverage of their activities is fairly limited and they are not held accountable to the same laws that state militaries are—they can even benefit from total immunity (Hobson, 2014, p. 1446). The results of this immunity are found in cases of various abuses of which DynCorp em-

ployees have been accused, such as rape, recording pornographic material with minors, and the importation of bottles of liquid laced with cocaine (Hobson, 2014, p. 1446).

The advantage of PMSCs is that they can be employed by anyone with the resources to do so; the higher bidders always get the upper hand. With a large amount of capital at their disposal, the US state and transnational corporations have not hesitated to employ PMSCs to defend their properties and carry out missions which often result in harmful impacts for civilians, such as aerial fumigation (for a different face of Coca-Cola's "connected capitalism," as discussed in the Introduction to this volume, see Foster [2010] who highlights the company's use of paramilitaries in Colombia). Indeed the collaboration between PMSCs, paramilitary groups and the US government in securing zones where companies like OP had interests because of their energy and mineral-rich territory has been shown (Ramírez Cuellar, 2005, p. 36). These heavily contested zones were endowed with US military bases from which US-supported forces could act to secure a given area (Ramírez Cuellar, 2005, p. 36). The securing of private property and accumulation of capital works to the detriment of populations long rooted in those lands.

A major contract that DynCorp received had as an objective the fumigation of coca crops in Colombia (Bonds, 2013, p. 96). The toxic war that the paramilitaries waged against coca growers, where strong herbicides have been used as a weapon, has resulted in numerous cases of lost subsistence crops and contaminated land and water (Bonds, 2013). Though fumigation is indeed consistent with one of the objectives of Plan Colombia, it is completely contradictory to others. Rural coca growers become the targets of military strikes and see their subsistence and coca crops being destroyed, ones that they were often forced to harvest in the first place and that constituted their only source of revenue (Quintero & Posada, 2013, p. 375).

DynCorp, defending its work in Colombia, boasts of carrying out a number of humanitarian actions in the regions in which they act. These include the financing of school supplies for Colombians around the military bases used by DynCorp. The company's website includes testimony of a DynCorp instructor stating in a compassionate manner that "helping children is the most marvelous thing in the world" (DynCorp, 2013). With "democracy" being instated, legally upheld by the rule of law and militarily defended by PMSCs and the US-trained Colombian military, the environment in Colombia has of course become more welcoming for foreign in-

vestment. This translated into the implementation of measures such as the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Colombia and the US, thus closing the loop between the political, juridical, and military dimensions of US dominance in Colombia.

Cornered In

In the end, the “war on drugs” is far from being an actual war on drugs but rather an excuse for the expansion of US-style liberal democracy and global capitalism, which the US aims to impose through both military and ideological apparatuses. Slowly and painfully, the US is implanting its preferred structures in Colombia. In light of the Colombian situation—the country with one of the most skewed income distributions in the world (Escobar, 2004, p. 19), with the FARC controlling part of the territory, and where the amounts of cocaine being produced are so huge they seem almost unimaginable—Colombia may appear as a humanitarian disaster in severe need of intervention. On the other hand, US presence in the country has proven to be ineffective in alleviating the pains for which it is partly responsible. Internally, examples of small rural communities such as the Comunidad de Paz de San José de Apartadó (2006) organize and resist against national and foreign threats in refusing any cooperation with any party involved in the conflict. This example of resistance is one of many Colombian initiatives that have found their place in the sometimes inhospitable rural areas. Regretfully, local initiatives by local actors who are better placed to understand their own realities and who are conscious of their needs are silenced by seemingly benevolent actors who claim to know better what must be done (Ginsburg, 2011, p. 230). Currently (in 2014), the Colombian head of state Juan Manuel Santos is in the midst of peace negotiations with the FARC. In an interview he gave for Euronews, he asked the European Union for both political and financial support for Colombia. He further stated that peace would benefit not only Colombia but the whole world (Euronews, 2014/11/6). The question to be asked is how to attain this peace? Based on available evidence, it seems unlikely that a renewal of plans of imperial intervention can or will produce any viable peace. Is peace even the actual goal of the states in question? Since the world seems to be in a permanent state of warfare and aggressive, imperialist apparatuses are gaining ground. Our aim then becomes dismantling the entanglements of the different methods that imperialism uses to further root itself in societies. In exploring dif-

ferent angles, subtle and not-so-subtle manifestations of imperialism, it will eventually be cornered in from all sides.

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