

State Encounters and Democratic Participation in the Plan Colombia Debates

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Abstract:

In this paper, I will explore citizenship, democratic participation and the relationship between citizens and the state by considering how residents of Putumayo make claims in a zone of graduated sovereignty. I am using the concepts of mutated citizenship and graduated sovereignty (Ong 2006), not in the usual sense of neoliberal economic practice, but as a way to explore how the Colombian government has ceded policymaking and implementation to the US government in so-called peripheral, drug producing zones, and the process of resistance to these efforts by local inhabitants. Rather than operating through multilateral institutional institutions, in the case of counternarcotics policy, the US is directly imposing and implementing policies and programs in Andean regions deemed to be predominant in the production of coca, the raw material for cocaine. The non-negotiable nature of US counternarcotics policies severely constrains the kinds of citizenship rights that can be claimed, and the extent of participation in political life that is considered 'democratic.' In the Colombian case, residents of Putumayo are categorically denied citizenship rights as the region is categorized as the 'wild west,' inhabited by drug traffickers, guerrillas and criminals. *Putumayenses* attempt to acquire proxy citizenship, through their relationships with politically legitimate U.S.-based non governmental organization and their political allies. In order to access and claim rights, they must accede to US officials. This proxy citizenship channels access to US officials, as well as authorizing who can speak and on what issues. I explore these issues through an ethnographic examination of a week-long Washington lobbying campaign conducted by Putumayo activists working with US-based NGOs. Their encounter with the state was profoundly transformative, impacting their concepts of participation, local relationships and networks, even while illuminating the limits of proxy citizenship and the violent ironies of US democratization programs promoted through Plan Colombia. I will not fully develop my argument here, but rather outline the major theoretical questions driving my inquiring to date and some of the contextual histories useful in exploring these issues.

Ethnographic Encounters

In November, 2008, five activists traveled from Putumayo to participate in meetings with US officials and testify in a hearing before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Caucus of the House of Representatives. During this visit, they met with officials from USAID, the State Department, Congressional aides, the Organization of American States Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia, the Government Accountability Office. Three Bogota-based Colombian human rights activists accompanied them. The Putumayo activists varied widely in their institutional positioning, and experience with advocacy. Blanca Galarraga Meneses, a displaced woman in her middle 50s, spoke as a victim, repeatedly offering her tearful testimony of the disappearance by paramilitaries of her four daughters. Following efforts with other bereaved relatives to locate the mass graves containing the remains of family members, she was threatened and forced to leave the region once again. Ana Tulia Burbano, the director of a rural school, spoke of the vulnerability of rural education to militarization and threats from armed actors. Emilse Bernal

Bastidas, a thin, dark-skinned woman in her late 20s had assumed the presidency of a large regional peasant organization after the assassination of previous leaders. Cescar Wellington Chapal, indigenous leader of Cofan and other indigenous peoples, highlighted the incursions of oil corporations, military officials and illegal armed groups onto indigenous territories. Fabiola Erazo Garcia, from the *Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres* and the *Alianza de Mujeres de Putumayo*, discussed the difficulties of women in towns controlled by illegal armed groups.

During their meetings, the activists focused on the abuses by the paramilitaries and their links with state security forces, while careful to mention abuses by the guerrillas as well. Several spoke of their direct experience of paramilitary violence, the deaths of family members and coworkers, expressing strong emotion and frequently tears. At the same time, they made direct requests to the US to change their policies. “We ask, how can you keep giving money to the military, when you know that they are violating the right to the life, to housing, to tranquility. The best way to help a country develop is to provide the help directly to the social part of development, for children and education,” Ana Tulia told the State Department representatives. They linked the counternarcotics programs to the larger social problems experienced in the region. “We are concerned about the economic humanitarian crisis, and I know that although you don’t have complete responsibility, that some of it is the responsibility of the Colombian state, many of the programs in this region that we are talking about are funded by your government,” Emilce told them. “Fumigation and forced manual eradication are generating hunger and displacement.”

How is it that these Colombian activists – not diplomats, not ambassadors, not officials – come to meet with the US state department, telling deeply personal stories of suffering, persecution and loss? Rather than the “boomerang” model of human rights activism, where Latin American activists would use their international relationships and connections to bring pressure on their abusive governments (Keck and Sikkink 1999), these activists spoke as victims of US policies, requesting political changes in Washington. What can examining this encounter, and its deep roots within the shared history of the Putumayo and Washington tell us about citizenship claims, translocal political participation and democratization efforts?

For the activists who traveled to Washington, the experience was both profoundly bizarre and a new iteration of the normal experienced dislocation required to exercise basic forms of political participation. For almost all residents of Putumayo, any form of citizenship requiring interactions with the state, including voting, paperwork or any meeting with bureaucratic officials, involves travel to distant, inaccessible centers of power. These journeys have long histories, from the colonial supplicant to the contemporary journey to the departmental capital of Mocoa – a day’s journey by foot, boat and jeep for most of the activists – or Bogota, an additional twelve hour bus ride. These encounters typically feature new rituals and vocabularies, an immersion in distant power politics and an unfamiliarity with local dynamics. In these forms of translocal political participation in which activists attempt to convey particular narratives of political legitimacy and claims illuminate the existing bureaucracies, relationships, and social worlds even as they are attempting to disrupt existing narratives, legitimacies and obligations.

Citizenship must be understood as a claims-making process, not an achieved status. Here, I analyze “claims as a contingent emergence within particular assemblages of market rationalities, politics and ethics.” (Ong 2006 17).

It is important that our analysis of citizenship specify the situated nature of enunciations in a field of space-time interrelationships without relying on a telos of predetermined inevitability. The situated entanglements of geopolitics, market logic, exceptions and ethical discourses require a conceptual openness to contingency, ambivalence and uncertain outcomes (Ong 2006 18).

These encounters rely on and generate multiple forms of inclusion and exclusion. Activists base their claims through a process of creating subjectivities worthy of inclusion. Here, I argue that the activists could base claims on a humanitarian logic as victims of violence and representatives of victim populations, as women, indigenous people, protectors of children; while *colono* men remain tainted, excluded from the possibility of making claims, by their assumed criminality and links to drug production and trafficking. In this process, I highlight the importance of the legibility effects of democratization programs, and “the production of both a language and a knowledge for governance and of theoretical and empirical tools that classify and regulate collectivities” (Trouillot 2001, 126). Within Putumayo, local contractors illustrate the role of theories of social capital in the democratization programs in delineating who among the population is to be disciplined, and who allowed to participate, who is empowered to articulate legitimate claims and whose claims can be discarded and discredited.

In this process, I am interested in exploring the possibility that these claims are facilitated by what I am calling proxy citizenship, in which legitimacy is achieved through not only the personal experience of suffering and loss and particular claims to representationality, but also through their elevation by established political actors within the United States. These activists gain entrance into spaces of US claims-making through their relationships with non-governmental organizations and their political allies. These efforts intersect with changes in US governmental bureaucratic practices, including the ways in which the US state bureaucracies are constituted as ‘democratic’ spaces, and in some cases are legally compelled to ‘consult’ with distinct constituencies.

Finally, I argue that understanding Putumayo as a zone of graduated sovereignty, in which the United States government, and their contracting organizations, operate to make and implement state policy, is critical for understanding how Colombian activists come to make claims at the U.S. State Department. Ong employs the notion of graduated sovereignty “refer to the effects of a flexible management of sovereignty, as governments adjust political space to the dictates of global capital, giving corporations an indirect power over the political conditions of citizenship in zones that are differently articulated to global production and financial circuits” (Ong 2006 25). Building on her notion of “exceptions to neoliberalism,” however, I want to expand the notion of graduated sovereignty to include the drug producing regions of the Andes, where the US government does not explicitly claim but does perform sovereignty in both the policy decision-making, and in many cases, implementation. Even as the Colombian state continues to deploy social services and other implements of statecraft, the US government retains decisive power in many areas of public life, including the aerial spraying of hundreds of thousands of hectares with chemical herbicides, the arming, training and deployment of national (“host country”) military and police units, and the extraction of individuals through extradition to stand trial for particular kinds of crimes within the United States.

Histories of graduated sovereignty in Putumayo

Stretching from the Andean foothills to the Amazon jungle along the border with Ecuador, Putumayo is a frontier province with a history of bloodshed inspired by regional conflicts and international trade. Like much of Colombia, Putumayo has been in an almost continual process of *ordenamiento territorial*, redefining the administrative and political landscape through successive decrees linking the region to different neighboring states and redefining the region's administrative status. On July 4, 1991, the National Constitutional Assembly (charged with writing the 1991 Constitution) officially designated the region as a department (similar to a U.S. state), with the capital remaining Mocoa. Putumayo is divided into 13 municipalities, and roughly three regions: higher, middle and lower Putumayo, with significant climatic, economic and political differences among the regions.

While on the geographic periphery of the Colombian nation, Putumayo has been a center of transnational enterprise since the seventeenth century, when the Franciscans used the region as a base for their missionary efforts throughout the Amazon (Stanfield 1998). Quinine, discovered at the end of the 18th century for use in controlling malaria and fevers, became the region's first international trade boom. At the end of the 19th century, Peruvian and English rubber companies' brutal exploitation of indigenous labor led to one of the first international rights campaigns (Taussig 1987). In the 1950s, peasants fleeing partisan violence and hoping to find work in the lucrative lumber and fur trades settled the region. The discovery of large oil reserves in the 1960s led to the oil boom; at its peak in 1968, the region was producing 30% of the country's oil. Putumayo most recently gained fame as the site of the largest boom in coca cultivation in Colombian history. In contrast to Bolivia and Peru, where some coca production is legal, all coca cultivation, and therefore all coca farmers, in Colombia was made illegal by the Narcotics Law of 1986. Initially cultivated by only a handful of small farmers during the 1980s, as U.S. counternarcotics operations reduced cultivation in Bolivia and Peru, and broke the supply line of coca paste flown from those countries to traffickers in Colombia, cultivation spread to Colombia in the 1990s, escalating first in Putumayo to reach a high of 60,000 hectares in 2000, estimated as enough coca to provide roughly 80% of the world's cocaine.

Despite the lucrative illicit coca industry and previous years of successive boom extractive industries, the region remains deeply impoverished with few public services. Electricity was first provided in Puerto Asis (the largest town) and Mocoa (the capital) in 1998. According to the state government, 79% of the population lives with their basic needs unsatisfied. Putumayo has the worst national coverage of potable water, with only .01%. According to the state school superintendent, 58% of school aged children do not attend school. The vast majority of roads in the region are unpaved and cannot be transited during the rainy season. Approximately 40% of the population has no access to health services.

Scholars of the region have argued that the state has in practice ceded sovereignty to illegal armed actors in the region, first the guerrillas through neglect of state authorities, and then the paramilitaries through active collaboration. The region has been a historic stronghold of Colombia's largest and oldest guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC. The presence of the FARC in the Amazon region can be traced back to *La Violencia*, and the FARC's 32nd Front arrived in Putumayo to stay in 1984, and began to regulate coca production as the illicit expanded. The FARC has increasingly financed its activities by taxing coca crops, protecting drug processing labs and intermediate trafficking, and the group was able to fund dramatic increase in military strength through criminal activities in the 1990s (Chernick).

There are currently approximately 8 fronts of the FARC in the region. Paramilitary groups began to violently contest FARC control in 1999. Unlike death squad operations in other Latin American countries, the paramilitaries benefited from the spectacular resources provided by drug trafficking. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, paramilitary squads linked to powerful drug lord Jose Rodriguez Gacha (and regional landowner) operated in Putumayo; following his death in 1989 and the demise of the Medellin Cartel in the mid 1990s paramilitary activity in the region slowed. In 1997, the nominal leader of a newly created national paramilitary umbrella organization, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, issued a statement announcing an offensive military campaign into new regions of the country, including Putumayo. The July 1997 massacre in the neighboring department of Meta was the first large-scale paramilitary attack in the region; paramilitaries carried out the first of a series of attacks in Putumayo in 1999 and have since established control over most town centers in the region.

The United States has played a central role in determining Colombian drug policy since the 1970s, through a variety of mechanisms including assistance packages, the certification process, and diplomatic pressure. Beginning in 1989 with the “Andean Strategy,” U.S. funds, equipment, logistical support, and personnel from the DEA, the CIA, and other agencies have played a leading role in counternarcotics operations in Colombia. U.S.-assisted operations resulted in the killing of Pablo Escobar in 1993 and the jailing of the heads of the Cali Cartel in 1994. However, the breakup of the two largest cartels did not lead to a long-term decline in Colombian drug trafficking. These drug syndicates have since been replaced by smaller, more vertically integrated trafficking organizations whose nimble, independent traffickers are much more difficult to detect and infiltrate. These traffickers employ new and constantly changing shipping routes through Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean for moving cocaine and, increasingly, heroin. In recent years, cultivation of both coca and poppies (used to make heroin) has expanded enormously in Colombia. Unlike in Peru and Bolivia, where peasants have for centuries grown and chewed the coca leaf (a mild stimulant, compared with the processed form, cocaine), in Colombia this practice was limited to a very few, small indigenous groups. While coca cultivation has recently declined in Peru and Bolivia due to U.S.-financed eradication programs, cultivation in Colombia increased 54% from 1996 to 1998, leaving overall Andean coca production constant. U.S. programs in Colombia have been two-pronged: extensive herbicide spraying, primarily of coca fields in southern Colombia, and hundreds of millions of dollars in military hardware and training for Colombian security forces involved in counternarcotics operations.

Citizen Claiming-making in Putumayo

Putumayenses employed a variety of strategies to make claims on the state. During my interviews with priests and other community leaders, they recalled the importance of the *Movimiento Civico-Popular del Putumayo*, created in the late 1980s in order to participate in the newly organized local elections. Working with priests influenced by Liberation Theology and attempting to chart a political middle ground, the movement was deeply impacted by paramilitary violence. In part as a result, the first municipal human rights committee was formed, with a paid staff advisor funded by the Bogotá-based Jesuit progressive think tank CINEP. After the committee was forced to disband because of paramilitary persecution in the mid-1990s, the advisor remained working with the state health service and became a critical link between Bogotá and international NGOs and local communities.

Following the implementation of widespread aerial fumigation, peasant farmers began to organize protests. In 1996, the *cocalero* peasant marches paralyzed the region for several months, as peasant coca farmers occupied small town plazas and blocked major roads. They demanded an end to fumigation, and an increase in state services. Many US and Colombia policymakers claimed the marches were simply motivated by pressure from the FARC. Anthropologist Maria Clemencia Ramirez has argued, however, that the peasant leadership were attempting to claim citizenship rights while negotiating space for relatively autonomous community organizing faced with extreme pressures from the guerrillas and the state security forces (Ramirez 2003). She emphasizes that the peasant marchers were not attempting to withdraw from the Colombian national polity, but were demanding full citizenship rights: they wanted more state presence in their region, along with the full range of state services, benefits, and opportunities for participation in the political process. The marches ended with the government and peasant leaders signing an agreement known as the Orito Pacts, in which representatives from the central government pledged to provide resources for infrastructure projects (such as paving major roads), education funding for teachers salaries and increasing school coverage in rural areas, and technical assistance for peasant farmers. These pacts were left entirely unfulfilled. Escalating paramilitary violence forced the marches leaders to leave the region; several were killed, including one assassinated in Bogotá; some joined the ranks of the FARC.

In response to the unfulfilled promises resulting from the protest marches, and the widespread threats and accusations participants being guerrilla supporters, a local parish priest very active in a local Catholic peace network (*Red de Formadores de Paz*) and Social Ministries programs decided to help leaders to organize as peace communities. Father Alcides Jimenez was inspired by workshops in which activists working with Colombia's most famous peace community, San Jose de Apartado, described how they had declared their territory neutral in 1997 and refused the presence of any armed actor in their community, including the state security forces. While he began with the intention of preventing further paramilitary attacks, the community workshops began debating International Humanitarian Law (also known as the rules of war) and considering how communities could develop greater autonomy. They began organizing community forums, where local leaders could strategize and present their proposals for development and other community initiatives. While they were unsuccessful in gaining central government support for these programs, pressure from the community forums resulted in the creation of the office of the regional *personero*, a human rights ombudsman linked to the National Ombudsman's Office. Father Alcides' organizing efforts also resulted in growing resistance to abusive practices by the guerrillas. When the local guerrilla commanders attempted to pressure communities to come out for another large scale protest march in 1997, the peasants refused, arguing that the previous marches had led to increased violence and poverty without any gain for the communities involved.

Father Alcides was killed while saying mass on September 11, 1998; while responsibility for the attack has never been definitely established it is widely believed that he was killed by the FARC in retaliation for encouraging autonomous community organizing. After his death, the local peace network dissolved; other local priests who had been involved in his community development projects were transferred to other parts of the country because of threats. Some of the leaders of the peace network began to look for support outside the region, calling on Bogotá-based non-governmental organizations to begin supporting their work. MINGA, CINEP, the

Women's Path to Peace (*Ruta Pacifica de Mujeres*) and the Quaker *Comite Andino de Servicios* all began working with local community initiatives. They organized several community forums addressing local concerns about the impact of counternarcotics policies as well as political violence. In 2003, the *Ruta Pacifica* organized a march of approximately 3,000 women in support of peace and against violence. In 2004, they organized another march to protest the assassination of an indigenous woman community leader in Puerto Guzman.

Plan Colombia and Putumayo

Beginning in the late 1990s, the US began designing a large-scale assistance program that would fund and implement counternarcotics and counterinsurgency programs in the Putumayo. President Clinton's "emergency" package of "U.S. Support for Plan Colombia" totaled \$1.3 billion for 2000 and 2001, and initiated yearly funding packages totaling \$5 billion. The bulk of the initial package -- \$600 million -- was destined for the "Push into Southern Colombia," focused in the Putumayo region. This funding was to be used to train and equip three new counternarcotics battalions of the Colombia Army, provide them with 30 Blackhawk and 33 Huey helicopters and intelligence assistance. This funding also includes money for "to provide shelter and employment for the Colombians who will be displaced during this push into southern Colombia." In the initial package, a total of \$321 million were designated for social programs, including \$119 million for governance programs (including judicial reform and human rights). According to the Colombian government, the total budget for these programs was to US\$7.5 billion, of which almost US\$2 billion was to come from the United States. The Plan, widely rumored to have been written in English and only minimally circulated in Colombia, was never discussed in the Colombian Congress or comprehensively covered by the Colombian media.

"Putumayo is a poster child for why you need Plan Colombia," Clinton administration Pentagon official Brian Sheridan told *The St. Petersburg Times* in the fall of 2000. "The FARC and the paramilitaries are running roughshod all over the Putumayo right now, killing each other, blockading roads, holding villages hostage ... and the military and the police are nowhere to be found." As the package moved through Congress, Sheridan told me these programs will allow the Colombian government to take control of the Putumayo and [the neighboring state of] Caquetá in two years."

A \$3.3 million grant was awarded to ARD, Inc., a development contractor, for the first phase of local governance programs in Putumayo; they received an additional \$10 million [check] contract to expand their programs into other areas of the country over the next four years. According to a public internal evaluation of ARD's program:

DLGPI [Democratic local governance phase I] sought to achieve Intermediate Result 3 of USAID/Colombia's Strategic Objective 1, to 'promote more responsive, participatory, and accountable democracy.' It was also part of the Government of Colombia (GoC) framework for promoting social and economic change, known as *Plan Colombia*. Its purpose was to strengthen local governance in regions most affected by the political and economic crisis caused by continuing internal violence and illicit drug crop cultivation. DLGPI was expected to increase citizen participation in local decision making at the same time as it enhanced the capability of local governments to respond to citizen concerns in an accountable and transparent manner, through social infrastructure projects....

The four principal program components corresponded to the USAID/Colombia's sub-Intermediate Results. These included: 1) citizen participation improved; 2) municipal management strengthened; 3) social infrastructure expanded; and 4) improved transparency and accountability at the local level.

The ARD democratic local governance programs were organized around the development of social infrastructure projects (primarily municipal water systems, but also including school and other public building construction) and technical training in municipal planning, including budgets and participatory oversight mechanisms. These programs took place alongside alternative development projects funded by a \$93 million contract given to another for-profit organization, Chemonics.

Social capital is the key to rural development, according to an evaluation produced by Chemonics, the implementing contractor of the \$200 million alternative development grant, the majority of which was spent in Putumayo. The report describes a consensus (citing World Bank theorist Woolcock) that finding "the means and ways to transcend social divisions and built trust and social cohesion is critical for socioeconomic development." However, development in the region was hampered by perverse social capital. The report goes on to argue that:

Between 2000 and 2003, the area covered by the CAD program in Putumayo has undergone a huge transformation in terms of social capital. Until 2000, in middle and lower Putumayo it was clear that there was the collective of relationships, actions and attitudes that conformed to what has been labeled "perverse social capital," that which goes against the collective interests of society, preventing development and generating negative consequences for society, which is expressed in the increase in violent deaths, the increasing transaction costs, inadequate resource management, and a constant state of tension, pressure, fear, and uncertainty.

Perverse and productive social capital were the central framework used by U.S. AID contractors working in Putumayo on local governance and development projects to explain the region's multiple problems, and how these governance and development initiatives were able to achieve major social transformation. Productive social capital was the foundation for building state presence, appropriate participatory citizenship, and legal economic development. According to the contractors, productive social capital, and thus multiple objectives, was achieved through technical training, workshops allowing select community members access to accounting and auditing strategies, reporting mechanisms, and project administration. By mastering the technical skills, these trained community members could then provide oversight for infrastructure construction financed through public private partnerships in the region. Efforts to explore community policy priorities, debate controversial national policies impacting the region, or develop wider advocacy networks were excluded from these programs.

According to the view presented by the contractor's documents and discussions of their projects, all social organization – social life in general – was defined as "perverse social capital" – all existing relationships as detrimental, damaging, illicit and unproductive prior to the arrival of the U.S.-sponsored good governance programs, as is all organizing efforts outside their boundaries. The only organizing experience mentioned in any of these accounts were the 1996 *cocalero* peasant marches, which were simplistically condemned as entirely motivated by

guerrilla pressure and focused against counternarcotics policies. Demands for increased state services and greater governmental presence were erased. That peasant farmers would have an inherent interest in protesting aerial fumigation – which indiscriminately sprayed legal food crops, water sources, and in many cases, schools and villages themselves, with toxic chemicals – was not discussed. Previous peasant organizing efforts, Father Alcides’ efforts to build autonomous community-based leadership, and ongoing efforts to protect emergent civil society initiatives were not discussed. According to ARD staff members who worked in the region, they refused to work the remaining Catholic-trained community leadership structures. While he recognized the importance of their work, one staff member told me that “ARD never approached Pastoral Social. They have been one of the few organizations that have operated independently but with the respect of the armed groups. They have initiated very important organizational process, like the projects of Father Alcides.” He went on to say that while the ARD projects were successful within the narrow parameters of improving local administrative capacity, and expanding existing infrastructure, “the weakness was in the area of citizen participation, which was really only in the projects, very focused on the projects. The strengthening of citizen participation in the wider public sphere never happened, for many reasons, including the lack of political will, and the lack of a broader social strategy.” Implicitly acknowledging that encouraging broader political participation might have contributed to results – such as greater opposition to US counternarcotics policies – antithetical to US political interests, he noted that “to have developed an alliance with Pastoral Social would have implied a much more a much clearer will (*decision mucho mas fuerte*), a commitment to a broader project.” By limiting their promotion of participation dealing the public services, budgetary and planning transparency, understood in terms of the technical knowledge allowing specific community members to monitor fiscal disbursements, ARD erased the claims made on the state by the previous generations of local organizations, as well as the range of political issues facing the region.

The analytic binary between perverse and productive social capital obscured the range of illicit social behavior (and complicated relationships between such practices) present in a region like Putumayo, instead establishing a model in which the legal and the illicit exist in clearly demarcated and separate social categories. A growing literature explores the ways in which illicit, criminal and organized violence, and statebuilding practices are intimately related (Heyman 1999, Thoumi 2000, van Schendel and Abraham 2005). This is particularly true in a place like Putumayo, where commerce was almost entirely sustained by the illicit coca economy (to the degree that coca paste periodically functioned as currency in some rural areas) and illegal armed groups regulated most collective behavior. At the same time, peasant coca farmers did not necessarily participate in any other kinds of organized criminal behavior, violence, nor were necessarily categorically opposed to the state. By delegitimizing all forms of social organizing previous to or outside the umbrella of those programs mediated by US contractors, the perverse/productive model fundamentally mislabels the ways in which local people have attempted to carve out space for political participation, protest against policies which they viewed as contrary to their interests, and demand alternative governmental policies. Indeed, US counternarcotics policies have been critiqued as ineffective, counterproductive and damaging to

the health and welfare of local populations in the areas where they are carried out by a range of scholars, including analysts at the Air Force think-tank the RAND Corporation.¹

Claims-Making in Washington

Elected officials in Putumayo and other regions of the country where Plan Colombia programs were carried out protested the lack of opportunity for participating in the policymaking process. According to then-Putumayo governor Jorge Devia Murcia:

Plan Colombia has not been developed in conjunction with the region. The governor has not been taken into account, nor the mayors or the communities themselves. The President had not heard the proposals from Putumayo. Though we have sought an audience with President Pastrana on several occasions, he has yet to receive us. I myself, the governor of Putumayo, have learned what I know about Plan Colombia through the media, from the declarations of Colombian authorities, and from the debates on the Plan in the United States Congress.

Beginning in late 2000, the governors of Putumayo, Narino, Huila, Cauca, Caquetá, and Tolima formed the “Southern Alliance” in order to press for more opportunities to participate in centralized planning. In February 2001, they presented the “Southern Project,” proposing an end to fumigation, increased social investment, and offering a model of alternative development based on sustained investment in participatory planning as the basis of peacebuilding in the region. The governors explicitly rejected Plan Colombia because of its development without the participation of local authorities and communities. President Pastrana, and his successor President Alvaro Uribe, refused to address the governors concerns (Ramirez 2005).

Both Putumayo governor Jorge Devia as an individual and the collective Southern Alliance turned to Bogotá-based and international non-governmental organizations to help them bring pressure on the national government. Devia first traveled to Washington on a trip organized and funded by the RFK Memorial Human Rights Foundation, which had awarded the executive director of MINGA (one of the Bogotá-based human rights NGO working in Putumayo) their human rights award in 1998. As part of her lobbying work focused on the impact of U.S. policy, MINGA director Gloria Florez traveled to Washington with Devia in early 2000, where for the first time he was able to meet with US policymakers, including State Department officials and members of Congress, and learn first hand about the contents of Plan Colombia. Washington-based NGOs also organized and funded a visit from the governors participating in the Southern Alliance, arranging press briefings as well as policy meetings.

Colombians brought to the Washington by their NGO allies were participating in a consolidated repertoire of political practices developed during the Central American peace movement and a long history of activists practices within the United States (Smith 1996, Rabben 2003). These included ways in which activists were recruited and given the analytical tools to understand US policy as a grievance that must be remedied through action. Educational efforts

¹ In countries like Bolivia, and a lesser extent Peru, where coca farming is not illegal and while the majority of coca cultivation is destined for the international cocaine market, coca farmers, including current Bolivian president Evo Morales, became powerful political force. In Colombia, that kind of political participation is not an option because of the criminalization of coca production.

included “witnessing” tours, political tourism orchestrated by non-governmental organizations in order to spark personal transformation, or bringing activists and survivors on speaking tours within the US. Many of these educational efforts also provided activists with the particulars of policy advocacy, including how to develop specific policy goals, the range of foreign policy instruments, and information about specific pieces of legislation, amendments and Congressional debates. For Colombians attempting to participate in the design and implementation of Plan Colombia in Washington, they also benefited from changes within the State Department under the Clinton Administration, including the appointment of Harold Koh as Assistant Secretary of Human Rights, Democracy, and Labor.

These lobbying efforts were made possible by the institutional infrastructure of a number of NGOs that began to incorporate Colombia into their mandates during this period. One of the central advocacy coalitions, the Latin America Working Group, was founded in 1983 as the Central American Working Group, expanded their work in the mid 1990s to focus on support for implementation of peace accords, humanitarian and development assistance and disaster relief, opposing the Cuba embargo, and Colombia. Lisa Haugaard, LAWG’s current director, recalled that LAWG began working on Colombia because “we were pushed by coalition members,” including Barbara Gerlack, a United Church of Christ minister who had adopted two children from Colombia, and Cristina Espinel, the founder of the Colombia Human Rights Committee in Washington.² The Colombia Human Rights Committee received funding for a small (two person staff) NGO, the U.S. Office on Colombia (USOC), that functioned to coordinate work with Colombian counterparts (described in greater detail below). Many other groups that emerged in the 1980s focused on Central America also went on to make Colombia policy a major focus in the late 1990s, and many of the now professional policy advocates involved in Colombia began their work as activists focusing on Central America in the 1980s. Human Rights Watch Americas began with a focus on Central America in the 1980s, but by 1990s focused on the Andean region. In 1998, the Colombian Steering Committee (CSC) was founded in Washington to coordinate the work of these groups. The CSC is chaired by the Latin American Working Group and the US Office on Colombia, and includes more than 30 organizations.³ The CSC has

² Beginning in the late 1980s, two Colombian immigrants, both married to Americans and settled in the U.S., established human rights committees, one in Washington (Cristina Espinel and the Colombia Human Rights Committee) and one in Madison, WI. (Cecilia Zarate and the Colombia Support Network). These committees have been important outposts of US-based activism on Colombia, serving as a base for speaking tours of Colombian activists throughout U.S. While membership in these committees has varied, in general they have maintained a small core of participants who are a mix of progressive Colombian immigrant and US-American activists; they have also inspired activists to create associated small committees in other cities. They have also partnered where possible with interested policymakers and analysts and academics. They never reached even a fraction of the organizing power of such Central American solidarity committees as CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador), NicaNet or Nisgua.

³ The member organizations of the Colombia Steering Committee include: the American Friends Service Committee, Americans for Democratic Action, Catholic Relief Services, the Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL), the Center for International Policy, Church World Service, the Due Process of Law Foundation, the Federation of American Scientists, the Franciscan Washington Office on Latin America, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, Global Exchange, Institute for Policy Studies, International Labor Rights Fund, Jesuit Refugee Services, Latin America Working Group, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, Lutheran Office for Government Affairs, Lutheran World Relief, Maryknoll Office on Global Concerns, Mennonite Central Committee, Peace Brigades International - Colombia Project, RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights, U.S. Committee for Refugees, U.S./Labor Education in the Americas Project, Washington Office on Latin America, Witness for Peace, World Vision, Amnesty International, Colombia Human Rights Committee/Network DC, Presbyterian Church USA

been the central location for strategizing how to promote grassroots mobilization around human rights issues in Colombia and policy initiatives intended to improve the human rights situation.⁴ The visit by the five Putumayo activists was organized and funded by the Center for International Policy, which had been founded in 1975 by peace activists involved in the anti-Vietnam War movement, but whose president had been fired in 1981 from his post as US ambassador to El Salvador for refusing to certify Salvadoran progress on human rights following the assassination of four US churchwomen by Salvadoran soldiers.

The idea and invitation for the House Congressional hearing had originated with Representative Jim McGovern (D-MA), during one of his several trips to Colombia in 2007. One of the most liberal members of Congress, McGovern was one of the leaders of small group of Democrats who opposed increasing military aid through Plan Colombia. As a Congressional staff member, McGovern had been a key player in the Speaker's Task Force appointed to investigate the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter by US-trained Salvadoran military personnel in 1989. McGovern and his staff (including Cindy Buhl, a founding member and former director of the Central America Working Group) have gone to Colombia four times, most recently in early March 2007. Unlike the official "drugs and thugs" tour, McGovern's trips are organized (and paid for) by non governmental organizations promoting the human rights framework: the Washington Office on Latin America, Latin American Working Group, and Center for International Policy. Unlike those tours, NGO sponsored travel stress the importance of meeting with non-governmental organizations and community representatives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I hope to explore these activists' meaning-making of their experience of the encounter with the state in Washington. Along with wrenching personal revelation, emotional calculations of risk and exposure and the rearticulation of ongoing local political alliances, these activists claimed to have experienced democracy in profound ways. Some articulated their critique and rejection of Washington power politics, while others described the experience of "being heard" as one that enabled ongoing claim-making in Colombia.

Washington Office National Ministries Division, Christian Aid. (List found at the U.S. Office on Colombia website, <http://www.usofficeoncolombia.com/USOC%20Partners/>, accessed April 18, 2008).

⁴ There are a number of policy actors that I will not address in this account, including the US Colombia Business Partnership and other corporate and Colombian government lobbying efforts. Founded in 1997 and initially convened by the Colombian embassy during the certification crisis of the Samper administration to bring the perspective of business community to the debates, the USCBP actively supported the aid package for Colombia, and are now lobbying for the Free Trade Agreement. According to the Wall Street Journal, the Colombian embassy pays approximately \$100,000 a month to public relations firms for lobbying in support of additional assistance to Colombia (Davis 2007: A6).