THE UNITED STATES AND THE COLOMBIAN CONFLICT: 
THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MILITARIZED INTERVENTION: WHAT DO 
COUNTERINSURGENCY AND PEACE REALLY MEAN TO THE STATE? 

by 

Chelsey Dyer 
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Committee: 

[Signatures] 

Director 

Department Chairperson 

Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences 

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The United States and the Colombian Conflict: The Construction of a Militarized Intervention; What do Counterinsurgency and Peace Really Mean to the State?

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By

Chelsey G. Dyer
Bachelor of Arts
North Carolina State University, 2011

Director: Andrew Bickford, Associate Professor.
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Fall Semester 2013
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA
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<td>DAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELN</td>
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ABSTRACT

THE UNITED STATES AND THE COLOMBIAN CONFLICT: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MILITARIZED INTERVENTION; WHAT DO COUNTERINSURGENCY AND PEACE REALLY MEAN TO THE STATE?

Chelsey G. Dyer, M.A.

George Mason University, 2013

Thesis Director: Dr. Andrew Bickford

This thesis assesses the economic and social ramifications of militarized U.S. intervention in Colombia. Using declassified policy and military documents, published accounts, and data collected during an August 2013 fieldwork experience in the Valle de Cauca and Cauca departments in Southwestern Colombia, the author examines how United States and Colombian conceptions of statehood are illuminated through militarized security and economic policies related to, or justified by, the Colombian conflict.
CHAPTER 1: A MILITARIZED AMERICAN

“Well, she was an American girl
Raised on promises
She couldn't help thinkin'
That there was a little more to life somewhere else” Tom Petty

Introduction

I was a militarized American. I was a gun toting, military loving, Tom Petty American girl who would take an action packed adventure movie over a romance film any day. I clung to war stories dripping with tales of American soldier’s bravery and sacrifice. I respected those in uniform, elevated them to supercitizens, and in some ways still do. I fed my need for courage and strength with stories like Tim O’Briens (1990) *The Things They Carried* and Alex George’s (2013) *A Good American*. In 5th grade I wrote my first short novel on the bravery of United States soldiers in WWII. War and the stories or myths of unfounded and undaunted righteousness buttressed me as an American. In them I found pride in the military, in the nation, and in myself as a United States citizen. I came to graduate school to study militarization because I loved militarization. I was the epitome of a militarized individual. When I became interested in United States interactions in Colombia, I “naturally” believed our actions were indubitably correct. I read the news and saw a simply painted picture of the FARC guerilla as nemesis and the United States altruistically coming to the aid of a nation in need. I came to graduate school to figure out exactly what militarization meant to
Colombia. I came to graduate school and learned my first lesson in being productively wrong.

This thesis evolved as I peeled back the layers of militarization of the Colombian conflict and of myself. The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate how United States policies influence military strategy in Colombia. Devoid of the comforts of militarized “normalcy” I was forced to remove my essentialized conceptualization of the United States from its almighty pedestal and embrace the nuances, the striking convictions, and the grayscale of policy and strategy crafted by humans. This research examines how the United States military currently constructs the Colombian conflict to justify, legitimate, and maintain United States military intervention and hegemony in Colombia. My purpose is to grasp how United States economic, political, and social policies towards Colombia have impacted counterinsurgency strategies, and how subsequent strategies have impacted policy and understandings of the conflict. An inquiry into how policy affects military strategy and vice versa provides a unique insight into how the nation-states of Colombia and the United States are both legitimimized and delegitimized by the Colombian conflict, and how they strive to mask delegitimizing effects. Additionally, this research holds timely relevance due to the current peace talks proceeding between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government. A reconciliation of how the militarizing sway of United States imperial influence in Colombia has impacted present imaginings of peace is imperative to untangle the webs of power, force, and fear that grip the conflict. To disempower the structures of militarization they must first be acknowledged (Bickford 2013).
In this thesis I examine how militarization and counterinsurgency strategy, in the context of United States- Colombia relations and the Colombian conflict, impacts and is impacted by the sitting government’s power claims to statehood. To do so, I conduct a textual analysis of archival reports and United States policy documents on Colombia over the past fifty-four years. I examine ethnographic and historical accounts of the Colombian conflict and compare these findings with United States policy during the time-period to assess correlations. I perform a context analysis of current media articles and websites of United States government agencies to assess the discursive formulation of present United States-Colombia relations. The main questions directing my research are:

- How does United States military intervention in Colombia support United States political and economic policy toward the nation?
- How does the United States military construct the Colombian conflict in order to justify and maintain a militarized intervention?
- How do the United States and Colombia currently imagine peace in Colombia? How do they imagine demilitarization?
- What are the United States military’s connections and impacts on the Colombian military and how do counterinsurgency tactics affect conceptions of the conflict?

In order to answer these questions I draw from a large variety of theoretical literature on the state, counterinsurgency tactics, power, hegemony, discourse, violence, and class struggle. I examine how United States military policies, recommendations, and
tactics have been implemented in Colombia over time beginning in the late 1950’s. Through a textual analysis of economic and military policy documents, I analyze why the United States began to focus on military intervention in Colombia, and how this intervention reflects United States members of congress’ ideas of the role and responsibility of the United States nation-state. I round-out this analysis with an examination of present day United States economic policies towards Colombia. Throughout my analysis I examine how United States economic and military policies display United States members of congress and military leader’s understanding of what development and security is in the 21st century. I demonstrate how the conceptions of development and security are tied to conceptions of statehood while peeling back the layers of United States influence in Colombia.

**Anthropology of the State and Militarization**

As part of our lexicon, the term “state” represents much more that a single word can connote. Under a one word heading the state is immediately born and essentialized, representative of an enigma of power, control, and government. It becomes the superorganic of a population, existing above it and setting the rules for how it should operate with a paternalistic conductor’s baton. Under an anthropological lens the term state can become both laden with meaning and demystified (Abrams 2006, Bickford 2011, Foucault 2006, Ferguson and Gupta 2002, Gupta 1995, Lemke 2007, Rose and Miller 1992, Sayers 1994, Skocpol 1994, Tilly 1994 and 1995). Foucault argues that the state is an instrument and effect of political strategies and social relations (Lemke 2007, Foucault 2006). As such, the state is in constant flux,
defined and redefined through realignments of power relations. However, under Foucault’s definition, the state exists outside of those who compose it (Foucault 2006). When he speaks of the state, Foucault simplifies it into an “it”, something that is an essentialized controlling force above the population. Contrastingly, Marx theorizes that the state is the repressive body of the bourgeoisie, articulated to maintain power and wealth amongst the ruling class (Tucker 1978). Unlike Foucault, Marx addressed a key element necessary to define the state, what is it composed of. In both contestation and agreement with Foucault and Marx, I argue that the state is composed of institutions vested with the authority to make decisions on behalf of the rest of the population, and the people that comprise them (Bickford 2011). No longer an intangible enigma, the state is grounded in people. The institutions that congeal to represent the state are defined and directed by the people who compose them. As such, institutions are in constant flux, at the whim of the variety of ideas, beliefs, and people compiled under a single bureaucratic heading.

Henceforth, when I refer to the state or the institutions that comprise it, I speak of the people within the institutions. Under my definition, I do not want to mitigate the contestations that exist within or between institutions, but to highlight how contestations in different bureaucratic institutions unite to achieve overarching policies of the state. Though this work focuses primarily on what Bourdieu (2003) would term the “right hand” of the state, the opposing “left hand” still plays a role in conducting the political environment.
Furthermore, it is important to mention that when speaking of the “state,” though the policies implemented in the name of the federal government are uniform, they have different political, social, and economic effects regionally. I choose to focus on federal “state” policies in order to assess the overarching impact broad-based policies can have on a conflict. However, though I focus on the military and economic policies of the federal government, this in no way seeks to diminish the importance of regional and community authorities, corporations, and illegal groups. In fact, in Colombia power has never solely been in the hands of state actors but is divided amongst local governments and leaders, corporations, businesspeople, paramilitaries, guerillas, and many more. (Hansen & Stepputat 2006, Stafford & Palacios 2002, Richani 2007). This thesis highlights the power held by the state and its intersection with other power-holders in an effort to show both the intended and unintended consequences of the exertion of this power.

I also see the state as a legally demarcated territorial body. In Paige West’s Conservation is our Government Now (2006) she explicates Lefebvre’s (1991) conception of space. Space, she argues, starts from the production of an idea, a location, and a relationship between people. It serves as a tool of thought and action, of domination and power (West 2006). I posit that the state is a claim to a space of fluctuating ideas, people, and a bounded material place. However, Ferguson and Gupta (2002) argue against the common conceptualization that the state is “above” the population and that it is territorially all-encompassing. Instead they contend that globalization has precipitated new forms of transnational governementality (Foucault 2006). “Instead of opposing the
state to something called ‘society,’ … we need to view states as themselves composed of bundles of social practices, every bit as local in their materiality and social situatedness as any other” (Gupta 1995 in Ferguson and Gupta 2002:992). As such, civil society and the state are not easily distinguished, and the state’s authority is not pre-determined. Categorically, “civil” society and the state are intertwined through a compound of NGO’s, transnational organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations, and the citizens themselves. The state defines and redefines its authority and the grasp of its authority through its fluctuating political strategies.

Congruent with Ferguson and Gupta, I contend that the state is comprised of both “bottom-up” and “top-down” processes that cannot be delineated as either “local” or “national” developments, and are thus categorized as “transnational apparatuses of governmentality” that exist with or alongside the state (2002: 994). As such, overarching influence of the state is a “precarious achievement” that must be continually reestablished through policy and action (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:994). However, while I agree that the state is comprised of the influences and interactions of transnational, subnational, and local or national groups, and such groups play a role in directing the Colombian conflict; militarized actions of the conflict are predominately maintained within the enclosed spatial entity designated as the Colombian state. As such, for purposes of this research, I maintain that the geographic state is enclosed within a legally defined barrier.

Charles Tilly contends that “war makes states” (1985:170). In “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” Tilly argues that the extent to which governments “protect their citizens are imaginary or the effects of their own activities” (1985:171).
Governments strive to monopolize violence in order to legitimate their claims of protection. As such, states represent the ultimate example of an organized criminal unit that operates off of a system of racketeering. Under the heading of organized violence, states eliminate or neutralize external and internal enemies, protect the enemies of their clients, and extract the necessary funds to conduct these activities. The state’s ability to monopolize violence varies based on its fiscal capabilities (Tilly 1985). Each activity of organized violence strengthens the other. State making operates on a continual loop of war making, protection, and extraction. Tilly’s work disregards the litany of power relations that operate within and between civil society and the state. He does not account for how relational fluctuations effect changes in the political strategies employed by government institutions, or the contestations state policies may produce. He does however, elucidate the state’s need to monopolize violence and produce the necessary finances to support its violent endeavors. Tilly (1985) demonstrates that war-making both legitimizes the state as a sustained territorial body, and endorses the state as the ultimate protector. However, the state’s attempts at control can have unintended consequences on the citizens it seeks to manipulate. As such, the state may induce new forms of being that perpetuate forms of resistance (Foucault 1995, Hughes Rinker 2013).

**Militarization and Military Tactics**

Bickford (2011) contends that militarization is not simply the taking up of arms but is also the production and reproduction of an ideology that supports this process. As such, Lutz argues that it is “the shaping of national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action” (Bickford 2011:20). Congruently, militarization is a tactic of
hegemony. “A tactic used to create support for the state, to make them [citizens] believe that the goals of the state are tied to their own well-being, survival, and social reproduction” (Bickford 2011:68). Enloe (2007) complements these arguments by denoting that militarization (and demilitarization) is a layered process that occurs over time. Civilians are militarized as they begin to see the world as a dangerous a place that warrants the quick decisive actions of militaries rather than slow legislative processes. These concerns impel the adoption of militaristic values such as the use of force and obedience (Enloe 2007).

Enloe (2007) contends feminist curiosity is essential for understanding militarization. Utilizing what she characterized as “feminist curiosity”, Enloe (2007) argues United States policies of force are associated with greater power and credibility because they are perceived as more masculine. Furthermore “the powerful strand of American political culture that values manly shows of overt strength over allegedly ‘softer’ more feminized demonstrations of patient, careful negotiations have become even more dominant in the wake of the attack of September 11, 2001” (Enloe 2007:50). Analyzing militarized policies without incorporating the impact of gendered conceptualizations ignores the gendered factors that lead to the formation of such policies and congruently a holistic examination of the effects (2007: 51).

Demilitarization and a Monopoly on Violence

Wallace (1968) notes that “mobilization for war often involves a collective mobilization of memory about past injuries” (Gusterson 2007). Congruently, demilitarization often requires the selective employment of memory (Fussell 1975,

Discourse perpetuates notions of the valor of war and its heroes, and war’s participants are simplified under headings of right vs. wrong, good vs. evil (Bickford 2013). Memories that don’t fit into the newly crafted puzzle of history are discarded, forgotten, or altered like a puzzle piece chopped in half to make a properly shaped edge. Violence aids in attempts to change memory. Scheper-Hughes argued that “violence is the only tactic the military has at its disposal to control citizens even during peacetime,” to shape the present through a remolding of the past (2004: 179). However, violence is not the only tactic at the disposal of the state. Within the hegemonic arsenal of state power is the ability to shape discourse, knowledge, and the normalization of beliefs and actions.

I contend that as the state seeks to maintain its monopoly on violence, it must engage in a variety of military strategies to legitimate its claim on power. Military tactics employed both within and outside of the state’s territorial boundaries are visual and forceful manifestations of the state’s power (Bickford 2011). Seen through personal contact or media broadcast, the presence of state troops can highlight the existence of imminent danger and reinforce the protective guise of the state, or it can be representative of state dominance, control, and repression. Regardless the specific effects, the presence of state troops reinforces the panoptical authority of the state, and can be seen as a
political project that reaffirms the practical nature of the state, for better or worse (Foucault 2006).

Abrams’ (2006) contends that the state as an “agency that has political projects does not exist” (Sayers 1994: 371). Rather, the state itself is an ideological project that embodies fragmented and often contentious attempts for domination. “The state is not the reality behind the mask of political practice, the state is the mask” (Sayers 2004: 171). I posit that the state is a dialectic of both ideological and practical projects. The state must protect its mask discursively, ideologically, and in practice. It is both a reality and a mask. Military tactics are one method employed by the state to reinforce its reality and protect its mask.

**Knowledge, Power, and Hegemony**

Foucault (1995) argues that the production and dissemination of knowledge is tied to power. He contends that power produces knowledge and knowledge presupposes a power relation. Lemke compliments this proposition arguing that “state agencies produce and proliferate forms of knowledge that enable them to act upon the governed reality… The state is constituted by discourses, narratives, world-views and styles of thought that allow political actors to develop strategies and realize goals” (2007: 7). A plurality of discourses and worldviews may co-exist amidst the various institutions of the state. These discourses may support popular hegemonic narratives, or reinterpret and imbue them with new meaning. As such, the hegemony of the state is not holistically binding; it does not make agency a hapless affair.
William Roseberry (1994) argues that Gramsci conceived of hegemony not as a ruling ideology but as an outline that constructs a “common material and meaningful framework… that is in part discursive: a common language or way of talking about social relationships that sets out the central terms around which and in terms of which contestation and struggle can occur” (1994:361). Roseberry argues that attention to political and discursive projects can illuminate many aspects of a field of force. However, he favors analyzing discursive projects to examine subaltern forms of struggle against the ruling class. I propose that a discursive analysis of the “ruling” body can help illuminate the political framework and strategies being employed by the state. “Conceptualizing such processes in terms of the necessity of constructing a common discursive framework allows us to examine both the power and fragility of a particular order of domination” (Roseberry 1994: 363). Yet, no matter the discourse, in order for the state to effectively dispense its policies, it must first possess proper administrative and military sovereignty over its specified territory (Skocpol 1994). It is imperative to account for the necessity of state control in order to effectively situate internal war-making strategies of the state.

The state and non-state actors who seek to make claims to the state, utilize discourse to both gain control and undermine the authority of competitors. The state employs a variety of mechanisms, or ideological state apparatuses, to spread their discourse. Althusser (2006) argues that ideological state apparatuses (ISA’s) are institutional devices, such as education, the media, and religion that purport and reinforce the hegemonic ideologies of the state. The maintenance of present ideological conditions safeguards against changing current social relations. Althusser contends that the ruling
hegemonic discourse of the state lays the groundwork that enables mainstream acceptance of the ideology espoused by ISA’s. However, Althusser also argues that ideologies are born of class conflicts. As such, even within ISA’s contestations and manifestations of conflicts exist. Similar to Althusser, Lemke argues that “state agencies produce and proliferate forms of knowledge that enable them to act upon the governed reality” (2007:12). Knowledge and policies produced by the state operate in a dialectic model in which the state produces knowledge that affirms the creation of current policies and then subsequently creates policies that support the knowledge that is created and proliferated. For example, following 9/11 the United States government and media spoke widely of the threat of terrorism with a specific focus on the Middle East. Thus, I argue that a militarized way of viewing the world can be seen as a type of knowledge produced by the state that subsequently shapes state policies and justifications for policies.

Seeing Through a Militarized Haze

This present research attempts to shear through the militarized haze in which I have been raised and elucidate how United States military and economic policies have impacted the Colombian conflict and present imaginings of peace. I intend to understand state violence and how it is portrayed by government agencies as a mechanism through which certain types of knowledge about the state are justified, maintained, or changed, and as a way through which the State expresses its power to its own citizens and other nation-states. The United States is composed of a variety of political, discursive, and relational spaces. The various institutions that operate to maintain the mask of the state in the United States- the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency,
Department of Commerce, the State Department, etc. are spaces within this claim. The discursive productions of each of these agencies create and recreate a mythology that portrays the United States as domestically and transnationally comparative with other nations. As such these state institutions discursively position themselves domestically and transnationally in historical, social, and economic contexts that facilitate and reproduce militarized ideology. By both locating the United States and other nations these discursive creations provide the framework for United States interactions and interventions abroad. I will examine the discursive framework of these agencies to see how they both create the space of the United States and validate interference in Colombia. Thus, I will examine the politics of representation involved in the creation of the “mask” of the United States and Colombia and how attempts at domination impact military strategy.

I propose that fear disseminated through military operations both highlights the Colombian state’s claim for a monopoly on violence and undercuts its assertion that it is the ultimate protector of the people. Colombia’s need to continually reassert its claims on power and violence demonstrates how the nation-state conceptualizes statehood and government. Securing the physical and psychological support of its citizens is the first priority of the state. Following United States counterinsurgency doctrine, Colombia seeks to assert the authority of the state first by militarily consolidating territory. I contend that members of the government and military believe that by acquiring authority of the physical space, authority of the people is soon to follow. Though “civil action programs” are part of counterinsurgency strategy; implementing social services such as health care
and education are not the primary methods through which the state seeks to enforce its presence. Rather, it prefers the visual and practical representation of a soldier and a gun. The implementation of counterinsurgency tactics blurs the boundary between civilian and soldier. All individuals become a target for the state’s psychological operations, and all individuals are codified as either working “with” or “against” the state. In Colombia, counterinsurgency can be seen as political subjugation designed to reproduce current social conditions. “In its broadest sense, counterinsurgency refers to the methods by which a dominant power imposes its will upon a subordinate population” (Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009:12). As such, counterinsurgency tactics are a political strategy of the state employed to defend its monopoly on violence and protect its ideological and discursive mask.

However, militarization and counterinsurgency strategies cannot be viewed independently of other socio-economic and political conditions. The United States has provided military recommendations and training to Colombia for over fifty years (Hylton 2006). However, neoliberal economic policies and the increasing globalization of the market have buffeted and spurred militarization. As peace talks proceed between the FARC and Colombian government, supported by the United States, it is important to assess how militarized and neoliberal policies affect how peace is designed and if a long-term sustainable peace is possible. While a variety of literature discusses the Colombian conflict and United States militarization, a gap exists in regards to peace (Gill 2004, Taussig 2003, Tate 2007, Brittain 2010, Dudley 2006, Clemencia 2011, Hylton 2006, Lutz 2001). How is peace conceptualized by a state that uses militarization to buffer its
claims to power? This is especially significant in a world where United States support, or lack thereof, of militaristic policies has global implications, specifically in nations such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Mexico, and Syria where militarized United States policies are undergoing shifts.

**Research Methods and Questions**

A broad historical scope is necessary to assess how United States policies have impacted the Colombian military and society and current conceptualizations of peace. A thorough examination of past and present policy documents as well as an analysis of ethnographies and NGO reports on the regional impacts of policy will provide insight into the impacts of United States militarization in Colombia.

**United States Policy Documents**

I will draw on a review of public documents on United States policy towards Colombia, a textual analysis of current media documents circulated in the United States that discuss the conflict, as well as a textual analysis of specified websites. I will qualitatively analyze United States policy documents dating from 1999 to the present available from the National Security Archives and government websites that expose economic and security policy, funding, and military strategy recommended for Colombia. These materials will be used for a discursive, textual, and historical analysis in which I will locate historical trends in policy, the positioning of the United States towards Colombia, their discursive justifications, and potential imaginings of peace. This material will enable me to locate the United States political positioning towards Colombia through
time and compare it to present policy that has been enacted within a year and a half of the peace talks.

**Colombian Military**

To examine the impact of United States policy on Colombian military strategy I will collect and analyze strategic documents available electronically from the Colombian military. I will also conduct a textual analysis of the information presented on the Colombian military’s website about the conflict and United States intervention. In addition, I will conduct a textual analysis of the South Command website, the division of the United States military that conducts operations in South America, and the website of Colombia’s national army. An analysis of these materials will focus on how the Colombian conflict is described, how United States intervention is justified, and how the Colombian army discursively explains and justifies their mission. These documents will elucidate how United States policy affects both the United States and Colombian military’s discursive justification and understanding of the conflict, the actors involved, as well as the impact of their militarized strategies.

**Popular Media**

In addition to policy documents, I will collect and analyze media articles from October 2012 (the start of formal peace talks in Colombia) to present circulated in the United States and Colombia about the conflict. I will find these articles through internet resources. They will be derived from news sources including the New York Times, BBC News, Colombia Reports, the Christian Science Monitor, CNN, Fox, El Tiempo, La Semana, and others. I will conduct a textual analysis on the media articles and analyze
how the conflict is presented, how the peace process is described, if/how United States intervention is discussed, and what correlations and contestations exist between the content of the articles, the direction of United States policy, and Colombian military actions. I will also compare and contrast the content of articles predominantly circulated throughout the United States with those circulated throughout Colombia. I will examine thematic as well as discursive differences and similarities, how the various articles frame the United States and Colombia as nations, and how this framing impacts justifications for the conflict.

Data Analysis

My analysis will identify multiple hegemonic discourses employed by the United States in its policy documents, contestations that exist within them, and their impact on the Colombian military that reverberated in the Colombian conflict. With this research I strive to show the complexities involved within United States influence in Colombia. Though the simplification of intricate concepts into simplistic categories provides data that can be easily controlled and comprehended, it elides the complexity of real-world solutions while undergirding ignorance, stereotypes, and uninformed actions. Religions, cultures, and governments become things, essentialized, unchanging, and devoid of the people that comprise them. With this research I seek not to pursue and crucify a villain or to valorize a hero. Instead, I strive to strip away discursive categories and weave together the complex story of a militarized United States and Colombia, a story of intent and effects, the imagined and the real, of profit and of loss.
“Though insurgents depend on terrorist tactics like bombings, kidnapping, selective assassination, and extortion, little is gained in understanding by applying the ‘terrorist label’. To blame the bulk of the country’s problems on the insurgency-fashionable academia and media- is to put the cart before the horse. It overlooks the fact that throughout modern history, state terror has provided the ‘oxygen’ without which insurgent terror ‘cannot combust for very long’ (Hylton 2006:3).

The maxim goes that United States interests have long been fueled by a commitment to democracy, a belief in equality, and freedom from the domination of others. Shrouded in Americanized propaganda and incomplete histories, this subjective notion is seen as objective historical truth (Lutz 2001). However, when removed from the obscuring grip of wishful thinking, a deeper examination of historical trends reveals the fallacy of this maxim. United States interests have not all been fueled by an Americanized notion of justice and righteousness, rather they have been justified, with amorality explained away, through the use of discourse and narratives that belittle anything other than capitalist, and today neoliberal, political and economic systems (Lutz 2001). By creating an “other”, an “us vs. them” complex, the United States strives to secure its dominance, its control, and its position as the global moral voice (Said 1979). The maintenance of the United States Empire relies directly on the nation’s ability to preserve the status quo or shift it to fit
United States interests (Gill 2004). As argued by Panich and Gindin, (2003) “the need to try to refashion all of the states of the world so they become at least minimally adequate for the administration of global [capitalist] order… is now the central problem of the American state” (Gill 2004:3). Though masked by anti-colonial and freedom-centric rhetoric, discourses of domination, United States imperialism is alive and well and manifests itself not just in securing economic interests but also in the “practices of political, military, and cultural domination” (Gill 2004:3).

Latin America has not escaped the imperialist grip of the United States. As demonstrated in Lesley Gill’s *School of the Americas*, (2004) the United States has propagated and reinforced United States ideology and interests by training Latin American soldiers at Fort Benning, Georgia at the School of the Americas, now referred to as the Western Hemisphere Institute of Security Cooperation (Gill 2004). However, United States impact extends beyond overt militarized influence. United States economic policies and beliefs about what constitutes development and security have socio-economic and political repercussions on the daily lives of Colombians. However, throughout time, justification for United States interference in Colombian affairs has been shrouded in political discourse that depicts Colombia in need of saving from communist, drug-trafficking, or terrorist forces.

**On the Ground Realities of a 2013 Colombia**

I was able to witness the effects of United States policies in Colombia on a Witness for Peace delegation during which we met with and visited numerous communities affected by the armed conflict and the violence of unjust economic policies.
Witness for Peace is a non-profit organization that has focused on advocating for human rights in Latin America for over thirty years. On my delegation I was able to witness the stark contrast between life in cities- our delegation visited Cali, Popayan, and Buenaventura- and the realities of rural existence. Our ten-day trip was concentrated in the Cauca and Valle de Cauca departments of Southwestern Colombia, and showed me that the beauty of the Colombian landscape competes only with the beauty of the people. Yet, the United States and Colombian governments insist upon forcing their version of “modernity”, “security”, and “development” into the laps of communities long denied basic social services like running water and electricity. I witnessed the effects of these free trade inspired “development” pushes on many communities while I was in Colombia, two of which were the Porvenir Community and Biodiversity Council and San Jose.

Figure A: The Port at Buenaventura: It may look pretty, but dock workers labor under some of the worst conditions in Colombia. Long hours, low pay, and threats to unionists are common. Some say it is equal to slave-like conditions.
The Porvenir Community and Biodiversity Council is a small community in Bajo Calima located a short distance away from the Calima River, on the outskirts of Buenaventura. A rural community that subsists primarily off of farming, fishing from the nearby river, and traditional small-scale logging, Porvenir has been heavily impacted by policies that seek to bring the government’s version of “development” into the area. Located near the bustling port city of Buenaventura- where 60% of imports arrive into Colombia- the community is situated in a prime position for port expansion (Sanchez & Nicholls 2011).

Buenaventura is one of the most dangerous cities in Colombia, and militarization did nothing to change this, the presence of troops just altered the tactics of violence. “Since 2006, when the army’s presence in the city was significantly increased, homicides have decreased while disappearances dramatically increased. From 2007 to 2010, 491 people were reported missing, more than twice the number reported during the four previous years combined (197 from 2003 to 2006)” (Sanchez & Nicholls 2011:5). These tactics are aimed at instilling a “false sense of calm” in the city, a sense of calm I experienced when I was in Buenaventura until the staid stares of the military reminded me of my place. Despite this lack of security- a deficit the FTA has increased- with the signing of the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement in 2012, an influx of goods and businesspeople created the necessity for port expansion and the desire for a more tourist friendly city. The government wishes to make the area more desirable for those visiting for business by expanding city infrastructure. In order to accomplish this task the government is repaving and expanding highways and entering communities- consistently
denied government social services- whose land is beneficial for expansion and project development. The national and local governments implicitly and explicitly allow big businesses and multinational corporations to do the same- inflict “development” projects on communities long denied state services for the benefit of business. However, much is masked in the discursive use of “development”. Unlike what the word connotes, these projects do not help the communities they enter. They are not providing infrastructure and resources for education, healthcare, or economic opportunities. Rather they are developing profit for the government and businesses at the expense of community’s livelihoods, health, and dignity.

The Porvenir community in Bajo Calima is one such population suffering due to its advantageous location. Long denied basic social services from the state like running water, the community is now threatened with displacement and economic alienation by several projects encroaching on their land. Those implementing the projects have failed to converse with the community about specific impacts, have not gained informed consent, and have treated the people as things easily discarded. The local and national governments have acted in complicity.

In 2005 surveyors arrived and began assessing the land. They informed the community that a port called Agua Dulce, or Fresh Water, was going to be built on their land. Agua Dulce is run by a consortium of primarily Filipino capital in which the local government of Buenaventura and the provincial government of Valle del Cauca are both shareholders. When the community did not want to relinquish their land to this project, the company hired private security forces to protect their interests, and in 2010 and 2011,
in an effort to terrorize the community into complicity, troops from the 80\textsuperscript{th} Battalion of the Second Fluvial Brigade of the Naval Infantry of the Colombian military arrived and burnt down community farmlands and 119 ranch houses. Though the military and Agua Dulce both refuse to take responsibility for the devastation of the community’s livelihood, community members attest to this truth. This militarization does not equate to increased security for the community, but instead increased tension and fear. In fact, the presence of the military is not security for these communities. It is security for the companies.
Figure B: Machines encroaching on Km 7.5’s land. Photo courtesy of author.
Several other megaprojects are also threatening the community’s sovereignty over their land including the construction of an international airport, the desire to exploit oil reserves, and the aspiration to build a landfill in the area. These projects carry with them heavy environmental and cultural impacts. The construction of a landfill and oil exploitation risks the contamination of their water sources—sources that are imperative since they are denied running water by the state. The airport would also cause significant noise pollution. Together these projects are the perfect storm encroaching upon community land and autonomy. Without their land the communities are unable to support themselves through the production of crops. The communities have not been consulted with about these projects, or offered any economic alternatives. Instead these companies are arriving with armed actors in tow and contributing to the economic and cultural degradation that perpetuates a cycle of violence and armed conflict.

In order to be heard, the communities of Bajo Calima formed another community council—as the two already in existence had corrupt members. This new community council, named Porvenir, seeks to represent the true voice of the community and jointly decide the fate of their land. However, they have not been granted legal recognition. Without legal recognition, they have little power or voice to control what is done with their own land, a land they have worked for the past 70 years. Instead that power is left in the hands of corrupt officials, big businesses, and multinational companies who have the force of the military on their side. Today, despite continued community resistance, machines have arrived on their land, and they are told that the project will commence forward without their consent. Many in the community wish simply for proper
consultation, consideration, and reparations in this “development” process. However, they are denied even those basic rights.

Unfortunately this is just one community of many being affected by forced economic marginalization. Another such community is that of San Jose, a small seaside town in Buenaventura. They, like Bajo Calima, have long been denied the presence of the state until now. Interest has piqued now that their land is wanted for the construction of a tourist boardwalk. The government would like to displace their entire community of homes to a landlocked compound in order to build a boardwalk for the increased tourist traffic the US-Colombia FTA is bringing. However, the community of San Jose is a seafaring people. They subsist from the ocean and maintain a culture and tradition that is sea based. They eat fish and mussels they catch themselves and make their floors with the shells of eaten mussels. The ocean is their economy. Yet, the government wishes to move them to a landlocked compound with no economic alternatives. Already the construction of high rises above their community has brought in an influx of discarded trash, and they have been denied the necessary wood to refurbish their homes. Some within the community welcomed the tourist boardwalk because it would provide another economic alternative, though they recognize that wages and working conditions would still be poor. Others are adamantly against the boardwalk’s construction and its threat to their traditional way of life. Yet, most desire the respect of a prior consultation process, one that assesses the needs of the people in the community and not the needs of businesses.
These communities are two among many that demonstrate that a “war” is still taking place in Colombia. It is a cyclical war, one in which militarization feeds economic distress and economic distress feeds militarization. The shock of murders, disappearances, and fear encroaches on the ability to wage a substantial campaign against an economic coup steered by the hands of big businesses and profit. Furthermore, the sheer serenity of the cities can lull many into a false sense of security, a sense of ease and safety, a sense that the war is over. Yet, while crime may have decreased in large cities, the battle in rural communities for autonomous security and sustenance persists. However, this façade of safety acts in the government’s favor. Marginalized groups of society are out-of-sight out-of-mind, and the war is no longer a pressing issue for some. I contend that this is one reason why the government of Buenaventura wishes to displace the community of San Jose, and why the compound for displaced civilians is so far from the main city- to keep the different “classes” separate, visually and economically. For if
seeing is believing, and the government can keep the marginalized hidden, silent, and competing for resources they pose no threat to the existing status quo.

Figure D: The deceptive serenity of a rural landscape and a city street in Cali, Colombia

When I was in Colombia, the sheer amount of communities affected, and the pain they felt was difficult to absorb. Yet, their strength and determination, and their bountiful
ideas for change were beautiful. While we were in Buenaventura, at night we were not permitted to go beyond the walls of our hotel, a nice hotel where business people regularly stayed on their visits to the city. Encapsulated there it was oddly ironic. We had to stay inside the walls and in this nice hotel because it was what was safe. That they only safe areas where we could stay were the same hubs of businesses that act as though people were disposable pawns was twisted. And the United States and Colombian governments say that war is easing in Colombia.

My experience in Colombia showed me the power that political posturing and discourse has on the public’s conceptions of events occurring around the world. When I returned and began telling people what I saw throughout my trip, many were shocked and baffled that such things were occurring as a result of United States policies. Other’s did not want to believe what I was saying and stood convinced of the half-truths mainstream media informed them on a daily basis. Breaking the through the barrier of assumptions fueled by decades of misinformation is challenging. The United States and Colombian governments have been framing the story of United States intervention for decades.

A History of United States Interference

The United States has a history of interference in Colombia dating back to the well-known story of the United Fruit Company, recounted eloquently in Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *100 Year of Solitude* (1967). The United States has justified inference in Colombia through a myriad of reasonings that align with the predominant justifications for interventions elsewhere around the world. For example, throughout the Cold War United States intervention in Colombia was seen as a way to stem the spread of the
Communist Menace (Gill 2004). Overtime, justifications have changed to ameliorate the average United States citizen’s apprehension about intervention. However, United States intervention has not always followed the path of the altruistic savior the media and government depict. Instead, United States engagement in Colombia has predominantly focused on securing United States economic and political interests. Such intervention began in earnest at the conclusion of World War II (Gill 2004).

At the conclusion of World War II, as Europe was rebuilding itself, the United States seized upon an opportunity to wave its paternalistic conductor’s baton over Latin America.

“The United States aided and abetted… [the consolidation of power in Latin America] by arming preferred leaders, intervening militarily to prop them up when necessary, and using threats, loans, diplomatic pressure, and other techniques to control governments in power. Military strongmen and factions of the national elites developed relations of interest and patronage that tied them to U.S. centers of military and financial power” (Gill 2004:60).

By strengthening their military operations by training Latin American troops and stockpiling their armory, the United States made many Latin American nations dependent and accustomed to its funding and intervention. The United States and Latin American nations developed a relationship of cooperation that entailed economic benefit to the United States and furthered their mission to spread and sanctify American ideology as the best a nation can offer (Gill 2004). The United States justified their interference in Latin American affairs by using the Cold War communist menace. In 1947, together with 20 Latin American nations, the United States ratified the Rio Treaty, signed with the aim of preventing and confronting an attack from a “non-hemispheric power” e.g., the Soviet
Union. However, “the real agenda was less ‘hemispheric defense’ than a far more traditional concern: the maintenance of U.S. dominance in the Americas and the control over raw materials” (Gill 2004: 63-64). Essentially, the United States was providing arms in return for the collaboration of Latin American nations not just against communism, but against all who threaten United States ideology and power, a tactic the United States still employs in Colombia today.

Following World War II, the United States gained increasing global dominance, proxy fighters for its ideological embattlements, and access to new markets of economic opportunities and raw materials (Gill 2004). The trophies of this ironic “good war” are still flaunted and utilized today. Though the war on communism has shifted its discursive focus to a “war on drugs” and a “war on terror”, the same principles remain. The United States desires to eliminate or derogate any group challenging Westernized ideals, and continues to arm, fund, and provide military expertise to those who support their same economic, political, and militaristic goals (Gill 2004). Congruently, United States allies in Latin America often remain so because of the funding they receive from Uncle Sam. The delicate balance of political relations rests on money and the United States’ military apparatuses adroit training. Latin America is but a puppet to the United States masterful skill of pulling the monetary puppet strings and watching it dance to the tune of Western hegemony.

The United States actions and justifications for their actions, such as referencing the communist menace and the imminent danger that would prevail if it were able to take root, impacted the security and development of the nations in which the United States
chose to interfere. Colombia, a nation with a complex historical background, was in the midst of a civil war between the Conservative and Liberal parties when the United States decided to invoke a greater hand in directing the nation’s future (Gill 2004).

**A Brief History of Colombia**

In the 1960’s after a period of extreme political violence and unrest known as La Violencia, a multiplicity of guerilla groups emerged (Hylton 2006). However, the history of guerrilla movements in Colombia began with peasant struggles of the 1920s and 1930s. “Peasant and indigenous groups organized in response to harsh working conditions imposed on day-workers by coffee plantation owners and conflicts over land tenure” (Vargas 1999:1). Structural inequities were -and still are- unproportionally felt by the rural population (Hylton 2006, Vargas 1999, Brittain 2010, Clemencia Ramirez 2011). Wealth was concentrated into the hands of the few and the traditional political parties (conservative and liberal) were populated with the wealthy (Hylton 2006). The rural population was excluded from the political sphere and denied state-run social, health, and education programs. As inequities increased so did social discontentment. This growing unrest fueled the political violence of La Violencia (Vargas 1999).

From 1948 to 1964 La Violencia raged as a civil war between the liberal and conservative parties (Hylton 2006). Each desired political domination. The conservative party co-opted civilians and the National Police to terrorize, persecute, and murder those with competing ideologies. In response, liberals and communists developed mobile guerilla units to defend themselves from state and civilian persecution. Extreme torture techniques, violence, and inequity dominated this time (Hylton 2006, Vargas 1999).
In 1958 the Conservative and Liberal parties reached an accord known as the National Front Agreement. This settlement presented each party with equal rule in government through an agreement that rotated power every four years. However, the wealthy still filled the ranks of government officials, and clientalistic relationships dominated the political sphere (Vargas 1999, Hylton 2006). The 16 year National Front agreement has been described as a limited democracy in which the political voice of the majority was restrained, the concerns of the few dominated those of the many, and structural inequities continued to persist and flourish (Tate 2007). The dominance of the conservative and liberal parties precluded the participation and incorporation of other political ideologies, including socialist and communist doctrines. Due to the lack of political sphere and continued government persecution and structural inequities, guerilla groups that developed throughout La Violencia solidified into self-defense units (Hylton 2006).

The Beginnings of United States Military Recommendations and Counterinsurgency Strategy

With the growing fear of the “communist menace” the United States began directing its resources to diminish the ideological threat. After the creation of the National Front agreement in Colombia, (around the same time as the Cuban revolution), the United States, under the Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower, created a Special Survey Team composed of experts with “irregular warfare” experience in Europe, Asia, and Latin America (Rempe 2002). The team was sent to Colombia for a two month period from
1959 to 1960 to assess the situation and draft recommendations for the Colombian government. Congruent with United States post-Cuban revolution policy throughout Latin America, these recommendations highlighted a litany of counterinsurgency techniques. Nordstorm and Martin define counterinsurgency as “state sponsored terror and repression deliberately carried out against suspected civilian populations” (1992:261). Such strategies focus their efforts not just on undermining the enemy but also winning the hearts of minds of civilians. Counterinsurgency incorporates a corpus of psychological operations, civil action initiatives - in which the military participates in local community-building projects to win the favor of the people, kill insurgents, and physical territory consolidation.

The hallmarks of United States counterinsurgency tactics were highlighted in their recommendations to the Colombian government. Suggestions included the establishment of a counter-guerilla combat force in the Colombian army, and the formation of “an effective government public information service with a covert psychological warfare capability” (Rempe 2002:13). In conjunction with counterinsurgency recommendations, the report delineated that the defeat of guerillas was contingent upon deep structural reforms. Military advisors highlighted that a military solution would not fix the guerilla problem short of “genocide or bankruptcy” (Rempe 2002:15). This team also recommended a United States support package of material and personnel to aid in the reorganization of Colombia’s military forces. Following United States advice, Colombia focused predominately on the militarized recommendations of the Special Survey team and ignored deeper structural reforms.
In 1962, a follow-up United States Army Special Warfare team, led by the head of the Army Special Warfare Center, William P. Yarborough, emphasized the need for more developed intelligence systems (critical for counter-insurgency operations), as well as for increased security measures. A supplemental recommendation by Yarborough established grounds for the formation of paramilitaries, which would come to be one of the deadliest forces throughout the conflict. This recommendation advised that civilians and military members be covertly selected to develop an underground civil and military structure. As written by Yarborough, “this structure should be used to pressure toward reforms known to be needed, perform counter-agent and counter-propaganda functions and as necessary execute paramilitary, sabotage and/or terrorist activities against known communist proponents.” (McClintock 2002: 2) This would be supported by the United States. Following this recommendation, in 1965 decree 3398 was passed to allow Colombian authorities to organize citizens into militia groups. It stated that “all Colombians, men and women…will be used by the government in activities and work that contribute to the reestablishment of order” (Dudley 2006:41). This decree was solidified with a law in 1968, a law that the Colombian military cited as legal justification for working with paramilitaries. Yarborough’s 1962 recommendation, and its deadly repercussions, underscores the desire of the United States to guide the path of Colombian development, and highlights the power a single United States proposal can have on the course of history.

In 1962, the Kennedy administration, following its penchant for low intensity conflict, launched the “Alliance for Progress” (Gill 2004). This plan was underscored as
an “economic development strategy for Latin America” that combined a “bullets and beans” strategy, heavy on the bullets (Dudley 2006: 9). Colombia created a similar plan entitled Plan Lazo that highlighted an internal defense strategy and drew from United States recommendations. Under this plan, Colombia attempted to eliminate the independent republics communist guerillas had established, improve intelligence structures, increase unconventional warfare capabilities, and enact military civic action programs to regain the trust of the populace (Rempe 2002:25). This strategy, like the United States “Alliance for Progress” focused heavily on military intervention with few resources or administrative structures directed towards social reforms. Under the Kennedy administration, United States Special Forces troops were expanded and counterinsurgency strategies prevailed (Simons 1999). As it became clear that nuclear weapons were not enough to deter alternative opinions about the veracity of the status quo, the United States began a significant shift in its usage of counterinsurgency strategy. In Catherine Lutz’s history of United States militarization she highlighted the impact of simply naming these operations.

She states:

“Special combat has gone under many designations, from the initial ‘limited war’ to ‘counterinsurgency’ to ‘low-intensity conflict’ to the most recent ‘Operations Other than War’. Much is in a name, the changes more and more suggesting this is not a ‘real’ war, not something to activate the constitutional requirements for congressional decision making. And the list does not include ‘counterrevolutionary war,’ a name that will not do for most Americans who proudly trace their nation’s roots to one. Insurgency was defined by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1962 as any opposition to an existing government that could be defined as illegal in the local context. It mattered not whether it was armed or foreign opposition, simply that it offended the governing (and often despotic)
elite. This, then, explicitly included anything from urban political demonstrations to strikes, and from political parties to religious movements” (Lutz 2001: 97).

The shift in United States militarized strategy increasingly blurred the boundary between civilian and enemy combatant. One could be labeled an insurgent for simply not agreeing with government policy or the United States’ expression of power. Such a label wreaked violent and terrorizing consequences. Following United States recommendations, training, and hegemony, “the Colombian government accelerated probing actions against the enclaves [communist independent republics] after the development of Plan LAZO, adopting a U.S. counterinsurgency methodology that included:

- Counterguerrilla training for security forces, initiation of civic action program, recruitment of informers, and infiltration of security personnel into guerilla groups.
- Conducting psychological operations in order to establish control over the civilian population.
- Initiating operations to blockade specific areas and isolate guerilla groups from their sources of support and intelligence.
- Utilizing in-place informers and infiltrators to splinter the internal cohesion of the guerilla groups and conducting ongoing offensive counterinsurgency operations, coupled with psychological warfare to destroy guerilla units and liquidate leadership cadre.
- Reconstructing operational zone economically, socially, and politically under the auspices of U.S. aid programs” (Rempe 2002:18).

These counterinsurgency recommendations illustrate that the United States was interested in pursuing a closer relationship with Colombia because it wanted to spread the political, ideological, and economic mantras of the United States and secure an ally in Westernized, U.S.-based hegemonic thought (Gill 2004). The report’s focus on
psychological operations highlights the desire of the United States to create and maintain a civilian population that will believe in and acquiesce to the needs of a global capitalist economy. These early recommendations foreshadow a future of United States intervention in Colombia that is directed by the political and economic interests of the homeland.

**Counterinsurgency Tactics and the State**

I contend that these tactics underscore a belief in the notion that securing claims to statehood rests in militaristic, forceful territory consolidation rather than consolidation and control through the implementation of broad-based social programs such as increased access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Tilly’s (1994) assertion that “war makes states” is exemplified through United States counterinsurgency recommendations in which the state is making war, but the war reaffirms state power and authority. Instead of the state expressing itself through social service initiatives, the state manifests itself in security operations and population discipline. Though civic actions programs (programs that focus on social service initiatives) are included in counterinsurgency strategy, they are but a small component to a larger militarized focus, employed often unsuccessfully to gain the support of the citizens. The majority of funding and focus of Plan LAZO and the Alliance for Progress was on military control of citizens and situations (Dudley 2005, Gill 2004, Hylton 2006).

I contend that in Colombia, claims to statehood were based on assertions to a monopoly on violence, not a monopoly on care-taking. However, because it failed to
offer substantial opportunities for structural reforms and economic, political, and social equality, these initiatives failed (Dudley 2005, Gill 2004, Hylton 2006). This leads one to ask why the United States would ignore the Special Survey Team recommendations that specify the necessity of deeper structural reforms. Did policy makers not believe in the veracity and intensity of the guerillas ideology? Was it America’s “self-assured superiority” that flouted the possibility that a movement towards another socio-economic and political system could be sustained (Gill 2004:31)? Or perhaps it was a belief in the strength of military and psychological operations, their effectiveness to quell a population, influence the support of adversaries, and demoralize the enemy.

Though questions may remain, the use of counterinsurgency tactics emphasizes the United States’ dislike of competing ideologies and its rampant desire to squash any foe that threatens United States hegemony. The result of the United States’ militarized approach was that the status quo was maintained, Westernized ideology reigned supreme and those who dare spoke against it where hunted down and killed. As such, the United States affirmed and maintained its claims to superiority, righteousness, and statehood by preserving the same capitalist and westernized ideology in its Latin American ally. Furthermore, Colombia retained its paternalistic United States partner by catering to United States militarized whims and advice. Those in power maintained power and the status quo prevailed. However, this was not without dissent or other non-militarized attempts enacted in Colombia to quell a displeased populace (Gill 2004, Tate 2007, Hylton 2006, Brittain 2010).
The Formation of the FARC

The United States’ conception of statehood and their resulting counterinsurgency recommendations to Colombia influenced the formation of the FARC-EP. Though there is no way to know how the existing class conflict would have evolved in Colombia without United States recommendations, it is evident that the United States’ recommendation to destroy communist independent republics resulted in unintended consequences. Between 1954 and 1964 the U.S. trained about 250 Colombians in counterinsurgency tactics. In 1964 this number rose to about 300 a year (Gill 2004). The U.S. espoused a National Security Doctrine focused on destroying “internal subversives”-the PCC-backed (Communist Party of Colombia) independent collectives of peasants that had fomented throughout a civil war in Colombia known as La Violencia (Dudley 2006:32). In 1964, with the support U.S. recommendations, aid, and training, the Colombian government launched “Operation Marquetalia” (Hylton 2006, Brittain 2010). Tasked with retaking the Marquetalia region in the Tolima province, and capturing or killing Manuel Marulanda, (an active PCC member who would later play a role in establishing the FARC), government troops launched an attack on the region. However, Colombian troops failed to kill or capture Marulanda, and the region was taken back from government hands months later. Further disenchanted with the Colombian government’s policies, many in the rural populace were emboldened and determined to defy government decrees and violent rule. “Operation Marquetalia” marked a turning point that initiated the creation of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, or the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Brittain 2010, Hylton 2006).
The FARC was founded on a Marxist-Leninist ideology which they claimed was designed to protect the interests of the rural peasantry (Brittain 2010). When founded, they were a defensive organization that did not yet employ offensive tactics or participate in the drug trade. It was not until 1982, at the seventh conference of the guerilla movement, that the FARC officially ratified the use of offensive tactics, though in practice they had been engaging in offensive attacks before the strategy was made official (Brittain 2010). Over time the FARC’s strategies devolved and preyed on the population they claimed to protect. In order to fund their campaign the FARC engaged in aggressive kidnapping and ransoming tactics, extortion of wealthy land owners, taxing drug traffickers, and though they still deny it, trafficking drugs themselves (Clemencia-Ramirez 2011, Brittain 2010, Dudley 2006, Gill 2004, Tate 2007). Today, they engage their old ideology, referencing concern for marginalized groups throughout Colombia in order to legitimize violence and terror tactics.

To combat the FARC, paramilitary groups began to coalesce throughout the 1980s as private militias hired by wealthy land owners to protect them from extortion. These right-winged militias united in 1997 to form the umbrella paramilitary organization Autodefenas Unidas de Colombia (United Self Defense Forces of Colombia) and came to be some of the deadliest actors in the conflict (Clemencia-Ramirez 2006, Brittain 2010, Dudley 2006, Gill 2004).

The formation of two of the prominent players in Colombian conflict, the FARC and paramilitaries was influenced by United States recommendations. Clearly, United States economic policy and military recommendations shifted the course of the conflict from the
beginning. By relying on counterinsurgency strategy and a militarized approach, the Colombian government further disenfranchised the already marginalized populace and created more internal discord that would feed violence in the future. However, the United States continued to justify its intervention in Colombia by using “communism” as a buzz word and feeding off of the unease and uncertainty it produced in civil society (Gill 2004, Hylton 2006, Brittain 2010). By relying on such political posturing, the United States was able to sugar-coat the real reasoning behind its interference in Colombian affairs- the desire for more political and economic resources a stable ally in Latin America could deliver (Gill 2004).
CHAPTER 3:

THE DEHUMANIZATION OF THE ENEMY AND A COUNTERINSURGENCY MILITARY

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." - William Shakespeare

Throughout the 1970’s state repression continued to intensify, and by the early 1980’s continued repression delegitimized state authority and created an atmosphere in which left wing “insurgencies” thrived (Hylton 2006). The 1980’s was greeted with a boom in the drug trade, and stemming the flow of cocaine from Colombia to the United States became the main focus of the state’s relations (Hylton 2006, Dudley 2007, Brittain 2010). However, “the more the government opted for a military response, the more justified the armed revolutionary response became” (Dudley 2006:25).

The 1980’s saw an explosion of debt in Latin America, and an intensification of drug violence in Colombia (Gill 2004). Cold war readiness prompted a modification in military formation and a discursive shift from thinking about militarization in terms of war and peace to a national security state surrounded by imminent threats (Lutz 2001). “Militaries shifted from institutions mobilized periodically by the temporary conscription of civilians to permanent forces with vastly expanded opportunities for lifetime employment and professional status” (Gill 2004:91). However, as discursively labeled
“insurgent” groups continued to flourish under regimes of state repression and restricted or non-existent social services and political expression, threats to state security were less and less externally located. While increased drug profits led to corruption amidst the ranks of those tasked with upholding morality and order, a cycle of greed-fueled impunity flourished (Tate 2007). The United States continued to tighten its grip on Colombian and Latin American affairs in order to preserve a Latin American ally and their economic interests in the area. As the guiding hand of United States omnipotence continued to meddle in Latin America, “imperial networks of power and privilege developed” between the United States and Latin American militaries. These relationships shaped mutual understandings about the meanings behind “national security” (Gill 2004:93). To Colombian soldiers, the United States was associated with wealth, freedom, privilege, and upward mobility (Gill 2004). Ties to such a powerful country engendered the feeling of a symbiotic relationship. Colombia was granted United States resources and military training and might while the United States had garnered another ally rich with economic potential. The reality, however, was much less symbiotic than parasitic.

As the United States welcomed another nation into its vast imperialist empire, it fed off of the country’s feeling of weakness, its perceived need for support, while simultaneously reproducing the social and material conditions that maintained the exploitative power relations both within Colombia and between Colombia and the United States. The counterinsurgency military policy the United States trumpeted successfully aided the nation’s attempt to maintain the status quo. By throwing resources at tactics of violence and psychological warfare that undergirded the current order, the United States
refused to address deeper structural issues that could have wrought a greater change to the Colombian state (Hylton 2006, Gill 2004, Vargas 1999, Brittain 2010).

**Out Goes the State, in Comes the Guerillas: The Failure of the State and the Dehumanization of the Enemy**

In 1978, with the election of President Turbay, a new four year reign of state of siege powers enveloped Colombia (Hylton 2006). Turbay implemented a national security statute which gave extra power to the military to fight left wing guerillas under state of siege authority. Like the former Alliance for Progress and Plan Lazo, these draconian measures reinforced state supremacy through military territory consolidation rather than a mutual partnership with civil society designed to meet the needs of the many (Hylton 2006, Gill 2004). In many communities guerilla groups assumed the position of an acting state (Brittain 2010). Affected by few lucrative financial prospects and left with little state aid provided in the form of healthcare, education, or judicial interference, peasants become trapped in a cycle of poverty. Sociologist James Brittain argued that the “guerillas are responding to the state’s failure in mitigating rural conflicts and are filling a hegemonic void left by the state” (Brittain, 2010). The militarized focus of the state, influenced by United States recommendations, had left a void within Colombian society. The preposition of counterinsurgency recommendations was that by providing “security” to the population “development” would be soon to follow (Gill 2004). However, though the State provided military personnel to rural areas, it did not offer the basic social services like healthcare and education that encourage sustainable development. Guerillas
stepped in to fill the social void left by the state provoking an even greater militarized reaction.

Turbay’s security initiatives crushed popular movements organized by students, peasants, and the marginalized populace. His unyielding use of force drove fomenters into the arms of the guerilla and stripped authority away from state power (Dudley 2006). As Turbay’s security state continued to weaken state legitimacy, Colombian citizens opted for a new Presidential choice. In 1982 President Bentacur was elected on a platform of a “democratic opening for peace” (Dudley 2006:18). His was the first government effort to create peace with the rebels. After President Turbay’s draconian security state, Bentacur initiated an alternative approach. He “named social inequality as the culprit of the maladies spawned by the guerillas, and insisted on executive, rather than legislative, supervision of ceasefire negotiations”….however “the international contexts discouraged a negotiated political solution to Colombia’s military conflict” (Dudley 2006: 22). Despite Bentacur’s desire for a shift in strategy, the United States continued to push for a military solution. This push was aided and abetted by actors within the government who discursively codified the guerilla as something that could only be defeated militarily.

In 1984 US Ambassador Lewis Tambs coined the term “narco-guerilla”, thus delineating the guerillas as criminal rather than political (Hylton 2006). By assigning the FARC a politicized heading, Lewis Tambs brought into existence an enemy of the United States. The oversimplification contained within the name elides the humanistic side of FARC members. The name acts as a signifier, a building block for a litany of negative
connotations that will be tacked on (Sassure 1972). As such, it ferments the process of dehumanization replete with “depersonalizations and compartmentalization of moral reasoning” (Montville 2001: 102). The FARC had been reified, and it is much easier to kill a “thing” than a person.

According to Nevitt Sanford and Craig Comstock (1971) dehumanization “protects the individual [or individuals] from the guilt and shame he would otherwise feel from primitive or antisocial attitudes, impulses, and actions that he directs-or allows others to direct-toward those he manages to perceive in these categories: if they are subhumans they have not yet reached full human status on the evolutionary ladder and, therefore do not merit being treated as humans; if they are bad humans, their maltreatment is justified since their defects in human qualities are their own fault” (Montville 2001: 102). Thus, by dehumanizing the enemy, political and military actors within the State pave the path for the public to accept killing it. If the FARC is subhuman then it deserves what it has coming- military assault and death.

As the conflict has progressed, the FARC has been re-reified repetitively, beginning from their inception as “communist guerillas” to their current day title as “terrorists”, (which the United States has a penchant for using post 9/11 to delineate its enemies). However, the United States is not alone in its dehumanizing othering. “Throughout history dehumanization and its resultant brutality have been predictable and ‘normal’ as tribes and nations set out to conquer or confront stresses in their lives,” from the Nazi’s dehumanization of Jews in World War II to Palestinians and Israelis othering of one another (Montville 104). Surely the FARC, too have dehumanized state agents and
paramilitaries under the umbrella category of “enemy”. Yet, whether real or crafted, the
discursive enemy does exist, just as “anthropologist Howard Stein maintains that
‘enemies are neither ‘merely’ projections, nor are they ‘merely’ real’. They are both”
(Volkan 1997:107). Dehumanizing the enemy makes them easier to kill. By painting the
FARC as the enemy the state seeks to bolster its claims to statehood by identifying an
“other” non-state actor, just as the FARC seeks to strengthen its group identity by
demonizing Colombian and United States elites and capitalist policies.

Yet through the reification of others, complexities of humanity and the
political/economic situation are lost. For example, when the FARC was first codified as a
“narco-guerilla” they “set the rules for market transactions, but could not directly
supervise the production of cocaine and secure distribution networks abroad”. Far from
“narco-guerillas”, the FARC simply used drug profits to fund their continued campaign.
It acted as a “statelet” (Hylton 2006: 87).

The discursive shift from “insurgent” to “narco-guerilla” “came during a period in
which, following Ronald Reagan’s visit to Bogota in 1982, the ‘war on drugs’ became the
principle theme of US-Colombia diplomacy” (Hylton 2006:70). Reagan declared drug-
trafficking a threat to national security and “set the stage for the expansion of the ‘war on
drugs’ in the 1990s” (Tate 2004). This war included a compilation of counterinsurgency
strategies and the aerial fumigation of illicit crops. Progress was measured by the number
of search and seizures, arrests, dead, and confiscated product (Gill 2004). The abject
social conditions that influenced many to grow coca instead of other farm products- for
which there is no market- was ignored and alternative development programs received
little to no attention. The guerillas were simplified into a military problem that could be shot, killed, and eradicated as a political threat through military means.

**Peace Talks Through the 1980s and 1990s: The Militarized Normal of Policy**

Throughout the 80’s and 90’s the United States increasingly relied on counterinsurgency tactics. The Reagan administration had a penchant for using Special Forces (SF) troops to covertly squash down any ideological threats abroad through a series of “foreign internal defense” missions (Simons 1999). Unlike common action movies that paint Special Forces troops in shoot-em-up high speed action sequences, the majority of SF missions involve training foreign troops or foreign guerilla groups to ensure the successful maintenance or replacement of a foreign regime (Simons 1999). Essentially they are tasked with securing United States interests by aligning military might behind the regime the United States wants to have power. Unfortunately the interests of the United States often do not align with the citizens in those foreign countries, and the United States has been responsible for the mass slaughter of innocent nay-sayers deemed “insurgents” on its quest for imperial power in nations such as Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and to a lesser extent Colombia (Simons 1997, Kinzer and Schlesinger 1999). A Lt. Coronel was telling quoted in the counter-counterinsurgency manual stating:

“There will be no peace…The de facto role of the US armed forces will be to keep the world safe for our economy and to open our cultural assault. To these ends, we will do a fair amount of killing. We are building an information based military to do that killing” (Network of Concerned Anthropologists (Gill 2004:31) 2009: iv).
According to the Center for Defense Information, from 1975 to 1998 alone, United States troops were sent on sixty-six official engagements (Lutz 2001: 179). The new counterinsurgency focused military of the United States increasingly saw external and internal differences as military threats to be squashed rather than social issues to be soothed. Colombia was only one of many nations to experience the wrath of United States sanctioned violence.

Under the militarized normal that the United States operates, enemies are seen as military threats, not ideological ones. The weapons “insurgents” possess are seen as the greatest threat, not the people behind them. Catherine Lutz (2001) argues that the United States and its citizens are operating under what C. Wright Mills (1956) calls “a military definition of things”, in which the actions of the nation-state are justified in terms of the militarized protection of the homeland and its interests. I contend that the militarized normal that has seeped into American society and its imperialist allies has eroded the conception that enemies can be neutralized through attention paid to their ideological concerns rather than their fetishized weapons (Lutz 2001, Bickford 2013). This assertion became evident throughout the 1980’s and 1990’s as the United States continued to pressure Colombian officials to continue a military campaign against the guerillas.

The 1980’s: Paramilitaries, the UP, and the Growth of the FARC

However, despite external pressure from the United States to continue a militarized campaign, in 1984, the FARC and government signed the Uribe agreement, arranging a path to peace (Hylton 2006). The FARC agreed to forbid kidnapping, blackmail, terrorism, and slowly relinquish their weapons in exchange for participation in electoral
politics. The FARC created a political party known as the Patriotic Union (Dudley 2005). With change threatening the status quo, those with something to lose began to organize and coalesce into one of the most deadly forces throughout the conflict, paramilitaries.

The first modern-day paramilitary group was formed by drug traffickers and went by the name of Muerte a Secuestradores (Death to Kidnappers) (Brittain 2010, Dudley 2007). Paramilitaries took up arms to protect themselves from guerilla extortion and win the hearts and minds of the peasantry. Originally hired by large land owners to protect their interests, small right-wing militias united to form the umbrella paramilitary organization Autodefenas Unidas de Colombia in 1997 (United Self Defense Forces of Colombia) (Brittain 2010). The majority of their funding was derived from drug trafficking. As Patriotic Union popularity soared, so too did death threats and murders of party members. The M-19 guerilla group also suffered massive losses as they tried to mobilize a political party (Dudley 2006). Between 1984 and 1988 UP popularity soared and FARC doubled in size (Dudley 2006). However, the UP’s association with the FARC eroded their credibility and made members target practice for right wing paramilitaries. Negotiations continued under President Barco, alongside a mass political genocide of all who threatened the status quo (Dudley 2005). Though public perception of the FARC shifted as they began to increasingly engage in criminal activities, FARC and FARC supporters viewed the annihilation of UP and M-19 political participants as justification for a continued militarized campaign. By 2000 the FARC troops had amassed over 20,000 soldiers and their presence was known in a plethora of communities around the country (Brittain 2010, Dudley 2006, Hylton 2006).
The Andean Initiative and the Drug Trade

As the 1980’s and 1990’s progressed both the guerillas and paramilitaries drew strength from the profits they acquired through the drug trade (Dudley 2006). A rise in exploitative neoliberal economic policies intensified internal repression, marginalization, and discord. The conflict continued to devolve with paramilitaries acting as proxy counterinsurgency fighters for the Colombian and United States militaries. In 1989 the United States enacted the Andean Initiative- “a $2.2 billion economic and military aid program” designed to combat the cocaine trade (Gill 2004:164). However as Lesley Gill succinctly stated:

“The principal victims were the peasant coca growers. Coca was the only crop that could be marketed in regions without stable roads, and it provided families with a modest living, as profits from its cultivation were sustained by the illegal drug traffic. By orienting agricultural production to the most lucrative export crops, peasants were doing exactly what neoliberalism prescribed. Yet states criminalized coca cultivation, and they required peasants to adopt a series of unviable alternatives or suffer the consequences. Coca cultivation exposed peasants to increasing levels of state violence that were unleashed by governments less concerned with addressing the social and economic difficulties of peasant families battered by free-market restructuring than with reducing the area planted in coca by almost any means necessary” (Gill 2004:165).

However, countries who did not comply with the strict United States policy were subject to loose annual certification and congruently United States aid (Tate 2004). As it had in the past with Latin American nations, the United States was purchasing compliance and allies. The economic, symbolic, and hegemonic benefit Andean countries received from being “in bed” with the United States, to them, outweighed the alternative.

Influenced by the United States’ focus on military intervention, Colombia’s economic and military policies increased financial hardships for many already impoverished
people. Military strategies focused on treating the symptoms of existing social and economic problems, but did not provide preventative care that addressed the social and economic problems themselves. “The ‘war on drugs’ and neoliberal economic policies contributed to the phenomenal growth of the drug economy, as coca farms became the solution to the protracted crisis in the countryside” (Hylton 2006: 85). Instead of fixing the drug problem, militarized policies created a cyclical process in which coca fields were planted because they were the only opportunity for families to make a decent living wage, then fields were fumigated, and families were displaced and impoverished once more. The underlying problem- poverty- was not addressed. The “military normal” that had invaded United States and, subsequently Colombian policies, assumed that the problem of drugs could be eradicated through military action rather than social reforms (Lutz 2001). However, this assumption was incorrect and only intensified the problem it was trying to solve.

**The 1990s and a Rise in Counterinsurgency**

As the United States and Colombia continued to see the problems faced in Colombia through a military lens, counterinsurgency efforts increased. Congruently, guerilla efforts to dismantle the Colombian government’s authority also intensified. In the 1990s, over 93% of “all areas of recent colonization had a guerilla presence” (Brittain 2010). “Drug money corrupted politicians and… new guerrilla tactics at the local level were developed to secure economic revenues for the war, while the political project of the guerrillas became increasingly less clear. Most troubling, the civilian population was increasingly targeted for attack by paramilitary groups and for kidnapping and extortion by the
guerrillas” (Vargas, 1999). Actors in the conflict (guerillas, paramilitaries, and government) became increasingly involved in the drug trade and corrupted by a lust for money. Tellingly quoted from a Colombian taxicab driver: “if a peasant owned two cows, the state took one, the guerilla the other. If there was a third, it went to the paramilitaries!” (Taussig 2003:58). The counterinsurgency war widened and death tolls mounted.

Following the paramilitary subverted efforts by the Bentacur administration, Gaviria’s government engaged in peace talks with the FARC between 1990 and 1994 (Hylton 2006). The talk’s agenda focused predominately on the FARC’s disarmament and reincorporation into civil society. However, the FARC desired a more extensive discussion that incorporated social reforms and talks ended without success. Throughout the talks with the Gaviria administration counterinsurgency tactics were still in use. A 1994 CIA Intelligence Memorandum released under the Freedom of Information Act, verified that “Gaviria’s [Colombian President from 1990-1994] hardline counterinsurgency approach has sent a clear law-and-order message and has reassured U.S. firms interested in continued investment in Colombia”. Rather than highlighting concerns with human rights and ‘collateral damage’, the report denotes that the guerillas “continued ability to hit military and economic targets in remote regions and to sow fear through assassinations and bombings in the cities undermines popular confidence in the government and makes foreign investors wary”.

The report further emphasizes the need for the Gaviria administration to increase troops in oil producing regions so as to ensure investor confidence. It states that “…if a
new administration focuses on extended talks with the guerillas and fails to increase military presence in the oil regions, investors are likely to hold back on new ventures. The report goes on to state that “To exploit public fears, The President [Gaviria] has been pressing the theme that the guerillas have discarded their ideology and evolved into common criminals and hired assassins.” What is mentioned about human rights is connoted in an air of ‘collateral damage’. The report states that:

“Colombian security forces continue to employ death squad tactics in their counterinsurgency campaign. The military has a history of assassinating left-wing civilians in guerrilla areas, cooperating with narcotics-related paramilitary groups in attacks against suspected guerrilla sympathizers, and killing captured combatants…Despite improvements in the investment climate as a result of Gaviria’s counterinsurgency program, Colombia’s difficulty in correcting human rights abuses is likely to continue as long as the hardline strategy is in force. The increase in Army operations in rural guerrilla strongholds has escalated violence, and the Army so far has treated Gaviria’s new human rights guidelines as merely pro formas. The Army traditionally has not taken guerilla prisoners, and several recent brutal insurgent ambushes have not encouraged sensitivity to human rights practices. Moreover, most of the fighting takes place in remote regions, where it is difficult for the government to exercise oversight.” (CIA 1994:4)

U.S. intel was exceptionally concerned with the economic implications of the conflict, and despite reports of Colombian troop’s “death squad tactics” and human rights abuses, intelligence officials still recommended an increase of troops in oil producing areas.

Counterinsurgency strategy continued to intensify in Colombia throughout the 21st century. Despite the government’s recognition of the toll such “hardliner” counterinsurgency tactics have, in 2000 under Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and United States President Bill Clinton, the military allies launched another hardline counterinsurgency strategy under the guise of Plan Colombia (Hylton 2006, Gill 2004, Brittain 2010, Clemencia Ramirez 2011). The blatant erasure of historical precedent
demonstrates both countries preoccupation with economic and territorial interests rather than social and human concerns.

**Peace Under President Pastrana?**

After the Gaviria and Samper administrations enacted a “crackdown” on guerillas groups and drug traffickers, policy underwent a slight change. In 1998 Conservative Andres Pastrana defeated Liberal Horacio Serpa to attain the Colombian Presidency (Hylton 2006). Unlike many of his predecessor’s Pastrana recognized the political nature of the guerillas and began preliminary peace talks with the FARC (Hylton 2006). As a concession to the FARC, Pastrana withdrew Colombian troops from some 16,200 hectares in the Caguan municipality in southern Colombia. Though the FARC and government agreed on a twelve point agenda for the talks, Pastrana’s inability to control burgeoning paramilitary and military forces encouraged the FARC to withdrawal from talks at the end of 1999 (Hylton 2006, Brittain 2010). The FARC then proceeded to utilize the demilitarized zone as a base for military training and a holding site for kidnap victims (Hylton 2006).

Even as the talks began, the United States increased military aid to Colombia. In 1998 the United States officially shifted the bulk of its aid from the Colombian national police to the military (Tate 2004). “Defense secretary William Cohen and Colombian Defense minister Rodrigo Llordea agreed to the first Colombian counter-narcotics battalion” and by 1999 Colombia was the third largest recipient of United States aid behind Israel and Egypt (Tate 2004). Under Plan Colombia Counter- Drug Brigade (*Brigada Contra el Narcotráfico*) was created in the Colombian Army. The intended goal of this brigade was
to make coca growing territories safe enough for coca eradication (Isacson 2012). The United States clearly saw military might as the tool to peace, and believed that by forcefully demoralizing the enemy, they would have no other choice but to relinquish arms and concede state control. The United States was discomforted by the continued actions of the FARC, and of their growing ranks. Peace, or ideological victory, was not seen as a valid possibility that could be achieved through talks when the enemy’s numbers were so large. “Since 1999, growing US support for the Colombian army has been viewed as endorsement of a military ‘solution’ to the conflict” (Tate 2004:2). War had become the normal. Under the military lens through which United States and Colombia members of congress and military leader saw, when limited military efforts were not succeeding, the only other option was to expand and intensify counterinsurgency tactics.

Colombian officials conceded to these demands to continue to receive United States military aid and funding (Gill 2004, Hylton 2006). However, I argue, that Colombia also conceded to these demands because they too operated under a “military normal” that assumed all threats could be eliminated militarily. This assumption was aided by the dehumanizing discourse used to describe the FARC. The FARC’s ideological basis was easier to ignore when they were not referred to as people. Unlike people, animals do not have ideologies, and to some, animals are easier to kill. The combination of failed peace talks and a militarized normal buffeted by dehumanizing political discourse led to a 21st century counterinsurgency military that enacted a massive and deadly campaign against the FARC.
“I’d say these people are just going to continue doing whatever they want. That’s the system that’s in place. That’s what everybody wants” (Dudley 2006:186.)

Despite the failure of previous military initiatives, the Colombian state was determined to reassert itself into the daily lives of all Colombians and regain the territory lost from the FARC. I contend that the United States’ and Colombia’s focus on military action under the haze of the “militarized normal” demonstrates that members of congress and the military in the United States and Colombia predominantly believe that “statehood” first manifests itself through physical control of territory rather than a mutual contract of social services between civilians and state actors. In July 2000 under Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and United States President Bill Clinton, the largest military assault to date denoted Plan Colombia was signed into law at the headquarters of imperialism—Washington DC. Plan Colombia was largely the brain-child of Colombian President Pastrana. Under Pastrana’s formula, Plan Colombia “was to emphasize economic development, nutrition, and education. It was the Clinton administration that militarized Plan Colombia and made it into a security doctrine rather than an economic development formula” (Smith 2010:2). Sold in the United States as a plan to stem cocaine
production and trafficking into the states, overtime Plan Colombia morphed into a concerted effort to defeat the guerilla.

Uribe was the first President since 1982 who did not first try to negotiate with the guerillas. Instead he opted directly for an intensive militarized campaign. Plan Colombia was designated to staunch the growing narcotics industry and regain the 40 percent of national territory occupied by insurgent forces, not State sanctioned troops (Hylton 2006). However, both the United States and Colombian government’s conflation of drug barons with guerillas and guerillas with civilians permitted a military assault that primarily targeted guerillas and the Colombian populace. In fact, retired General Barry McCaffrey, former head of the United States South Command “urged US legislators to embrace the war on ‘narco-terrorism’- the idea being that since the FARC functioned like a cartel, to fight the ‘narco-terrorist’ FARC was to fight ‘the war on drugs’” (Hylton 2006:101). Current Secretary of State John Kerry also argued that “the line between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency is not at all clear in Colombia” but that this cannot stop the “extension of aid” to the Colombia military (Hylton 2006:102, Isacson 2004). Such discourse resonates with United States policy to date: anyone is an enemy if they do no support United States interests, and too often, no matter the cost, the neutralization of the enemy is key.

Plan Colombia significantly strengthened Colombia’s armed forces and counterinsurgency strategy. However, the guerillas still persisted. Furthermore, by strengthening the Colombian military, the military’s proxy fighters, paramilitaries, also gained force. Counterinsurgency thrived under Uribe’s “democratic security”. To aid his
battle for democratic security, Uribe drastically increased the size of the Colombia military and national police. “Colombia’s armed forces roughly doubled, and their budget nearly tripled, between 1998 and 2010” (WOLA 2013). Harkening back to the US Special Warfare report recommended to Colombia in the early 1960’s, Uribe’s democratic security cultivated a repertoire of civilian informants. Uribe himself stated that “in democratic societies there is no citizen neutrality in the face of crime. There is no distinction between citizens and police” (Hylton 2006:105). Such a statement underscores a primary tactic of counterinsurgency- incorporating civilians into the war machine through fear, coercion, and reward. As Steven Dudley aptly states:

“In reality, U.S. money [for Plan Colombia] was part of a modern-day rehash of the ‘bullets and beans’ concept that the Kennedy administration had tried in the early 1960s. Colombia’s old Plan Lazo was replaced by Plan Colombia, an ambitious social, economic, and military strategy. But as it was during the Kennedy years, Colombia was more ‘bullets’ than ‘beans’. Most of the U.S. money for Plan Colombia was going toward helicopter-gunships, training, and intelligence equipment, although Washington put a cap on the number of U.S. soldiers who could be deployed at four hundred. The money made Colombia the third largest recipient of U.S. aid in the world, behind only Egypt and Israel. Colombia, it seemed, had become a priority in Washington, and the Communist guerrillas had once again become the U.S. government’s principal concern” (2006:170).

The FARC, which had been emboldened by the slaughter of the UP, had taken to a campaign of intensive extortion, kidnapping, and attacks on government and military outposts. They were an easy target at which to finger the blame for the still lucrative cocaine industry that was dumping socioeconomic problems on the doorstep of the United States. What was a war against drugs transformed into a war against insurgents, and in the wake of 9/11 was codified under the banner heading of a “war against terror” (Hylton 2006,
Brittain 2010). In 2003, Plan Patriota was implemented to complement Plan Colombia and drive the FARC out of the Caqueta, Meta, Guaviare, and Vaupes departments in Southern Colombia with the help of 100 million a year in United States aid (Dudley 2006:116). Though Plan Patriota saw initial success, as noted in a 2013 WOLA report:

“There came with no plan to bring the rest of the Colombian government into these zones in order actually to govern them. ‘[E]ach military victory requires the COLAR [Colombian Army] to occupy more territory, leading it to convert mobile brigades into units of fixed area control and reducing offensive capacity,’ noted a 2006 cable from the U.S. embassy.”

The military was the only state presence, and what military security provided was undone by a lack of social and economic infrastructure.

The Paramilitary Threat

As FARC violence continued to escalate throughout the 1990’s and early 2000’s, so too did paramilitary violence. Once homegrown militias directed by large land owners and cattle ranchers, paramilitary groups had formally united in 1997 and like the FARC were acting as the state in areas with little or no state presence. Originally hired to protect the wealthy from the FARC’s vacuna, or boleto, extortion money that one Colombian stated was used “to combat petty crime and create equality by fighting the rich and the exploiters”, paramilitaries devolved into violent actors often associated with the interests of wealthy businessmen and corporations (Medina 1990:177). Noted by Taussig in Law in a Lawless Land (2003), Alfred Rangel indicates that “The notorious frequency with which the paras situate themselves wherever drug dealers are active- or where there are mega-projects such as hydroelectric dams or new highways pushing up
land values- indicates that behind paramilitarism there is something other than an altruistic interest in counterinsurgency” (Rangel 1998:189). Paramilitaries were- and in some places still are- interested in profiting from the drug trade and implementing their own brand of social justice and order (Taussig 2003).

I often think of paramilitaries as the antithesis of the FARC, an organization devoid of ideological principles whose intent is largely money and power. However, this conceptualization simplifies both groups into something they are not, masking their many similarities which include terror tactics, profits derived from the drug trade, and the general dislike and distrust felt for them by most of the Colombian populace. Furthermore, as the paramilitaries began to strengthen, they, like the FARC developed a strong presence in rural areas. Paramilitaries claimed ungoverned territories and expelled the FARC from guerilla controlled regions. Often paramilitaries would announce their impending entrance into a town by posting a list of targets, ranging from what they deemed as social delinquents to human rights activists and FARC supporters (Taussig 2003). In response, many would flee and paramilitaries could enter communities with much less contestation. They would then “set up shop” acting as sovereign ruler over the territory and enacting their own laws and justice system. These territories came to be known as “parastates” and slowly emerged as a threat to the legitimacy of the Colombian state (Hristov 2010). Ironically, however, the success of the formation of parastates was based largely on the paramilitary’s use of terror tactics and both implicit and complicit aid from the Colombian military.
Though paramilitaries enacted a campaign of terror—through death threats, disappearances, and murders—the fear that became pervasive in the communities they threatened often allowed them to enter territory with little push-back from residents (Taussig 2003). Fear coupled with silence became a weapon that all sides of the conflict benefitted from as opposition movements grew weaker (Taussig 2003, Gill 2013, Tate 2007). Yet, despite the fear they bred, some residents welcomed the presence of the paramilitaries, believing that they could at least restore order to their town (Taussig 2003). For example, Lesley Gill demonstrates how in the working-class town of Barrancabermeja paramilitaries became the only option for social order. As paramilitaries continued to break-down other social institutions through which citizens could air grievances “residents were obliged to turn to the paramilitaries to resolve problems, and inadvertently legitimized the violent social order that the latter [paramilitaries] sought to create” (Gill 2013: 29). Increasingly, citizens turned to structures of economic and social violence in order to subsist and many people, both within and outside of Colombia, began to believe that violence was the only solution to the country’s ills (Gill 2013, Taussig 2003, Chomsky 2008, Grandin 2010).

As violence and terror from all actors took hold in Colombia throughout the 80’s and 90’s various regions in the country were affected differently. The resulting economic, political, and social polarization created a national landscape in which violence was the primary medium of communication. While the United States played a significant role in swaying the direction of the conversation, the language of communication—violence—had been developing throughout years of political and economic unrest. Congruent with
Margaret Mead’s argument that “if a people have an idea of going to war and the idea that war is the way in which certain situations, defined within their society, are to be handled, they will sometimes go to war,” many within Colombia came to believe that violence or all-out war, was the only way to handle the deteriorating situation of the state (1990:3, Grandin 2010, Chomsky 2008).

Plan Colombia echoed this violent sentiment. Though paramilitaries were placed on the United States terrorist list in 1997, knowledge of the collusion between Colombian and paramilitary forces was well known (Brittain 2010). As such, this plan gave a “tacit nod to military-paramilitary collaboration, and opened the door to 1.3 billion in ‘aid’, 80 per cent of it to military and police” (Hylton 2006:103). The United States government was indirectly aiding terrorist actors. Tellingly stated by the AUC’s leader Carlos Castano: “The U.S. policy towards Colombia is good… I’ve always admired the U.S. as a nation that has worked as the police of the world, that keeps an eye out so nothing happens to it” (Dudley 2006:201).

However, by 2002 according to the 2002 State department report “Colombian Terrorists Arrested in Cocaine-for-Weapons Deal,” the AUC was responsible for 70% of human rights abuses in Colombia. As they continued to occupy more territory and reign as the acting sovereign, they, like the FARC, grew into a threat to the Colombian state. What was an extension of the state’s counterinsurgency and intelligence arm had become a threat to the perceived power of the official government. In response, instead of enacting a militarized campaign against the paramilitaries, perhaps because they were in
collusion with the military, the Colombian government under President Alvaro Uribe engaged in peace talks.

The formal disbandment of the Autodefenas Unidas de Colombia (United Self Defense Forces of Colombia) was between 2003 and 2006 (Brittain 2010). This demobilization process is now held as an example by human rights groups and Colombian citizens of what NOT to do with if future demobilization agreements arise with the guerillas. As the paramilitaries continued to thrive under the Uribe administration the Colombian government underwent plans to hastily relegalize the state. Uribe himself had long been a supporter of paramilitary groups during his reign as governor of Antioquia (1995-1997). CONVIVIR or a “nationalized ‘civilian military force’ was sanctioned under the Presidency’s of Gaviria and Samper from 1990 to 1998. As governor, Uribe was as adamant supporter of the CONVIVIR despite warnings that these groups could develop into paramilitary organizations. The state went on to facilitate and fund the formation of armed networks” (in Brittian 2010: 117, Garcia Pena Jaramillo 2007, Giraldo 1996, Hylton 2006, Rochlin 2003, Aviles 2006, Leech 2002). As James Brittain summarizes in Revolutionary Social Change in Colombia

“The stated reason for the CONVIVIR was to ‘allow armed civilians to establish rural security cooperatives for the purpose of providing the Colombian military with intelligence information’ (Leech 2002, Richani 2002). It became clear that this was not their true intention. According to Luis Alberto Restrepo M ‘they in fact served as armed protection for different personages and for different regions of the country and, in many cases, they exercised their own brand of justice” (2010:117).
The purpose formation of the CONVIVIRS was reminiscent of the early reports given to Colombia by the United States that recommended Colombia form a civilian intelligence network. Due to numerous implications of human rights abuses and civilian massacres, CONVIVIRS were outlawed in 1999 (Brittain 2010). However, they simply passed the torch on to the emerging paramilitary the AUC. As such, the state attempted to delegitimize these violent actors by making them illegal but by “relinquishing its ‘formal’ involvement with the CONVIVIR and not ensuring its disintegration, the state facilitated aggressions against suspected guerilla supporters via civil society” (Brittain 2010: 118, Brittain 2006). As both governor of Antioquia and President of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe played a significant role in the legitimization and delegitimation process of paramilitaries. In fact “based on his endorsement of the civilian military networks, Uribe was later heralded by some as a ‘paramilitary president’” (Brittain 2010:117, Murillo and Avirama 2004, Livingstone 2003). Even today, Uribe continues to field allegations of his potential paramilitary involvement and funding (Parkinson: Insight Crime 2013). However, the power of the paramilitaries, aided by funds from drug trafficking and fear-inspired silence, soon fell out of the state’s control (Taussig 2003, Dudley 2010, Hylton 2006). In an attempt to ameliorate the damage done to perceptions of the state’s authority, government officials decided to act. However, Uribe’s historical and vocal support of paramilitary entities and groups, as well as the collaboration occurring between many congress people and paramilitaries, laid the foundation for a fraudulent demobilization process under his administration.
From 2003 to 2006 a swath of paramilitaries demobilized. Under the Justice and Peace (law 975) law members of the AUC were offered impunity and shortened jail sentences for laying down arms. The Justice and Peace law aimed for “the demobilization of up to 20,000 members of the rightwing paramilitary group the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), while granting its leaders broad concessions. Under the legislation, AUC commanders will receive sentences as short as 22 months and at most eight years, with the possibility of serving the time on private farms instead of in state-run prisons. A ‘double jeopardy’ provision also makes extradition to the United States unlikely. In addition, the legislation does not require AUC commanders to dismantle the group’s organizational infrastructure, nor to give up any profits they have made from drug trafficking, kidnappings or other criminal activities” (Goffman 2005:50).

In short, the Justice and Peace law was fraught with impunity, but its tenants did not go uncontested. “At the passing of Law 975, Colombian congresswoman Gina Maria Parody d’Echeona criticized the legislation as it paradoxically gave ‘benefits to people who have committed the worst crimes’” (Brittain 2010:145, Goffman 2005:50).

However, impunity was only one problem of the demobilization process. The general director of Colombia’s national police, Jorge Daniel Castro, estimated that by the end of the demobilization process about 31,000 paramilitaries had relinquished their weapons (Brittain 2010). However, it has largely been argued by human rights groups, academics, and politicians alike that the process was fraudulent and that formal disbandment ceremonies were filled with stand-ins rather than actual members of the AUC (InSight Crime 2013). Many, who had supposedly demobilized, remobilized into new paramilitary groups under different names, including the Aguilas Negras, Rastrojos, and Los Urabenos (Human Rights Watch 2013, Brittain 2010, InSight Crime 2013,
USOC 2013). In 2011 Colombia’s Prosecutor General opened an investigation into the alleged false demobilization of about 850 paramilitaries (Glade 2011).

Despite the illegitimacy of the demobilization process and the tide of impunity that accompanied it, Uribe considered the negotiations a success and paramilitaries were deemed non-existent by the Uribe administration. In 2007 President Uribe declared to the United Nations “today there is no paramilitarism. There are guerrillas and drug traffickers.” (Hansen 2008: Council on Foreign Relations). The Colombian government did not recognize the new groups that had formed from demobilized paramilitary members as paramilitary organizations. Instead they encased them under the heading of BACRIM also known as criminal bands (Hristov 2010, Brittain 2010).

By encompassing reformed paramilitary groups under the heading of common criminals the Colombian government elided the historical formation and terror tactics of the “neo-paramilitaries”. In doing so, the state nullified a potential and perceived threat to its power and hegemony. Though the Colombian state has never had a Weberian monopoly on violence, many of its actions throughout Plan Colombia-and before and after- have been attempts to achieve this monopoly. By engaging in “negotiations” with the paramilitaries the Colombian government sought to legitimize the state as the primary violent actors. This “legitimation of the illegitimate” was done by delegitimizing its counterpart, the paramilitaries, that were not overtly state sanctioned (Abrams 2006).

It is possible that the paramilitary demobilization process occurred with little paramilitary push-back because of the close relationship between the paramilitaries and the Colombian military, congress members, and business people. In fact, in 2012 about
700 e-mails were recovered from the computer of former AUC commander Vicente Castano. Among these e-mails were details eluding to the collusion between Colombian congress people and paramilitary members to speed the ratification of the Justice and Peace Law. “‘We have to push through the Constitutional Court ruling regarding Law 975. Surely it will come with substantial modifications to the original text approved by Congress. This has to be done in haste,’” an email read (Barrett 2012). In the end, though the state’s military arm still does not have a monopoly on violence, it was able to submit another claim to legitimate its power and authority over the Colombian people, and the paramilitaries were able to continue their nefarious activities.

**FARCländia: A Threat to the State**

Under Uribe and Bush’s leadership, Colombia’s United States trained military embarked on a campaign of territory consolidation. In February 2002, the state enacted an immediate campaign to retake San Vicente Caguan, often referred to as FARCländia (Hylton 2006). During peace talks, this area had been run like a FARC statelet, with FARC rules and regulations, curfews and patrols. Ironically, the crime rate in this area was lower than in much of the state controlled territory (Brittain 2010). The state’s cessation of this land to the FARC combined with the failure of peace talks and FARC’s relative success running the territory posed a direct threat to state authority, hegemony, and power. Though violent and authoritative, much like the actual state, FARC offered another option of sovereignty. This option endangered not just Colombian state control, but also United States imperialist interests. The FARC’s success would mean the loss of a United States ally in Latin America that provided economic and resource wealth, as well
as the proper support and dissemination of American ideology and hegemony. The United States had purchased a Colombian compatriot at the end of War World II and was not willing to risk its ally by paying any credence to the socioeconomic and political concerns of armed guerillas (Gill 2004). Following suit, and the interests of the United States that were congealed into the interests of the Colombian state, Uribe too did not recognize the guerillas as political opponents (Hylton 2006). If not political, then the FARC and their supporters, (and often even those they spoke to with or without consent), were seemingly not of the state, but a parasitic enemy leaching off of state territory and resources. As such, they had no voice. They were subcitizens, subhumans, a fungus rotting the foundation of the nation that could be destroyed with simple eradication tactics. As such:

“Washington welcomed Pastrana’s readiness to escalate the conflict with the guerrillas. The day after the offensive began, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher announced that the United States ‘understands and supports’ Pastrana’s decision to end the peace talks – a statement echoed the following day by Secretary of State Colin Powell. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) director Asa Hutchinson characterized the Colombian military offensive as ‘a benefit in that region,’ citing the potential gains for counterdrug efforts (Gedda 2002, Rice 2002, Evans 2002).

With this new push of aid to Colombia, the Bush administration appealed to lift restrictions against the use of aid in operations against guerillas. Previously, such aid was earmarked solely for drug operations, though, in practice it was already being used in operations against insurgent forces (Richter 2002). However, not all United States officials were supportive of such a dramatic shift in aid. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) – after whom the Leahy Amendment, which hypothetically prevents United States funds
from going to Colombian troops who commit human rights abuses, was named in 1997-
paid heed to the dramatic change stating that: “For the first time, the Administration is
proposing to cross the line from counter-narcotics to counter-insurgency. Now, as a
matter of our national policy, this is no longer about stopping drugs but about fighting the
guerrillas” (Evans 2002).

Though the United States government did not overtly recognize that they were
employing counterinsurgent tactics against the guerillas until the early 2000’s, in
practice, such strategies had been in use since the 1960’s when the United States sent its
first team of advisors over to assess the conflict. The Colombian army had long not
distinguished between guerillas and drug traffickers, and as the United States slowly
shifted funding from the Colombian National Police to military forces, more aid was
being directed at the eradication of the guerillas. Plan Colombia only intensified these
tactics and thus prompted a change in discursive justification from the government. Both
the United States and Colombian states were trying to buttress state boundaries and
secure the proper conditions for the reproduction of western hegemony and power.

The Boundaries of the State

Throughout the conflict, both the physical boundaries of the state and the social
boundaries of state control have been in flux. As the Colombian military tried to regain
control of lost state territory, they also impacted the boundaries that delineate guerilla,
paramilitary, and civilians. Just as Horowitz (1985) concludes that the boundaries in
ethnic conflict are “reciprocal rather than unidirectional”, so too are the boundaries that
define the state, paramilitaries, civilians, and the FARC’s finite role in the conflict (74). I
argue that the counterinsurgency strategies employed by the state and paramilitaries eroded the line between the state and civil society, guerilla combatant and guerilla supporter, and friend and foe.

The 1990’s were marked with a tide of murders, death, and violence, and with the voices of civilians, NGO’s, and transnational organizations volleying together to sway the direction of the war (Taussig 2003, Clemencia Ramirez 2011). Human rights discourse began to flood into the ranks of power. Ruling hegemony about the reasoning behind the war was upset, forced to modify. And so the “war on drugs” was modified to a “war on guerillas” and post 9/11 to a “war on terror”. New reasoning was found to justify continued intervention in Colombia. For example:

“On 10 September 2003, General James Hill, head of US Southern Command, linked Middle Eastern and Latin American terrorists, concluding ‘Not surprisingly, Islamic radical groups and narco-terrorists in Colombia all practice the same business methods’” (Tate 2004).

Such a statement justifies continued United States aid in Colombia by simplifying the enemy into one that is easily recognizable and on the minds of United States citizens at the time, terrorists. All evil is melded together into a single entity of anti-United States sentiment that endangers national sovereignty and United States citizens. Practically, military tactics changed little, they were just expanded. Change came in the discourse used to justify the tactics, the terror instilled in the population by the ruling government, and a penchant for trying to discern cultural data to defeat the minds of a populace. The war on terror created just as much terror as it supposedly repressed.
Counterinsurgency and the State: A Monopoly on Violence?

“Violence” and “collateral damage” are seen as acceptable losses by each side, the state, the guerillas, and the paramilitaries. However, the discursive justification for the pitfalls of war varies. Plan Colombia cost the lives and displacement of many civilians, a toll that cannot be properly justified or weighed with statistical figures. However, many, including Former United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Former President George W. Bush have labeled it as a model of successful counterinsurgent warfare (Hylton 2006:127). Thomas Marks, an adjunct Professor at the US Joint Special Operations University contended at the beginning of Plan Colombia that:

“Faced with this profound threat to its viability as an insurgent movement, FARC must respond. As a consequence, there should be no doubt that "violence" in Colombia will continue indefinitely. Yet the state should continue to do precisely what it is already doing: meeting the insurgency in a "correct" and "sustainable" manner. The Uribe approach is certainly correct in the way it conceptualizes the problem and seeks to respond to it. The approach is also sustainable, in its present form, because it demands no unacceptable investments of human or material resources-or of will. It will face adjustments if the U.S. contribution ends, but it is unlikely this will happen for some time” (2011:1).

Thomas acknowledges and supports the fact that ‘violence’ will continue indefinitely in Colombia, yet still contends that the Uribe approach is the correct tactic. His statement raises many questions. Why is violence in quotation marks? Does he not view the slaughter and displacement of innocent civilians as violent? Does he see it as nothing more than rebellious criminal activity to be easily squashed? Clearly he agrees with the conceptualization of the FARC as non-political actors that ought to be militarily squashed with a focus on the acquisition of their territory, but he fails to consider the human costs,
the civilian sacrifices, and the socio-economic consequences. Plan Colombia’s impact was vaster than simplistic words like “acceptable” and “correct” can denote.

However, after years of waging a discursive and psychological battle against the FARC, enacted on the general civilian population, a turn to increased government violence was hailed as the natural course of action by some military leaders and civilians alike. Discourse and strategy recommended by the United States and employed by Colombia troops exemplified a state apparatus bent on exercising and maintaining its authority through the creation and clear delineation of good guys and bad guys. Counterinsurgency strategy is driven by such delineations, as Bowman notes when speaking of state violence in general:

“wherein some agents of the state appropriate to themselves the power to perform violence against outsiders as well as against ‘deviant’ forces within the society the state controls while others constrain and direct the non-deviant society, so that it serves to perpetuate and reproduce the order characteristic of the state… ‘constructive’ violence comes to be seen as pedagogy and conformity while repressive state violence appears as the legitimate expression of the ‘will of the people’… [part of] the state’s responsibility to protect the citizenry it represents from the illegitimate violence of the people’s enemies (external enemies of the state, criminal, revolutionaries, mad persons etc) (Bowman 2001:31 in Peacock et al 2007:174).

Though Uribe and Bush’s Plan Colombia utilized many of the same features of violence as the FARC- placing civilians in the throes of war as informants, fighters, and funders through guerilla extortion -or state extortion by the implementation of Uribe’s war tax- the state’s violence was seen as justified, an acceptable tool to “protect the will of the people,” while violence by all other actors was painted as illegitimate. In conventional wars, unlike the war in Colombia, forces may occupy a foreign territory with or without
the support of the citizens. Rebellions would be suppressed with violence, and civilian-soldier interaction is confined to basic enforcement of the new regime’s law. Forces do not rely on citizen support because they are already a legitimate opposition (Arjona 2009). They possess the resources and support to conduct a full blown offensive. However, in today’s world of unconventional and counterinsurgency warfare half the battle is proving yourself as a legitimate ruler or opponent. Counterinsurgency wars operate under the pretense that the goal is not to conquer and subjugate a population, but to integrate a new ruling regime that aids in the development of the land and people- this requires the support of the population. “For armed groups to be able to preserve sovereignty over their territories and keep expanding, they need to build their organizational capacity and weaken that of the enemy. Weapons, ammunitions, access to networks, intelligence, political visibility, new recruits, and training are essential to these ends” (Arjona, 2009:15). These resources- political, ideological, and material- are garnered from the civilian population by both insurgent and counterinsurgent forces.

Similar to conventional warfare, counterinsurgency warfare is a battle over the control of assets. The difference between conventional warfare and counterinsurgency warfare lies primarily in their discursive justification, and the overtness of tactics. Counterinsurgency is still bent on conquering and subjugating a populace, but ideally with tactics that allow for less use of lethal force, and greater support from the populace enabling easier long term occupation. It strives to facilitate a relationship with the community that will incite the least amount of rebellion and instill the maximum amount of order. I contend that in the context of the conflict in Colombia, counterinsurgency was
used by the state so that it could re-exclaim its power over both territory and people. Because the FARC claimed to represent the interests of people, it was in the interests of both the Colombian and United States governments to win back the trust of the people. However, counterinsurgency is governance through the armed component of the state, and has vast socio-economic repercussions.
CHAPTER 5:
TRAINING COUNTERINSURGENCY

“The problem is that you cannot prove yourself against someone who is much weaker than yourself. They are in a lose/lose situation. If you are strong and fighting the weak, then if you kill your opponent then you are a scoundrel... if you let him kill you, then you are an idiot. So here is a dilemma which others have suffered before us, and for which as far as I can see there is simply no escape.” (Crevald 2007:52)

Militarization has been so normalized as a driving societal force that ideologies are masked or denigrated as secondary to military concerns. The reigning belief is that by killing the enemy and inundating the rest of the population with hegemonic ideology through policy or psychological operations, the ideological concerns that drove the enemy will die with their bodies. Counterinsurgency strategy also demonstrates this notion. Aside from it being military action rather than socioeconomic action, the tactics employed in counterinsurgency highlight a disregard for ideology and the socioeconomic conditions that drive it. This may sound obscure being that counterinsurgency strategies are employed to win the “hearts of minds” of the people, but in counterinsurgency, the people to be won are dehumanized pawns in a war game moved about, ignored, or discarded when not useful to the mission. Furthermore, under counterinsurgency operations, civic action programs and social services are only employed to subdue the
population to acquiesce to the military’s demands or control. Feldman notes that counterinsurgency

“demands a large role from civilian organizations to help in everything from building roads to establishing sanitation facilities. It also draws on a range of expertise from civil engineering to anthropology to public administration to economic development to population control measures to advanced technological surveillance and warfare. The intended synergistic effect is to integrate occupied populations into a US-led global political economy and to terminate insurgents” (Feldman/Network of Concerned Anthropologists: 2009:78).

Under the guise of sugar-coated propaganda and ethnocentric assumptions of United States superiority, counterinsurgency can seem like an innocent strategy designed to lead the poor uninformed “other” into an era of United States enlightenment, happiness, and success. It is the guiding hand of Uncle Sam reaching down to pull you out of poverty, fear, and disorganized violence with, of course, an American-based respect for your different beliefs and culture. The U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual states that:

“U.S. forces should show respect for local religions and traditions. Soldiers and Marines should willingly accept many aspects of the local and national culture, including food (if sanitation standards permit). U.S. forces must make clear that they do not intend to undermine or change local religion or traditions. However, Soldiers and Marines have a mission to reduce the effects of dysfunctional social practices that affect the ability to conduct effective security operations. U.S. trainers and advisors must have enough awareness to identify and stop inappropriate behavior, or at least, report it to the multinational and HN chains of command” (2007: 219).

There are multiple problems evident within this one snippet from the Manual. For example, who gets to decide what “dysfunctional social practices” or “inappropriate behavior” are? An understanding of cultural mores, the reasons and functions behind them takes anthropologists years to master, and even then they are only partial truths of
an ever fluctuating culture and society (Clifford 1986, Abu-Lughod 1991). Untrained and ethnocentrically socialized soldiers are ill-equipped to assess which practices are inappropriate or not, and the long-term effects of adjusting them. Moreso, the platitude that the United States can assess which practices are dysfunctional or proper assumes that the United States is culturally superior. This assumption is based on orientalist and colonial assumptions of the unchanging and unruly “other” contrasted with the civilized and mature United States (Said 1978, Feldman/ Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009). Counterinsurgency isn’t about “winning the hearts and minds” of a populace, it is about occupying a foreign country to meet the needs of the United States, winning territory, intel, access to resources, and a firmer stronghold in the land (Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009).

However, during training soldiers are only taught about the positives of counterinsurgency strategy. They are inundated with information that does not provide a holistic picture of the impacts counterinsurgency can have on a population. Instead the focus is on the mission, identifying the enemy, and neutralizing the threat. The enemy’s tactics are highlighted as harmful, while the tactics and people used to confront them are illuminated as more mature and altruistic. This training impacts how soldiers perceive the conflict, themselves, and security (Gill 2004).

Though counterinsurgency is advertised as a culturally educated type of warfare, it is a military strategy with a primary emphasis on security. Aside from basic theoretical, ethical, and moral concerns, the above segment from the Manual places its main concerns on security issues. It does not advise soldiers to adjust practices (not that they should be
adjusting anyways) that are seen as immoral or harmful. Only those that are impeding the United States ability to secure the area should be changed. What then comes of those individuals who are participating in activities deemed inappropriate? Surely some of these practices will fall within the bounds of accepted “criminal” activity, but what of those instances in which it does not? What happens when individuals choose for moral, ethical, or other personal reasons not to do as the occupying forces demand? We must remember that an insurgent, based on the 1962 definition assigned by the state, is anyone who goes against state interests (Lutz 2001). In Colombia, this definition coalesced civilians with guerillas, political activists with terrorists, and human rights advocates with the enemy. As such, all were deemed targets and many were threatened, murdered, and terrorized by United States trained Colombian security forces and paramilitaries under the direct command or complicit collusion of the military.

**Digging Deeper into the Counterinsurgency Manual: Training Colombian Troops**

The United States employs a variety of mechanisms to train Colombian troops. Special Forces Mobile Training Teams, generally comprised of a team of 12 soldiers are deployed to Colombian bases to train troops and aid in tactical planning (Simons 1999). The United States also provides schooling vouchers funded by the International Military Education and Training program (IMET) that subsidize Colombian soldiers and enable them to train at United States military institutions such as the Western Hemisphere Institute of Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), formerly known as the School of
Americas. The IMET program began in 1976 to “subsidize the training of foreign soldiers” (Gill 2004:78). Overtime, Colombia has sent more soldiers to WHINSEC than any other Latin American Country (Gill: 2004: 142). Training foreign troops provides a direct method to instruct foreign regimes into a similar way of thinking.

Though overall aid to Colombia has decreased, in an attempt to maintain its hegemonic indoctrination, the United States has increased funding for training, in spite of repeated reports of human rights abuses committed by United States trained soldiers. Despite a provision applied to military training monies (including the IMET program) in 1998 designating that funds could not be sent to troops in violation of human rights, Colombia has consistently been allocated training money (Gill 2004: 252). As Gill notes, according to Human Rights Watch “it is often impossible to know the names of individual security force members who are alleged to have committed violations” (2001: 81). However, a 2011 Government Accountability report highlighted the need for human rights training to be emphasized in programs that received IMET funding.

Despite repeated public relations attempts to recreate WHINSEC’s image, including a name change, human rights discourse and concerns are largely discarded as leftist rants and propaganda. Though some soldiers do recognize the ethical concerns in which counterinsurgency strategy is steeped, many more write-off moral considerations as the cost of doing war (Gill 2004).
Table A: IMET Funding (US Department of State Chart-In Millions 2010)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>1,646</td>
<td>1,421</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>1,695</td>
<td>1,695</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As such, soldier’s socialization into militarized and essentialized thinking often puts them at odds with human rights activists (Gill 2004). Soldiers are told who the enemy is, how to defeat them, and not to question their training. The so called human rights abuses they are blamed for are seen as a product of doing their duty. Yet, many believe that average peasants or human rights activists are associating with guerillas, holding their nations back, and are the true enemy (Gill: 2004). Counterinsurgency strategy is thus used as a military “development” model to civilize perceived “backwards” populations, and in recent years culture has been viewed as the missing tool that can aid the military in their civilizing mission. David Price argues that the 2008 Special Forces Advisor Guide “conceptualizes culture as nothing more than a measurable set of values that can be understood, compensated for, and therefore not only navigated but engineered to one’s advantage; in the context of Special Forces interests in these matters, this includes the tasks of empire”. Price demonstrates that the Manual is based off of Florence Kluckhohn’s and Fred Strodbeck’s largely disproved Values Orientation Model which categorizes culture based on 5 subsets of information:

1. Human Nature (evil, good, mixed)
2. Relationships of people to nature (e.g. subjugation-to-nature, harmony-with-nature, or mastery-over-nature)
3. Temporal focus (past, present, or future orientation)
4. Human activities (being, becoming, doing)
5. Social Relations between “men” (hierarchal, collateral, individual) (Price 2011: 143).

Based off of these criterion, the Guide concludes that “Central and South American cultures have human natures that are ‘unchangeable’ and are a ‘mixture of good and evil’ with ‘authoritarian social relationships’” (Price 2011:145). These conclusions are wrought with problems. If the United States truly believes that South American’s are “unchangeable”, what is the purpose of interfering in the region? Price argues that these “stereotypes are not selected because they educate, but because they tell the military what it already institutionally knows” (Price 2011:146). Furthermore, “the attraction of such ‘rank-order principles’ models to the regimented structure of bureaucratized military culture is palpable, and it is easy to see why such an approach to cultural complexities would be structurally attractive to a culture so imbued with engineering” (Price 2011: 144). Essentially, a simplistic model of culture based on five categories seems more manageable and easier to change, and this is congruent with the military’s interests and operation structure.
Figure E: South and Central America Value Chart from *Special Forces Advisor Guide*

Human nature:
- Mixture of good and evil
- Unchangeable

Relationship of man to nature:
- Man is the master of nature

Sense of time:
- Present-oriented

Activity:
- Growing
- Stress on development

Social relationships:
- Authoritarian
- Slightly group-oriented
Figure F: Basic American Values Chart from *Special Forces Advisor Guide*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation for the Future</th>
<th>Originality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness</td>
<td>Physical Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wariness</td>
<td>Aggressiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frugality</td>
<td>Persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely Action</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicality</td>
<td>Sportsmanship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuality</td>
<td>Physical Appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diligence</td>
<td>Hard Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrift</td>
<td>Privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Presentation of Self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The *Guide* also explicates basic concepts such as religion, values, and learned behavior. However, its analysis is simplistic and ethnocentric. For example when discussing values the *Guide* states:

“Many cultures believe that their internal values are universal—that everybody knows right from wrong as they perceive it. Figure 2-8 depicts 20 values or qualities that are admired by most Americans. Those who do not accept these values often are viewed as deluded, perverse, or evil. The SF advisor must strive to avoid this mindset in order to be successful. Advisors often must work with counterparts with different or opposing values. Any time spent trying to change a counterpart’s basic values is time wasted; furthermore, such efforts are likely to create lasting resentment.” (2008:19)

The *Guide* then provides a chart detailing American values including cleanliness, practicality, and sportsmanship, among others. The *Guide* is steeped in ethnocentric assumptions of American superiority. The *Guide* counters the notion that values are universal while simultaneously denoting that American values are better than others. The notion throughout the *Guide* is that such superiority naturally imbues the United States and the United States military with the moral high ground. This supports Bickford’s argument in *Fallen Elites* that “soldiers must be convinced of the naturalness of the state they are sworn to defend, of the impossibility or desirability of a different type of economic or political organization; the two must blend together seamlessly” (2011: 39).

Soldier’s training, much like young school children’s, is carefully crafted to instill notions of the United States’ natural superiority. However, in order to do so, training manuals are forced to rely on has to use an outdated and refuted notions of culture.

Like the *Counterinsurgency Manual, the Special Forces Advisor Guide* seeks authority and justification by using academic theories and concepts to support what the
military wants to know. The use of these manuals throughout training effects military personnel’s conception of both their homeland and the country where they are deployed. As United States Special Forces troops are training Colombian forces these manuals might instill presumptions that their trainees are “unchangeable” as well as peasants, and other criminal or terrorists actors they are fighting. Whether directly taught or indirectly hinted, these assumptions filter down to trainees. Perhaps it is these assumptions that have led to such high civilian body counts within the Colombian conflict. If people can’t be changed then they can at least be killed.

Furthermore, following Daniel Rothbarth’s theory of conflict, the comparison of United States purity and moral rectitude against other culture’s subhuman and undeveloped tendencies can make conflict seem inevitable (2008). Though I find it unlikely that ethnocentric assumptions alone cause conflict- a threat must also be perceived as violent and imminent, not just backwards and uncivilized-the history of United States interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam, and Colombia demonstrate that ethnocentrism does indeed perpetuate conflict.

The Civility of Soldiers

In Catherine Lutz and Matthew Gutmann’s “Breaking Ranks” (2010), when speaking about his experience in Iraq, U.S. war veteran Garett Reppenhagan aptly stated that “It doesn’t take a type of person to be out there and to commit atrocities. It’s just circumstance. So, I don’t know, I always think back to that and I’m amazed. The ease at which an individual person can have control and power over another individual human” (103). In Colombia, the circumstance needs to change. While increased training on
human rights certainly does not hurt, ultimately their fewer infractions will be committed if the combat situation itself is changed.

The doctrine contained within the Guide and Manual shows both how the United States sees itself as a “civil” force of good, and how it perceives others incivility. Soldiers are viewed as the face of civility and are indoctrinated in a manner that supports notions of superiority and others inferiority.

A single soldier’s view is but one lens tinged with his training, indoctrination, and personal experiences. Yet, when these soldiers are placed on the ground, in a local rural community with uniforms emblazoned with the Colombian flag and weapons often bearing a United States logo they represent much more than the amalgamation of a single individual’s beliefs and experiences. They become a symbol of the state, and with counterinsurgency operations they are a mechanism of “state-building”, whether through violence or civil action programs (Bickford 2011).

The presence of state troops on the ground seeks to buffer the state’s claim to a monopoly on violence. Soldiers act as a reminder of the state’s authority, power, and hegemony. As representatives of and symbols of the state’s ideology and monopoly on violence, soldiers are the “congealed ideal of propriety and violence” of the state (Bickford 2011: 21). Located at the epicenter of state indoctrination and policing, perceptions of soldiers are intertwined with conceptions of the state. They act as metasymbols, reinforcing the panopticism of the state as both a mechanism of force and security. However, the creation of soldiers is contingent upon the construction of historical memory and the political economy of the present (Bickford 2011, Foucault
2006). In order to support democratic conceptions of statehood, soldiers need to be seen as the helping hand of the state, not a repressive apparatus tasked with maintaining the status quo (Bickford 2011). Counterinsurgency operations incorporate “civic action programs”, not out good intention, but to sway the support of the population, to illustrate soldiers as altruistic heroes.

The training soldiers receive purposefully ensures that soldiers too see themselves as doing good work. This makes soldiers more willing to complete their assigned tasks (Gill 2004). However, it also leaves troops ignorant of the socio-economic ramifications of their job. Throughout Plan Colombia the social and economic costs of war were vast.
“For the first six months I didn’t sleep at night, I was too on edge. I had panic attacks. I spent three months pressing towels to my ears at night to try to stop hearing what I thought were gunshots. I thought I was going crazy.” (Gonzalez/Brodzinsky and Schoening 2012:45)

According to State Department documentation, the some of the original goals of Plan Colombia were to “improve governing capacity and respect human rights” by “creating and training special units of prosecutors and judicial police to investigate human rights cases, and training Colombian public defenders and judges” (State Department, Human Rights Report 2010). Other goals included expanding counter narcotics operations into Southern Colombia, “increased interdiction, assistance to the Colombian national police”, and investment in alternative development programs. Despite seemingly well-rounded goals, the democratic Security initiative “focused almost exclusively on the presence of part of the state: the part that wears a uniform. Military, and usually police, capabilities were strengthened throughout Colombia’s territory, but those of the rest of the government – road-builders, land-titlers, healthcare workers, teachers, judges – lagged behind” (Isacson 2010:12). Congruent with past operations, human rights issues and alternative development goals were primarily ignored. Assistance has rarely been withheld based on Leahy Amendment human rights violations,
in fact, a provision was added to the amendment stating that human rights restrictions could be waived for “national security” reasons (Gill:2004:160).

Lauded by many for successful reductions of coca crops and FARC numbers, Plan Colombia has been suggested as model for US intervention throughout Latin America. However, as argued by Adam Isacson:

“looked at more closely… Colombia’s security gains are partial, possibly reversible, and weighed down by ‘collateral damage.’ They have carried a great cost in lives and damage. Progress on security has been stagnating, and even reversing. Scandals show that the government carrying out these security policies has harmed human rights and democratic institutions. Progress against illegal drug supplies has been disappointing. And wealth is being concentrated in ever fewer hands.” (Isacson 2010:1)

The cost of life and displacement has been staggering as a result of the conflict and counterinsurgency strategies. The Colombian Commission of Jurists estimated that 14,028 civilians were killed or disappeared between mid-2002 and mid-2008. And 20,915 soldiers, paramilitaries, and guerilla recruits were killed between 2002 and the end of March 2010 (Center for International Policy 2010). But numbers can’t show the individual lives lost, the stories of terror, of family, of struggle, loss, and survival. Those realities can’t be summed up in a five digit number or discarded as the collateral damage of war. People’s lives, opinions, hopes and futures have been irreparably shaped by Plan Colombia and its tactics, and it is these experiences that coalesce now into a new Colombia, one in which peace could be on the horizon but the meaning of peace itself is weary, unspecified, and contested.
In 1999, before the enactment of Plan Colombia, 55% of the population was below the poverty line. Though this number has decreased to 34.1% in 2013, after five years of a significant drawback in United States aid, according to a United Nations Development Report (2011), Colombia still needs “drastic rural reform if the country wants to further develop, decrease its high inequality rate and diminish the country’s violence.” Counterinsurgency tactics have only increased the displacement that helps facilitate such despotic land dispersal.

However, scholars have argued that civilian displacement is not just a result of counterinsurgency strategy, but a tactic itself (Gill 2013, Hylton 2006). Displacement limits civilian’s abilities to form long-term bonds of solidarity and movements against the status quo. Maintaining a situation of perpetual unrest and insecurity creates a day to day life that focuses on survival and the present. Individuals do not have the time, energy, or relationships to organize or maintain sustainable social movements (Gill 2013).

Paramilitaries, government troops, and guerillas alike have all purposefully or accidentally inflicted the deep social repercussions of displacement.

**The Cost of United States Interests**

In spite of these harmful consequences, Isacson argues that Plan Colombia did bring significant security improvements and reductions to both FARC and ELN numbers, attracting more foreign and economic investments (2010:2). Such investments were tied to United States economic interests. For example, in 2003 a $94 million counterinsurgency aid package was established to protect the “Caño Limón oil pipeline used by Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum” (Gill: 2004:241). United States forces
were sent to Arauca, Colombia as part of the package deal to train counterinsurgency troops that aid in the protection of the pipeline, as multinational oil pipelines are often the recipient of guerilla attacks. These pipelines symbolically represent a collusion of ideals that guerilla groups are oppose, including United States imperialism, capitalist exploitation, and the internationalization of a local resource. A pipeline attack is equivalent to an ideological battle. They are physically destroying the symbolic manifestation of United States hegemony and power. To maintain its hegemonic claims on ideological and imperialist authority, which is often associated with military and technological prowess, the United States responds by sending aid and troops to train Colombian forces to protect their economic and ideological investment. By training Colombian troops, and not just sending aid, the United States directly indoctrinates Colombian soldiers in United States ideology, and is able to entrance them with access to more advanced technology, upward mobility, and capitalist hedonism (Gill 2004).

**Scandal**

However, while arrangements like that at the Caño Limón pipeline have increased security forces in Colombia and protected United States interests, they have been accompanied by grave human rights costs. “While Colombia has made security gains, its democratic institutions and respect for human rights have been under siege” (Isacson 2010:3). Just between 2002 and 2008 14,000 civilian non-combatants were killed in “conflict-related violence” associated with the Colombia military, not including conflicts between the FARC and the ELN (Isacson 2013). Success was measured in “body counts”
and resulted in a “false positives” scandal in which the Colombian military, funded and trained by United States dollars and soldiers, was accused of killing innocent civilians and dressing them in FARC fatigues to claim victories (Isacson 2010, Gill 2013). “Colombia’s defense ministry set up a system of informal incentives for soldiers-special recognitions, leave time, promotions-and formal incentives for civilian informants to reward body counts” (Isacson 2010:5). Colombian troops also collaborated with paramilitaries as they enacted what they called “social cleansings,” killing and displacing any they deemed socially unclean, including drug dealers, users, homosexuals, the homeless, suspected guerilla supporters etc (Taussig 2003). Troops participated directly in massacres or failed to respond until the massacre was over (Brodzinsky & Schoening 2012). In 2013 Human Rights Watch’s World Report found that Colombia’s Attorney General’s office “was investigating 1,727 cases of extrajudicial killings involving almost 3,000 victims, allegedly carried out by state agents between 2004 and 2008” (Norby & Fitzpatrick 2013:2). Amnesty International Reports that Colombia’s “Office of the Attorney General has recorded more than 4,000 cases of extrajudicial executions reportedly carried out by security forces” (2013). As of August 2012, 539 army members including 77 officers had been convicted- fewer than 10 percent of the cases. Unfortunately additional cases were also reported in 2011 and 2012 (Norby & Fitzpatrick 2013).

In addition, to the scandals in the army and the fraudulent paramilitary demobilization process, testimony from “former” paramilitary members has resulted in the investigation of Colombian politicians for their ties to paramilitary members. While
only fifty-five members of congress have been convicted, there may have been more than
11,000 officials, politicians, and businesspeople involved (Norby & Fitzpatrick 2013).

Furthermore, in 2009 it was revealed that Colombia’s Administrative Department of Security or DAS, a “longtime U.S. aid recipient”, participated in gross power abuses including “a campaign of wiretaps and surveillance against dozens of human rights defenders, independent journalists, opposition politicians and even Supreme Court justices, especially those investigating ‘parapolitics,’” the term that connotes the collusion of politicians and military officials with paramilitaries (Isacson 2010: 7). In 2010, DAS documents surfaced detailing a “political warfare” strategy employed against political opponents. The stratagem included a smear campaign of allegations about ties to guerillas, and corruption and other lies denigrating opponent’s credibility. Targets included political adversaries, journalists and human rights workers. All the while, the United States had contributed funds to this department and troops in collusion with the paramilitaries (Isacson 2010).

**Fumigation- Nation**

Under Plan Colombia the United States also expanded its aerial fumigation strategy for coca crop eradication in Colombia. Low-flying plans spraying *glyphosate, or Roundup* have not just killed coca crops but also polluted water sources, and killed other viable cash crops such as yucca, banana, corn and rice fields. The pollution of food and water sources as well as the degradation of land often leads to community displacement (Brittain 2010). Furthermore “extensive anecdotal evidence from sprayed communities continues to raise legitimate concerns as to the chemical’s safety. Reports from Afro-
Colombian community groups indicate widespread skin, respiratory, and gastrointestinal issues on locals after fumigations take place. Worst affected are pregnant women, the elderly and children” (Sanchez-Garzoli & Schaffer 2012:1). Fumigation tends to affect already vulnerable populations such as indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities who suffer high displacement rates due to violence from the conflict.

Though fumigation ripped at the social, economic, and physical health of communities, it did not have a significant impact on coca crop growth. “Aerial fumigation fell by 39% from 2006-2009” possibly because in 2007 the government increased “civilian government’s on-the-ground presence in coca-growing zones” and decreased aerial fumigation (Isacson: 2010: 8). In fact, it has been argued that “fumigation is part of the problem…” as this technique “prompts more rather than less replanting, thereby contributing to coca’s spread into new areas of the country” (WOLA: 2008:1). Hylton argues that the use of “chemical warfare” i.e. fumigation, can be viewed as a larger part of a holistic counterinsurgency strategy:

“Fumigation is a mode… whose hidden objective is to get settlers and peasants out of their regions to prevent them from helping…the subversion…It serves the same function as paramilitary terror, to drain the water from the sea” (Hylton 2006:119).

The United States’ and Colombia’s repeated attempts to ignore the facts about the failure and destruction of fumigation strategy, supports Hylton’s argument.

Overall, Plan Colombia and continued United States intervention in Colombia has supported human rights abuses, corruption, and has done little to address socio-economic problems from the bottom-up by focusing on social programs and economic aid. The militarized approach has increased the marginalization of already vulnerable groups and
has left gaps in the program’s success, with little effect on coca cultivation and the availability of cocaine. Instead Plan Colombia was just another mechanism for the United States to wield its influence over Colombia. Military tactics were used to consolidate the territory and people under the control of the Colombian state, and as proxy, under the control of the United States. In the *Counter-Counterinsurgency Manual* Bickford states that “counterinsurgency is just another way of saying occupation, but in a way designed to mask the occupation” (2009:138). Though United States troops are not operating directly in counterinsurgency missions in Colombia, through Plan Colombia and subsequent economic policies, the United States is trying to occupy Colombia through an indoctrination of westernized sentiment, policy, and belief. It is less of a physical occupation- though United States troops do have a presence in Colombian bases-and more of an ideological and economic occupation through training, dogma, and aid that is contingent on United States interests. The United States is trying to orchestrate and maintain a Latin American ally, but its methodology of doing so is fraught with humanitarian, ethical, and moral implications.

Furthermore, the amount of corruption and scandal that ensued throughout Plan Colombia demonstrates that those officials who coalesce to form the apparatus of the state in Colombia are not the sole bearers of power in the nation. Though Plan Colombia was an attempt for the state to assert a power claim as the sole sovereign of Colombia, the inability of the state to administer the policy undercut its claim, and provided further evidence that the Colombian state monopolizes neither power nor violence. Instead, power is split between paramilitaries, corporations, business people, guerrillas, regional
governments, human rights groups, and of course, Colombian civilians. As such, a
heavily militarized policy designed to stamp unified control and power over the nation
faces much push-back and creates unintended consequences resultant of other power
holders exerting their power (Hansen & Stepputat 2006, Safford & Palacios 2002,
Palacios 2006, Richani 2007).

Though opinions of Plan Colombia vary regionally and often based on economic
status, it is evident by the tales of terror, the ongoing dissatisfaction of marginalized
groups within Colombia, and the continued existence of the FARC, that much of the
population does not view the Colombian government as legitimate. However, citizens
may have more favor for some state actors and politicians than in the apparatus as a
whole. This is due to the development of greater human rights oversight within
government structures, the ability for demobilized M-19 guerillas to run for political
office, and the slow incorporation of more liberals into public office through the 1990’s
would term the “right-hand” of the state or the technocratic side, the “left-hand” of the
Colombian state has grown overtime and continues to shape the political climate and
discourse within the nation.

Nonetheless, hailing Uribe’s “democratic security” as a model of
counterinsurgency elides the extensive problems and ‘collateral damage’ of this
militarized approach and of counterinsurgency in general. It ignores the wide-spread
corruption within Uribe’s administration, the United States’ acceptance of such
undemocratic proceedings, and the United States’ imperialistic involvement.
Why then do both Colombia and the United States recognize Plan Colombia as a success? Both states have a different scale of measurement for the winningness of a military operation than human rights activists or Colombian citizens. Following a militarized mindset, success is not based on the democratic application of techniques or following a strict code of ethical and human rights concerns. Success is based on the number of bodies and bodies still in a FARC uniform. As such, the plan did work. FARC’s numbers were cut in half from about 20,000 troops to between 8,000 and 10,000 troops (Brittain 2010). The number of families who were displaced was ghastly, the number of farmers still disenfranchised by the state is staggering, but the number of people donning FARC fatigues was slashed, and so the plan is glorified and exalted as an historical success against an historic enemy, a success and proof of the powers and almighty rectitude of United States imperialism, ideology, and guiding hand.

Perhaps, this is a price of militarization. As guns are fetishized the material and ideological conditions that impel people to hold them are masked, discarded, or ignored (Bickford 2013). Enemies become the weapons and weapons the enemy. The person that holds it is dehumanized into a one-dimensional animal ready to kill, and all is simplified into an “us versus them” scenario. Either the state and capitalism wins or guerillas and communist insanity. There is no democratic moderation in which two competing ideologies can exist in the same political sphere. Under this militarized lens, both the guerilla and the State view one another as a target to be shot, killed, and dominated. Counterinsurgency strategy is designed to make the killing easier by infiltrating hearts and minds of civilians and establishing a proxy army of citizen informants that bolsters
political and economic hegemonic ideology. Yet, in an ironic twist of fate, the proxy army (the paramilitaries) long supported through United States funding wreaked more havoc on innocent civilians than did the guerillas, and following the illusory disbandment process, reorganized into neo-paramilitary groups that continue to thrive off of drug funds and exploit and displace much of the rural populace (InSight Crime 2013, Hristov 2010).
CHAPTER 7: CONSOLIDATING THE STATE

“The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is getting an old one out”

B.H. Liddell

While United States funding to Colombia has steadily declined since 2008, United States political, economic, and military influence remains. Following the “territorial gains” made under Plan Colombia, in 2007 Colombia enacted Plan Nacional de Consolidacion, the National Consolidation Agreement or PNC. According to the United States Embassy website, this

“new strategy, a civilian-led whole-of-government approach, builds upon successful Plan Colombia programs to establish services-including justice, education, housing and health-care, strengthening democracy, and supporting economic development through sustainable growth and trade, the Colombia government seeks to permanently recover Colombia’s historically marginalized rural areas from illegal armed groups and break the cycle of violence” (2013).

The United States supports this initiative through the Colombia Strategic Development Initiative. According to the State Department website, the goals of this initiative include support for the

“Colombian Government's National Consolidation Plan by selectively working in key "consolidation zones,” where drug trafficking, violence, and the lack of government presence have historically converged. The U.S. Government coordinates its efforts in these areas through the Colombia Strategic Development Initiative, an inter-agency, whole-of-government approach to providing U.S.
assistance in eradication and interdiction; capacity building of the military, national police, and prosecutor units; creation of viable options for citizens in the licit economy, particularly in the agricultural sector. Our programs also provide more general support for the implementation of Colombian Government reforms in land restitution; reparations for victims and vulnerable populations; demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants; promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law and protection of vulnerable citizens (such as human rights and labor activists); and addressing global climate change and environmental issues in one of the most ecologically diverse countries in the world.” (2013)

This discursive “whole-of-government” approach sounds attractive, possibly even effective, aside from continual imperialist undertones. The State Department makes it sound as though citizens will be provided with protection, security, and the social services they require. However, the actions of this new plan have been strikingly similar to old initiatives. Furthermore, because of old initiatives, armed troops do not represent security to much of the civilian populace. The Colombian and United States government’s desire to work in key “consolidation zones” sounds like a discursive mask for the implementation of continued counterinsurgency operations and territorial consolidation through the acquisition of the local populace’s support. United States funding to Colombia affirms this interpretation. According to a WOLA estimate the United States gave between $500 million and $1 billion between 2007 and 2012 for Consolidation efforts. Compare this to the $1.3 billion spent in only the first year of Plan Colombia. Though overall aid to Colombia has decreased since 2008, military funding still takes precedent over development and humanitarian concerns.

According to CIP’s Adam Isacson with the National Consolidation Agreement and the Colombian Strategic Development Initiative
“The underlying idea is that Colombia’s historically neglected rural areas will only be taken back from illegal armed groups if the entire government is involved in “recovering” or “consolidating” its presence in these territories. On paper, the strategy begins with military operations and illicit crop eradication, moves into quick-impact social and economic assistance projects to create trust or “buy-in,” followed by food security, permanent income, local capacity and land reform projects, and ends up with the presence of a functioning civilian government and the removal of most military forces” (2010:3).

The “consolidation” strategy aims to integrate marginalized and disenfranchised peripheral areas into the state’s authority to ameliorate the preconditions that exacerbate social unrest. A mirror image of “consolidation” known as “Stability Operations” has been employed in Afghanistan and Iraq by NATO troops in an effort to bring stability to previously ungoverned areas (Isacson 2010). Like basic counterinsurgent strategy, “Consolidation” begins with military occupation. However, unlike counterinsurgency initiatives that are run wholly by the military, consolidation seeks to incorporate other public programs.

In Colombia the implementation of Consolidation strategy is run by the “Colombian Presidency’s National Security Council, the Presidency’s Center for Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI), and Regional Coordination Centers (RCC) in Consolidation zones. The National Security Council serves as the “strategic roof” that gives direction to the whole process. The CCAI is the interagency mechanism centralized in Bogota, which seeks to coordinate the entry of fourteen state institutions, including the military, the judiciary and cabinet departments, into parts of Colombia considered to have been recovered from armed groups’ control. Finally, the RCC are the territorial coordination centers that actually implement the policy and the program on the ground” (Center for
“Consolidation” was supposed to work as a layered process. Ideally, the military would first enter, expel guerillas, and secure the area. From there, basic infrastructure and development initiatives would be implemented and closely monitored by the military for protection, or done by the military themselves. As these projects (which are strikingly familiar to basic counterinsurgency) established more confidence in the state other civilian agencies would enter and slowly build-up a ‘consolidated’ civil area with judicial, health, and a developmental State presence. Security would be passed from military to civilian structures and troops would depart to another zone.

Lessons from Consolidation in the Middle East

By 2004 in the United States, the Bush administration had begun to see the value in Consolidation techniques in the two wars in the Middle East. Under Presidential Directive 444 Bush created a State Department position known as the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization “which sought to institutionalize civilian agencies’ central role in efforts to establish governance in insecure, ungoverned territories… ‘While the office was created in 2004’, notes Johanna Mendelson Forman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, ‘it was not until 2009 that S/CRS [the State Department’s Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization] actually engaged’ in Afghanistan” (Isacson 8,10:2012). The Obama administration saw the benefits, and tried to reengage civilian efforts in the Middle East. However, like the initiative in Colombia, the ideal shift from military to civilian forces that was postulated in the Stability
Operations and Consolidation models did not take place (Isacson 2012). In response “a 2011 Rand Corporation report about the U.S. experience sought to outline some criteria for a civilian takeover, which it called a ‘COIN transition.’ It found four:

- The level of violence between the government and the insurgents has been declining over the previous 12 to 24 months.
- Political, judicial and similar reforms are being pursued.
- The population interacts with and supports the security forces and government representatives and assistance workers.
- The police forces of the government combating the insurgency are taking over responsibility from internal security from indigenous (and any foreign) military forces” (Isacson 11:2012).

All of these criteria highlight security rather than socio-economic concerns and position the military as the primary “state-builders”. In practice due to the slow arrival of other social services, the military has been the prime provider, acting again as the main face of the state. The United States even recognized the failings of Consolidation policy and strove to encourage the Colombian government to increase civilian participation.

“The lag in effective participation of civilian ministries, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, and other actors undermines the PCIM [La Macarena Integrated Consolidation Plan] model of integrated state action,” noted a January 2010 cable. “The current ad hoc inter-institutional process will result in poorly coordinated interventions that lack a long-term, structural impact. (Isacson 11:2012). Though “Consolidation” policy earmarked a shift in Colombian and United States policy in that it recognized that the social and developmental arms of the state must be present to ensure lasting security, its implementation was faulty and it still operated on a militarized premise.
The Failure of Consolidation in Colombia

When run by the small-budgeted CCAI, the department had to endear other governmental units to donate money to Consolidation efforts, often unsuccessfully. Furthermore, corruption continues to preclude the creation of effective judicial and police forces. Largely Consolidation efforts have remained incongruently militarized and unsuccessful (Isacson 2012). Witness For Peace, a non-profit organization whose aim is to educate civilians and policy-makers on human rights situations in Latin America, stated that “Consolidation has shown itself to favor investment in resource extraction and monoculture crop production.” The Washington Office on Latin America voiced similar concerns in a 2012 report “Consolidating ‘Consolidation’” in which they stated that

“Today, while ‘Consolidation’ has brought security improvements and more soldiers and police to a few territories, the governance vacuum remains far from filled. In the Consolidation zones, armed groups remain very active, especially outside of town centers. Soldiers are by far the most commonly seen government representatives, and the civilian parts of the government—such as health services, education, agriculture, road-builders, land-titlers, judges, and prosecutors—are lagging very far behind” (Isacson 3).

Most strikingly, the report noted a lack of “political will” for civilian arms of the state to establish a presence in Consolidation zones. Amid bureaucratic labyrinths, funding constraints, a lack of qualified civilian professionals, little incentive for professionals to go to dangerous areas, and hesitation about the policy’s implementation by military departments and leaders, civilian structures have failed to flourish in consolidation zones. Adam Isacson argues that “civilian agencies can take over from the
armed forces when they are willing—or sufficiently compelled by incentives—to do so” (Isacson 14:2012). Notably the failure of civilian forces to engage in consolidation zones resulted in resounding weaknesses that feed guerillas justification for the conflict. WOLA noted the following:

- “In the absence of judges and prosecutors, human rights violations (which have occurred, but do not appear to have been systematic, in these zones) and official corruption—including alleged ties to armed groups—have gone almost totally uninvestigated and unpunished, negatively affecting the population’s already-high distrust in the state.
- In the absence of economic support services and food security, forced coca eradication has too often left cultivating families with no way to sustain themselves, with resulting re-entry into the drug economy and anger at the state.
- In the absence of Agriculture Ministry and public registry officials, land titling has been extraordinarily slow, inhibiting farmers’ access to credit and feeding fears—which lie at the heart of rural residents’ distrust—that with a greater state presence will come wealthy landowners who will dispossess them of their lands.
- With the absence of the Transportation Ministry, one of the communities’ most strongly expressed demands—for the building of tertiary farm-to-market roads has gone badly unmet (15:2013).

Amongst the program’s struggles, Consolidation is losing support and interest from higher levels of government. Under President Santos (elected in 2010), the Consolidation effort has been diminished, and now only operates in areas where United States funding (under USAID contracts) supplements efforts. Just as “Stability Operations” are being abandoned in Iraq and Afghanistan so too are “Consolidation” efforts in Colombia (Isacson 2010). The new strategy implemented by Colombia’s Defense ministry in 2012 is called Honor Sword or Espada de Honor. This initiative focuses efforts on FARC drug structures and forgoes COIN civil action initiatives (Isacson 2010). Military officials and analysts alike denote this new strategy as counterterrorism rather than counterinsurgency.
Colombia’s shift to less civilian based military operations echoes the United States’. After failed COIN initiatives in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Colombia the Obama administration has seemingly decided that military efforts that incorporate civilian interaction are too costly and ineffective to continue. The 2012 *Defense Strategic Guidance* document notes that “‘U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.’” The document calls for “‘emphasiz[ing] non-military means’” to “‘reduce the demand for significant U.S. force commitments to stability operations,’” but offers no clues as to how to operationalize a handoff to U.S. civilian agencies” (Isacson 20:2012).

Yet, the biggest problem with consolidation, and the state’s conceptualization of “security”, is that to many, a soldier in uniform is not security at all. After years of human rights abuses and a trenchant campaign of corruption, false positive scandals, and collaboration with paramilitaries (a collaboration which still exists today), many in rural communities have little trust in the military (Green 1994). They are not the type of security people want. In fact, often they do not stand for security at all, but insecurity, fear, and a government that refuses listen to their voices. The military’s presence in communities is often limits mobility for the populace and attracts other armed actors, guerillas or paramilitaries. It is a hindrance rather than a help. For many communities security would be removal of all armed actors, and the ability to operate autonomously over their own land, cultures, and lives. Security encompasses economic stability and the power to maintain a dignified livelihood. A military presence in communities impedes or
completely erodes the possibility for such simple desires. Because of this, consolidation will never succeed.

Whether codified under the heading of counterinsurgency or counterterrorism, the United States and Colombia’s militarized strategy of exercising statehood will continue to be unsuccessful until deeper reforms are initiated. The implementation of such reforms through military subsets of the government, as was done with Consolidation strategy, maintains the primacy of a military approach. While security is important for the success of civilian governance and stability, ideas of exactly what “security” is differ, and without addressing the fundamental issues that cause social unrest and resulting violence, a cycle of war and terror ensues.

With counterinsurgency “the military is pictured as advancing from the center on a civilizing mission, conquistadors arriving to set the periphery in order” (Clemencia Ramirez 8: 2011). Socio-economic problems were subsumed are the minds of the government officials by security concerns and the need to recover state sovereignty. In 2010, Uribe’s former Secretary of Defense, Juan Manuel Santos was elected President. After eight years of militarized reign, the Santos administration has sustained an armed platform, but has begun to implement a variety of policies targeting structural concerns. The United States has continued to hail Uribe as Colombia’s savior. John Walters, “a US drug czar during the George W. Bush administration” echoes the sentiment commonly displayed in United States media on Colombia when he says: “The real change was Uribe… We provided a lot of assistance and aid to a lot of different places, but you cannot substitute for the leaders of a partner country who are able, dedicated, and
courageous. During his presidency he not only systematically defeated FARC and the AUC but he also created a country” (Norby and Fitzpatrick 2013). Uribe’s position on a United States pedestal reinforces the propriety of violence. The seemingly abundant success of Uribe elides the crises that Colombia still faces, some of which grew or were caused by military policies.
CHAPTER 8:

THE ECONOMICS OF THE MATTER: SHOCK AND AWE

“…Arms like laws discourage and keep the invader and the plunderer in awe, and preserve order in the world as well as property. The same balance would be preserved were all the world destitute of arms, for all would be alike; but since some will not, others dare not lay them aside... Horrid mischief would ensue were one half the world deprived of the use of them....” (Thomas Paine 1894)

In 1970 Milton Friedman, the father of neoliberalism and shock and awe economic doctrine, acted as an advisor to Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet (Klein 2007). After Pinochet’s coup in 1973, and with the nation in shock and disarray, Friedman advised the dictator to institute the hallmarks of neoliberalist doctrine- privatization, deregulation, and free trade (Klein 2007). “It was the most extreme capitalist economic makeover ever attempted anywhere” and was completed under the extreme distress of the nation (Klein 2007:8). Friedman coined this tactic of instilling a new economic regime on a nation when it is in throes of stress “shock treatment”. He “predicted that the speed, suddenness and scope of the economic shifts would provoke psychological reactions in the public that ‘facilitate the adjustment’ (Klein 2007:8). More blatantly, people would be too busy struggling to piece back their shattered lives to mobilize against such swift and overarching economic changes. This is what happened in Colombia.
As communities were struggling to subsist in the militarized environment of Plan Colombia and National Consolidation, the government was able to enter a new era of neoliberal economic policy with limited civilian resistance. The “shock and awe” of armed group’s murderous and terrorizing reign placed new structural boundaries on the ability of the populace to unite in solidarity against more unjust policies. This does not mean that a multitude of organizations, communities, civilians, activists, even members of congress did not try- and many still are trying- but that their voices were muted through strident government accusations of their associations with leftist guerillas, and corruption in the political ranks that focuses the mainstream media spotlight on its interests of choice. By capitalizing on Colombia’s delicate internal composition after years of conflict, the United States was able to push through a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Colombia in 2012, an agreement they had been striving towards since 2006, but was stalled due to members in the United States congress who were concerned about Colombia’s poor working conditions and reputation as one of the most dangerous places to be a trade unionist (Norby and Fitzpatrick 2013). This was an example of the “shock doctrine” in action.

In October 2011 the United States congress passed a free trade agreement with Colombia, also codified as the US-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement (TPA). The policy went into effect in May 2012. Following neoliberal logic, supporters argued that this agreement would expand and open up new economic markets, spurring both Colombian and United States economies. The FTA eliminated tariffs on 80 percent of United States goods and will phase out the rest in subsequent years (Norby and
Fitzpatrick 2013). Yet, contrary to what many wish to believe, Free trade is not “free” at all, but creates many new problems. With cheaper United States goods flooding Colombian markets, small farmers and producers cannot compete. Their operations fall victim to economic competitiveness and an unregulated market that does not protect those already marginalized.

An Oxfam report detailing the effects of the US-Colombia FTA concluded that the income of 400,000 farmers who already live below the minimum wage will fall another 70% (2012). They will be forced to find new work and will contribute to the growth of an environment of unrest and violence. Furthermore, a recent report by the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacements (CODHES) found that displacements jumped 83 percent in 2012, mostly in areas affected by the FTA (Norby and Fitzpatrick 2013). Fearing these consequences, Colombia’s ministry of Agriculture rejected the idea of an FTA in 2004. Correspondingly, in 2008 the United States congress rejected an FTA in 2008, citing labor and human rights concerns. Obama himself campaigned on a platform against the implementation of an FTA (Norby and Fitzpatrick 2013). However, amidst a disgruntled United States populace, frustrated with the slow economic growth of the repression, Obama began a tide of Free Trade Agreements around the globe.

To appease the naysayers including human rights activists and United States members of congress Jim McGovern (D-MA), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), and Hank Johnson (D-GA), Obama first enacted the Labor Action Plan in 2010 intent on instilling more protection for Labor rights activists and unionist in one of the most dangerous countries to be a unionist.
“The plan would strengthen the prosecution of perpetrators of violence against trade unions, improve protections for threatened trade unionists, address abuses related to the associative cooperatives, and criminalize anti-union behavior. It would also reestablish the Colombian Ministry of Labor, which was dismantled under the previous Colombian president, Álvaro Uribe. In speaking about the plan President Obama said, ‘I am very pleased to announce that we have developed an action plan for labor rights in Colombia, consistent with our values and interests, but more importantly, consistent with President Santos’s vision of a just and equitable society inside of Colombia,” Obama said during the meeting. “And we believe that this serves as a basis for us moving forward on a U.S.-Colombia free trade agreement.” (Sanchez and Nicholls 2011:4)

Yet, many argue against the validity of the plan, and its ability to foster significant enough change that justifies the implementation of a free trade agreement. Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch argues that: “It was a cover. The Labor Action Plan was used as an ameliorative to try and overcome the outrage in Congress over the United States associating itself with a government responsible for the single highest rates of unionist assassinations. That’s what the Labor Action Plan was about” (Norby and Fitzpatrick 2013).

The Labor Action Plan identifies five priority labor sections with historically poor working conditions that many equate to slavery. These are: port workers, sugarcane cutters, miners, palm oil workers, and flower cutters. Placement under the “priority” heading should put these sectors under increased scrutiny by the Ministry of Labor to ensure proper working conditions are being implemented (Norby and Fitzpatrick 2013). This, however, has not been the case. Furthermore, the Labor Action Plan sets no punishments if its tenants are not followed. A mere year after the Labor Action Plan was signed into place the United States deemed the human rights situation in Colombia
possible to permit the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement. The Labor Action Plan possesses no political repercussions if Colombia violates its tenants now that the FTA has been passed. Yet, Colombia and the United States can justify their efforts to the public by using the political gesture of the Labor Action Plan.

Essentially, the FTA continues to increase the wealth of those that already have it and is further impoverishing the poor. However, many within the United States support a different approach that addresses structural socio-economic problems. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) addressed congress on July 14th 2012 and addressed the plans weaknesses, stating:

‘The Labor Action Plan is not legally binding under the FTA before us. If violence and impunity continue, [and they have] the United States will have no mechanism for delaying or halting implementation of the free trade agreement. The Labor Action Plan fails to require sustained, meaningful, and measurable results. Once we enact the FTA, we lose any ability to force the Colombian government to produce tangible change.’” (Norby and Fitzpatrick 2013:3)

Furthermore, these maladaptive economic policies- policies that have continued to be enacted without the consent of the people- have detrimental effects on community’s culture, livelihood, and economic and psychological well-being.

However, United States companies have interests that lie elsewhere than human rights. In the past big-name organizations such as Dole Food Company and Coca-Cola have been accused of paying paramilitaries to kill unionists and intimidate workers.
Chiquita Brands International was convicted and fined (a paltry $25 million) for paying the AUC, what their lawyer-current Attorney General Eric Holder- wrote off as extortion monies. Robert Scott, “director of trade and manufacturing policy at the Economic Policy Institute, a strong critic of the CTPA”… argues that “The motivation for negotiating these trade agreements on the part of multinational businesses is to drive down their cost of production, take advantage of low wages and take advantage of a totally de-unionized labor environment” (Norby and Fitzpatrick 2013). Though not all United States members of congress are pro-FTA- like Georgian democrat Hank Johnson who voted against it- the array of United States companies, well-known companies whose products can be found in almost any household, and the recent FTA demonstrate the breadth of United States interests and influence. United States congressperson Hank Johnson continues to speak out against the harmfulness of the FTA. “It’s economic exploitation” he says “To understand that our government has helped foster the businesses that exploit people is not something that I am comfortable with at all. That’s why I must continue to speak out” (Norby and Fitzpatrick 2013).

The FTA also increases community’s reliance on the state’s economic model. To mobilize more of its country’s economic reserves and create a greater demand for incoming goods, Colombia passed a litany of laws before the official ratification of the FTA. These included: Resolutions 002546/2004 and 0779/2006 which “prohibit the production, marketing and consumption of artisanal sugar; resolution 970/2010 which regulates and controls the production, use, and marketing of all seeds in the country; and law 1518/2012 which expands intellectual property rights laws to include seeds”, among
many others (Duranti 2013). The laws limit small-scale production and trade, that many communities rely on to subsist, and forces them to purchase outside more expensive goods. As such, these laws increase community’s dependence on the national and global economic markets and are an attempt to incorporate them into a larger economic model. While this threatens traditional, autonomy, and economic security for small communities, these laws bodes well for the government. Not only does the state have more people contributing to government capital, but it also pits communities against one another for resources- a divide and conquer strategy.

**Economic Militarization**

United States militarization and its conceptualization of statehood do not just manifest through the uniformed soldiers teaching Colombian troops counterinsurgency strategies. It exists and is felt at both a macro and micro level, from the economic policies that perpetuate and aggravate structural issues, to military aid and weaponry, and finally to United States boots on the ground. United States economic policies demonstrate an idea of statehood that neoliberal king Milton Friedman believed in himself. The idea that the role of the state is to “protect our freedom both from enemies outside our gates and from our fellow-citizens: to preserve law and order, to enforce private contracts, to foster competitive markets.’ In other words, to supply the police and the soldiers-anything else, including providing free education, was an unfair interference in the market” (Klein 2007:6). As such, much of United States action is dictated by the market and upheld through militarized action, or impacts the market through its militarized nature. As the
Network of Concerned Anthropologists aptly states: “A society whose political economy is so militarized inevitably militarizes its relationship with other nations.” (Gonzalez, Gusterson, and Price 2009: 5).

The United States is militarized from the top down. It begins with government policies filtered through national media and public relations systems and is maintained through revisionist history that inculcates the populace with romantic notions of war and masculinized action. United States influence in Colombia has been similar, though with far less civilian acquiescence. Economic and foreign aid policies have trickled down from the caverns of United States socio-economic hegemony into the mantras of the Colombian government and the daily lives of Colombian citizens. The military is but one arm of militarization and counterinsurgency a finger, an attempt to exert more control with less push-back from the populace (Price 2011, Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009). United States economic policies toward Colombia can be seen as tool of militarized counterinsurgency strategy. However, instead of aiding in the successful occupation of a population they create a cyclical process of more impoverishment and increased militarization.

The FTA increases security issues and perpetuates human rights abuses and impunity, it also, through economic marginalization, makes small farmers and rural workers dependent on the neoliberal economic model. The military recognizes that a key tool to successfully occupy a populace is making them dependent on the occupier’s economic system, to make it seem as though they cannot subsist without the interference of the new regime (COIN Manual 2007, Price 2011). This strategy is being enacted on a
far grander lever, however, than on a single military occupied town. It is being used on
country. And though some in Colombia, like President Santos, agreed to and were in
favor of the FTA, many more without heavy wallets to use as a megaphone, did not. As
such, the FTA is an act of power. Defined by Weber and reused without citation in the
Counterinsurgency manual as “the probability that on actor within a social relationship
will be in a position to carry out his or her own will despite resistance” (1922:53). The
FTA is an act of power designed to tighten the knot of United States and Colombian
unification, and maintain control. Though it was not enacted by military personal or the
defense department, it is certainly a militarized tactic, one that seeks control, dominance,
and power. Counterinsurgency is not just a tactic of the military. It is a tactic of the state.
CHAPTER 9: A PIECE OF COLOMBIA OR PEACE IN COLOMBIA?

“A peace is of the nature of a conquest; for then both parties nobly are subdued, and neither party loser.” William Shakespeare

Amidst an array of Colombian policies aimed at reconciling the nation’s wrongs, (Victims and Land Restitution Law 1448 of 2011) the government has begun peace talks with the FARC. Since October 2012, after six months of preliminary talks, the FARC-EP and the Colombian government reengaged in the peace process for the first time since the Pastrana administration. Both parties have limited the talk’s agenda to focus on five points including the end of the armed conflict, guarantees for the right of civil participation, drug trafficking, rights of the victims, and integral agrarian reform. After eight months of discussion on the first point of the agenda, agrarian reform, on May 26th, 2013 both groups announced that had come to an agreement and were moving to the second item on the agenda, the political participation of the FARC (Communicado Conjunto 2013)). This is first agreement reached between the FARC and government in 30 years of on-and-off again peace talks. The contents of agreements are to be kept secret until a final proposal is reached and “popularly approved” through referendum, popular election, or popular consultation however a joint statement from the negotiating table indicated that the contents of the agreement cover the following:
The FARC have also crafted a website on which civilian proposals for peace can be posted and in July 2013 added English subtitles to its videos in an effort to speak to a wider, possibly American populace and gain more public support. The government has also supported public forums for civilians, academics, and human rights workers alike to discuss and submit peace proposals. However, amidst the public circus of the talks, military activity has continued. Though the FARC agreed to a unilateral ceasefire from November 2012 to January 2013, the government will not concede to a bilateral ceasefire. Furthermore, the Santos administration has crafted the success of the talks to mean peace for the entire nation. The United States, too has sat idly by, discursively supporting peace talks and financially continuing a militarized campaign. What then does peace really mean?

I contend that the way a state conceptualizes peace amid its governed bodies is tied to how the state imagines its own statehood. The way a state sees itself and its role, responsibilities, and authority to govern a specified territory effects its conceptualizations of what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable under its reign. Likewise, a state’s view of itself impacts its beliefs about what constitutes proper and active citizenship.

Congruently, as a state is a product of the citizens who compose it, citizens (both “legal”
and “illegal”) impact a state’s formation and identity. Just as an individual’s identity formation is processual and in constant flux, so too is a state’s (Korostelina 2007).

Throughout the history of the Colombian conflict United States’ militarized mindset and western hegemony have impacted Colombia’s conception of statehood. Through an array of military tactics highlighting counterinsurgency strategies and operations, the Colombian state has shown that it views statehood as the consolidation of territory, ideology, and humans under a map of westernized hegemony that prioritizes the security of the nation-state, its power, economy, and ruling ideology, over the security and prosperity of humans (Network of Concerned anthropologist 173:2009). The state operates on the assumption that socio-economic stability will occur if physical security is first secured. Certainly physical security is of basic human importance. Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs demonstrates this elementary presumption. However, the state’s continual failure to deliver social and economic security erodes what physical security gains are present. Furthermore, the United States’ over-insistent focus on military rather than humanitarian or developmental aid, and the failure of both nations to learn from the past, and constant recommendations from transnational and national human rights and non-profit organizations, highlights the United States’ and Colombia’s predilection to first achieve a Weberian (1922) monopoly on violence than focus on structural issues.

Furthermore, the United States’ penchant for engaging in foreign battles, including Iraq, Afghanistan and other training missions in nations such as Colombia, demonstrates not just the United States’ desire and need to proselytize western hegemonic word, but also its belief in Tilly’s presumption that “war makes states”
The United States has exchanged this belief with Colombia through an osmosis of will. Colombia, and those within Colombia that have the majority of power, naturally wish to maintain the status quo and reap the benefits.

Taking point from the United States’ fear of first communists, insurgents, rebels, and then terrorists, Colombia created a demonic and threatening enemy of the guerillas and perpetuated it until myth blurred with reality and nothing but a dehumanized enemy remained. Hylton states that “one effect of the long-term use of political terror in Colombia and elsewhere has been to erase the memory of political alternatives to which terror responded” (2006:7). However, instead of “making a state” and reaffirming statehood, the United States’ and Colombia’s militarized tactics have perpetuated distrust between citizens and the state. Of course, some in Colombia are pleased with the state, and suburban cities differ substantially from rural areas that lack basic amenities like running water. Yet, through counterinsurgency techniques and “Consolidation” that state has demonstrated that it sees itself as a “civilizing” force, with the military as the main arm of civilization. Rural citizens, however, have been affected by the state’s continual inability to deliver on social and economic promises and concerns, as with Consolidation and to date, the Victims Law. As quoted from a victim of the 2000 El Salado massacre: “I hope that the government gives us what it owes us, because they have to give us something” (Brodzinsky & Schoening 2012). However, with the growth of neoliberal economics, such as the FTA between the United States and Colombia, those marginalized with continue to be disenfranchised from economic and subsequent social security.
Peace in this context of neoliberal militarization is complicated then. What can it really mean? As Winifred Tate aptly argues:

“In both the ‘war on drugs’ and the ‘war on terror’, US policy towards Colombia remains driven by domestic policy considerations rather than a reasoned response to the Colombian conflict. Both these frameworks have generated widespread support among the general population, and grant wide latitude for a militarised response by positioning US authorities as tackling an extensive and amorphous evil. In polarizing debates, extremist rhetoric limits the degree to which reformists can push for a peace-centered agenda” (Tate 2004:5)

The United States has long been pushing the masculine maxim that “we will not negotiate with terrorists”. This is extremely limiting considering the wide swath of “terrorist” enemies United States officials have taken to identify. Yet, with their discursive “light footprint” approach and the determination echoing from Colombia for peace, perhaps a negotiation to the conflict isn’t as disparate as it once was. The meaning of this “peace”, however, could still differ from civilian to civilian, government to government, and military to military. As such, an analysis of the government’s previous strategies against the FARC, present day proceedings of the talks, and public statements from government officials will help elucidate what Colombia and the United States want peace to be.

**The United States and Peace, Money, and Security: The Holy Trinity**

In General Fraser’s 2012 posture statement to the House Armed Services Committee, an address delivered before the formal commencement of peace talks, he
explained the perceived goals of United States South Command. Highlighting the seemingly humanitarian mission of SouthCom the general stated that the:

“primary focus will remain strengthening partnerships to enable effective regional security, we will also support and contribute to the disruption of illicit trafficking; the dismantling of transnational organized crime networks; and the fostering of alternatives to criminal influence in under-governed areas…The key concept in our strategy is support. With the exception of fulfilling our statutory responsibility as a lead agency for detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs, the Department of Defense plays a supporting role in all counter-narcotics related efforts” (25).

Amid cries for fiscal cutbacks and sequestration in the United States, spending on Colombia has declined and discourse has refocused on “criminal” rather than “terrorist” actors. General Fraser’s report consistently mentions working within the restraints of “limited resources”. As tensions in the Middle East have continued, the United States under the Obama administration has maintained its focus on Middle Eastern and North African countries, strived to develop a greater presence in the East, and has stepped back to a “light footprint” approach in Latin America. The United States has developed a penchant for operations that involve fewer troops like drone strikes and Special Forces missions. General Fraser’s statement echoes a “light footprint” approach in which United States troops are used as “support” rather than as direct combat operators. However, despite the discursive connotation that implies a light footprint leaves a little mark, United States interests have still held sway over the region, and militarized aid is by far paramount.
In 2009 the United States and Colombian governments ratified a Defense Cooperation Agreement formally known as Supplemental Agreement for Cooperation and Technical Assistance and Security, or SACTA. This agreement specified seven military bases at which United States troops could maintain a presence, and outlined the regulations of militarized cooperation between the two nations. This agreement is valid for ten years, and under it, the maximum amount of United States troops allowed and their function on Colombian soil will remain the same, whether a peace accord is reached or not. If a peace agreement is reached then, discursively if not in practice, United States economic policies and investments towards Colombia are what are most likely to change, as has been demonstrated with the recent Free Trade Agreement.

United States government officials have been publicly praising Colombia and President Santos for their strides towards peace, rarely mentioning current United States military involvement in the nation. In January 2013 former United States President Jimmy Carter visited Colombia and met with a multitude of officials and former Colombian President Gaviria to discuss current proceedings of the peace talks. According to his website when he met with Gaviria the formed Colombian president “explained the generic need to shift from military action, destruction of crops by fumigating, and judicial punishment for those in possession of drugs to an emphasis on treating the drug problem as a health issue. I [President Carter] had recommended as president that marijuana be decriminalized (not legalized) and stressed treatment and not imprisonment for simple possession of drugs. That policy was subsequently changed and America's prison population has increased seven-fold, to the highest on earth. No progress has been made in reducing production or consumption of addictive narcotics.” (2013).

During the same visit, Carter met with President Santos to discuss the same issue and later in the month Santos released a statement highlighting the social nature of the
drug problem and calling for a different approach on the ‘war on drugs’ (Edmond 2013). In June 2013, Santos published an article in The Guardian that highlighted four ways the Organization of American States explored as new approaches to the drug problem in Latin America (2013). Though one approach still viewed drugs as a security issue, others recognized the need to address the structural social issues that contribute to drug use and trade. President Santos discursively backed changes to the approach on the “war on drugs” early in his Presidency, and critics have long noted the failure of fumigation and forced eradication policies, not to mention their devastating socio-economic and health impacts. However, while so tightly tethered to United States interests and military policies, it will be interesting to see how or if these discursive shifts manifest in concrete policies and peace, just how “light” the United States’ footprint will be.

In a May 2013 visit to Colombia Vice President Biden stated “Just as we supported Colombian leaders in the battlefield we fully support you at the negotiating table, Mr. President… We applaud every advance, every advance that gets Colombians closer to the piece they so richly deserve and we look forward to the day when Colombia can fully enjoy a genuine peace dividend” (The White House 2013). Conceptions of what this “peace dividend” is though surely differs widely both throughout the Colombian and United States governments and civilian communities.

Furthermore, a news articles have highlighted how foreign investment will flourish if peace succeeds, as if in an attempt to convince potential benefactors of the possible opportunities Colombia holds. Colombian Deputy Energy Minister Orlando Cabrales Segovia voiced hopes in June 2013 that a peace deal would open up more land
for oil exploration. U.S. Secretary of Commerce Rebecca Blank also announced in April 2013 that twenty new companies would be participating in business in Colombia, Brazil, and Panama, and on the one year anniversary of the United States- Colombia FTA, accounts from United States diplomats dripped of the fruitful outcomes of the deal (U.S. Department of Commerce).

These statements indicate that “peace” in Colombia is not the demilitarization of the FARC and their reincorporation into a structural system that encourages economic and social stability for the entire populace, but it is perceived regional stability that allows for the fulfillment economic interests of the United States (which the United States believes will magically occur if the FARC lay down weapons). The opening of more Colombian land to foreign/United States investment would spur capitalist profit and reaffirm Western neoliberal ideology and hegemony. An ideological contestation to the United States would be lessened as would be a boundary to financial profit. In this age of neoliberal globalization cheap goods are wanted at a cheap labor price.

In “Fragmented Solidarity: Political Violence and Neoliberalism in Colombia” Lesley Gill argued that neoliberalism was able to take root in Barrancabermeja, Colombia because fear and terror enacted by the government, paramilitaries, and guerillas limited civilian’s ability to coalesce and form long-lasting bonds of solidarity against the movement. Unionized workers and human rights movements in the regions were terrorized into submission (2013). Though the process of neoliberalization differs regionally, ultimately one could argue that fear, terror, and violence prohibit the formation of cohesive solidarity movements against the status quo. This was also
demonstrated with slaughter and ultimate demise of the UP. As such, United States policies, like the FTA and continued militarized campaigns with little focus on socio-economic causes, contribute to the unrest, terror, and violence that perpetuate the prevalence of unwanted economic policies. Ironically, the United States’ shortsidedness, often leads them to increase militarization in unstable areas (like the Cano Limon pipeline). Their version of peace then, as demonstrated by current economic policies and military strategy, is not possible, for they seek territorial security without addressing human security (Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009).

The Other Side of Peace

However, not all in the United States government view peace as an economic and ideological gain. In April 2013, 62 United States members of congress signed a letter addressed to Secretary of State John Kerry that acknowledged United States history of militarized interference in Colombia and rallied for a United States aid package in support of peace. After decades of supporting a campaign of fear and violence, the United States has decided to try an alternative tactic, one of peace (Latin American Working Group 2013). The letter states that “U.S. policy and assistance for Colombia should emphasize the promotion of human rights, development that reduces that country’s great inequities and lays the groundwork for the implementation of peace accords, should they materialize.” (Latin American Working Group 2013:3) With little mention of militarized concerns other than “security” related drug issues, the letter focuses heavily on social, developmental, and humanitarian issues. Included in the letter are recommendations that the United States advocates for the inclusion of “both victims of violence and civil
society in the peace process and its implementation”, the release of all kidnapping victims and truth to families of the disappeared, and an independent truth commission that reveals “the full truth about those who implemented, ordered, financed, aided, abetted, benefitted from or tolerated violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.” The letter also states that:

“Further, justice for gross human rights violations by the state's own security forces must not be bargained away at the negotiating table. For example, the cases of more than 3,000 victims of extrajudicial executions allegedly committed by members of Colombia's armed forces must be effectively prosecuted in civilian courts. The Santos Administration pledged that these and any future cases of extrajudicial executions, as well as sexual violence and other grave human rights crimes, will be investigated and prosecuted in civilian courts, despite recent controversial constitutional reforms that increase the power of military courts. The State Department should monitor closely to ensure that extrajudicial execution cases and other cases of grave abuses are not transferred to, or initiated in, military courts. The U.S. provided training and resources to Colombia's military during 2004 through 2008 when most of the extrajudicial executions known as “false-positives” took place, and we therefore bear a special responsibility to ensure that the Colombian government fulfills its promise to deliver timely justice for these crimes” (Latin American Working Group 2013:5)

Such goals are a lofty and admirable change from past impunity, as demonstrated by the demobilization of the paramilitaries. However, in practice achieving such goals may be a different story. Historical attempts for deep-seated structural changes have demonstrated the political contention that emerges when the status quo is threatened. Colombia has long had some of the most progressive laws on the books hampered by a lack of will, money, or power to enforce them (Taussig 2003). This is certainly not to say that such changes are impossible, rather that they face impressive boundaries and will
require the mobilization of more than just 62 United States members of congress and their pens. To support their recommendations, the letter’s signatories suggest:

“…Offering an aid package designed for peace, reorienting aid that for the last dozen years has supported a government at war. A new aid package should be tailored to support eventual accords, but would likely feature increased support for implementing President Santos’s signature Land Restitution and Victims' Law, especially for safe, sustainable land restitution for internally displaced persons (IDPs); titling for indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities and landless farmers, including women; a strengthened Ombudsman's Office (Defensoría) to help protect the rural population; and support for regional “peace and development” programs that are designed in close consultation with communities. It should include substantial investment in livelihoods for IDPs who choose to remain in urban areas so that they can rebuild their lives, as well as support for the full range of durable solutions to improve the situation of Colombian refugees in neighboring countries…. we encourage aid that supports community-based solutions to protect the population in these areas.

“Such an aid package would also include expanded de-mining programs; reintegration of demobilized guerrilla fighters, with social services for child soldiers and appropriate programs for female ex-combatants; and protection for ex-combatants. It should include technical support for exhumations and legal aid for families of the disappeared; an expanded human rights program with a strong civil society component; support to strengthen the justice system; and economic and political support for investigating and dismantling paramilitary structures, including for the Supreme Court’s parapolitics investigations. Crucial elements will be support for an independent peace accord verification mechanism with significant civil society participation and for an independent Truth Commission, should one be established, along with efforts to recover historical memory” (Latin American Working Group 2013:6)

This aid package is ambitious and relatively thorough. Greater attention is paid to the structural concerns that perpetuate the conflict, such as the livelihoods of displaced, demobilized, and marginalized populace. The letter also states that “Dismantling paramilitary and guerrilla successor groups is imperative. The experience with paramilitary demobilization has shown us that unless the structures that support illegal armed actors are eliminated, armed actors will persist or reappear, embedding themselves
in organized crime and wreaking violence on communities.” It would seem that these members of congress have learned from the history of the conflict and understand demobilization as a process that is greater than just laying down weapons. Though the letter does not specifically request a budget that gives greater aid to humanitarian and developmental concerns than militarized ones, the nature of its tenant’s denote such a need.

What the letter does not address was how United States economic policies and interests have affected the Colombian conflict and aid in the creation of the structural preconditions that influence violence. The letter states that “prioritizing rural development designed with small farmers' participation, rather than continuing aerial fumigation, is a likely outcome of negotiations”, yet it discusses this as a change in the war on drugs strategy and fails to mention how politico-economic conditions have impacted current and previous attempts at “rural development”. Interesting that the letter should mention the United States’ role in the Colombian military’s human rights abuses-noted as though United States military intervention was a thing of the past- but not how economic interests and policies have influenced militarization and affect the lives of so many Colombians. In the context of an otherwise detailed letter, this denotes a misunderstanding of the impact of neoliberal economics, or perhaps a misunderstanding on how political-economy is tied to peace.
Colombia and Peace: Demilitarization or Remilitarization?

Colombian officials, however certainly understand how political-economy is tied to peace (or their version of it), and throughout peace talks have bristled at the FARC’s repeated attempts to include a discussion of the country’s current economic model. Though both sides agreed to stick to the agenda (one devoid of any mention of economic changes or discussions on energy and mining problems) parsed out during preliminary talks in 2012, the FARC clearly thought it could slip in a new point, or is trying to stick discursively to its more reformative platform to cater to its supporters while making backroom deals with the negotiators. To date, however, the progress of the talks has been substantial with a few hiccups along the way. The landmark agreement on Comprehensive Rural Reform reached on May 26th 2013 includes tenants for a Land Fund from which illegally acquired land will be reappropriated, a mechanism for the formalization of land titles, as well as measures that address the development of existing Peasant Reserve zones, infrastructure, education, and healthcare in rural areas (Mesa De Convercasiones 2013). Yet, like many laws that come before this agreement, implementation is the often the greatest boundary.

The Colombian government and FARC’s agreement to return to the negotiating table after ten years of intensive fighting, indicate that both sides believe the conflict cannot be resolved on the battlefield. However, with continued militarized action until an agreement is ratified, it is unclear if either side believes peace can be achieved at the negotiating table. In June 2013, Colombia’s congress approved a heavily contested bill that reforms to the military justice system. Critics argue that this law will strengthen
impunity for human rights violators. Under this law war crimes will be investigated by the military. Though some human rights violations, like extrajudicial executions, will not fall under military jurisdiction, “given the armed forces’ continued control over the initial stages of criminal investigation the reform will make it easier for them to define human rights violations as legitimate act of conflict, thereby making them subject to military jurisdiction” (Amnesty International 2013). This reform does not bode well for citizens and human rights workers advocating for peace with justice in Colombia.

Furthermore, as militarized action continues amongst all parties, onlookers are wondering in FARC will actually lay down their weapons if a peace agreement is reached. In June the FARC stated that it wanted a peace deal similar to the one achieved by the Irish Republican Army in which weapons are not immediately relinquished. FARC negotiator Andres Pais stated that their weapons “will go quiet when the will to fire them ends. And that is what will happen in Colombia once all situations are dealt with and we leave the [peace talks] table” (Alsema D 2013). The Colombian government rebuked the possibilities of such an accord. Yet, a recent report by InSight Crime argued that even if peace accords are successful between the FARC and the government, there is a high probably that some FARC fronts will not demobilize and will continue illicit activities (McDermott 2013). Despite these developments talks have continued. On February 12th, 2013 President Santos issued a statement detailing that peace in Colombia will be achieved “by any means necessary” (Hansen-Bundy 2013). Such a comment connotes that if current peace talks do fail; the government will continue a militarized strategy and will employ any tactics deemed “necessary” to achieve peace. In July 2013 Colombian
defense minister Juan Carlos Pinzon stated that “To have public security, to have security in their daily lives” is what Colombians want (Alsema 2013). “Security” throughout the history of the conflict, however, has not always meant the same thing to the Colombian government (whose primary focus is on physical security) and its citizens (who are also significantly concerned with socio-economic and political security). The government’s focus on physical security reinforces its notion of statehood as a force of spatial occupation.

While the government’s current attempts of victim restitution and peace are substantial strides towards constructive change, statements from Colombian officials suggest that peace is not imagined as the complete demilitarization of nefarious groups, though an accord is contingent upon the FARC laying down its weapons, but rather a remilitarization of state forces. If the FARC are eliminated as an ideological enemy and its members are still involved in illicit activities, the Colombian military and National Police can then combat them as basic criminal actors without political dissent. The transformation of an ideological threat into a basic criminal one limits the frame of contestation and buttresses state legitimacy. Peace then is the depolitization of FARC violence and its incorporation into a basic “criminal” discourse. If however, this type of peace cannot be achieved through peace talks, “security” is still a paramount concern, security of physical territory and western hegemonic ideology. The FARC’s actions throughout peace talks and in their attempts at revolution have only supported claims for needed security. In July 2013, the FARC killed 15 Colombian soldiers in an attack and announced that they had kidnapped a former United States marine. Though they stated
that the solider was a representation of United States imperial authority, they also decided to make arrangements for the release of the prisoner to purport the good mood of the peace talks. Of course, in order to do so, the FARC could not have kidnapped the soldier in the first place.

**Constructing Peace**

Following Sherif’s (1953) realistic conflict theory, the struggle between the Colombian government and the FARC began as a conflict over resources and ideas about their proper allocation throughout society. Land, political power, and who has the right to a monopoly on violence has been hotly contested throughout the life of the conflict. Increased violence against the FARC aided the process of ingroup identity solidification, and contributed to continued feelings of government deprivation (Gurr 1970 in Korostelina 2006: 134). Feelings of deprivation based off a comparison between the rural populace and Colombian elites fed the FARC’s quest to remake the Colombian state into a more egalitarian system that provides a more equal standard of living for all. However, their attempts to remake the state have been cast in a shadow of violence and abuse. “According to Gurr, when people get frustrated they have ‘an innate disposition’ to lash out at the source of their frustration in direct proportion to the intensity of their frustration” (Korostelina 2006: 133). This proposition applies to violence committed by the FARC, and the United States and Colombian governments throughout the conflict. All parties, frustrated by the perceived injustices enacted against the state, civilians, and themselves have reacted with violent act that display symbolically and literally their antagonism towards the opposing party. Such violence has perpetuated a “we better get
them before they get us” mentality and led to a cycle of violence intermittently
interrupted by attempts at peace talks (Ashmore et. Al 2001:8). In order for the current
talks to be successful, the structural problems that led to such feelings of frustration must
first be addressed and all opposing groups must be incorporated into a broader model of
citizenship. This will not occur over night. Tilly argues that “public politics invariably
involves creation, activation, and transformation of visible us-them boundaries, as well a
reversal of those processes: destruction, deactivation, or restoration of us-them
boundaries” (2005: 174).

Throughout the process of peace the “us-them” boundaries between the FARC,
civilians, and the state must be nullified. The United States government has recognized
this necessity, and, following militarized airs, is planning to create a Soap Opera for
Colombian society that expresses positive sentiments about accepting demobilized
members back into society. In an online recruiting website, the army placed an ad in May
2013 for “a potential contractor to write and produce a total of 20 radio novella episodes
for an Army MISO team (Military Information Support Operations) based in Colombia
that ‘convey messages that promote demobilization” MISO is the new, softer name for
Psychological Operations (Beckhusen 2013). Though this demonstrates that the United
States and Colombia recognize the necessity of civilian acceptance of demobilized
members, this approach is fraught with the simplistic elisions of militarization. Again,
instead of allocating resources to address the fundamental problems, such as neoliberal
economics, few opportunities for upward mobility etc, the focus is instead on convincing
the population to accept state policies with little attention paid to why the population
would not want to accept them in the first place. As such, these attempts will not succeed, or what success there is will be short lived.

As has been demonstrated, throughout the conflict, no side has been innocent; both have been victim and victimizer. Yet, I contend that in order for any peace process to be successful—aside from addressing the structural socio-economic problems that facilitate the marginalization of large swaths of the populace—the FARC must be rehumanized in the eyes of the government and civilian population, and the Colombian state must also be rehumanized in the eyes of the FARC and civilians. Furthermore, feelings of victimhood must be addressed and history should be clarified (Montville 2006:368). Both parties must take responsibility, verbally, for their actions and assist in necessary reparations. Such action will help disintegrate the “us-them” boundary that has been bolstered through years of violence. Peace will not subsist through just an agreement between the FARC and the government. The structural inequities that led to layers of militarization and dehumanization of opposing sides must be broken down, and the populace must believe in the possibility for sustainable peace (Bickford 2013). A new category must be created that incorporates everyone into the citizen construct: one of Colombian citizenship i.e. supercategorization (Korostelina 2007:202).

Montville (2006) proclaims that in order to construct a lasting and sustainable resolution to a conflict the circumstances that led to feelings of victimhood must first be addressed (368-369). I agree with this proposition, as often the first step in reconciliation is the recognition of ills. I contend that education, history, and demythologization can create opportunities for victim recognition that promote recategorization and
reconciliation. Montville details how today's realpolitik has recognized the importance for victimizers to take responsibility for their crimes in order to achieve peace with justice (ibid). Currently, as peace talks progress in Colombia activists and citizens alike are calling for an agreement that does not further entrench impunity into the system. Over recent years, this process has begun slowly as investigative journalism has uncovered the truth about the government’s corruption and demythologized the previous Uribe administration. To further entrench these facts in historical and learned memory, school books in Colombia and the United States should reflect the failings and vast human rights abuses of the administration.

Based off of Montville’s theory that the victimizers recognition of their misdeeds helps perpetuate reconciliation, I contend that both the FARC and the government must recognize and verbally proclaim to Colombian citizens the misdeeds and human rights abuses each has enacted. Abuses cannot be hidden behind watered-down discursive half-truths, but must be fully accounted for, recognized, and reconciled for. I believe such confessions will confirm what much of the populace already knows, but reaffirm their trust in the government because of their honesty, and demonstrate the FARC’s acknowledgement and thus commitment to the peace process; for if each party verbally recognizes what it has done wrong, it will be less apt to commit the same acts in the future. Such actions will also contribute to the rehumanification of each party.

The FARC has long been criminalized and derogated by the Colombian government and international parties. In order for FARC members to successfully reintegrate into society, some stereotypical preconceptions of the group must be broken
down and nullified. The second item on the peace talk’s agenda seeks to address the
FARC’s political participation in society. However, in order to be seen as a legitimate
political participant, the FARC must first be humanized and not seen as a target to be
exterminated, which is occurred during the 1980s slaughter of the UP. However, the
humanization of the FARC is not just the responsibility of the government, it is
imperative that FARC plays a role. They must regain the trust of the populace, or least
ameliorate fears that they will continue to participate in more criminal behavior should
the peace talks succeed. They must present themselves as unified with society, as average
Colombian citizens. Paradoxically, much of their campaign has anchored on such
discursive justifications, with little practical evidence. However, by recognizing their
flaws, their criminal and inhumane behavior, the FARC would take a first step in
associating themselves with typical humanistic behavior, inclination, and emotions.
Furthermore, they could provide peace-of-mind to many who are hesitant to accept them
back into society, providing culpability for their crimes, lessening the anger and injustice
that comes with not knowing or with unrecognized knowing, and easing their transition
and weakening the barrier between “citizen” and “FARC terrorist”.

Realistically, however, neither the FARC nor the government will attest to all of
their misdeeds, primarily because they do not believe they are misdeeds at all, but the
proper actions required to support their moralistic cause. As has been true with past talks
“When representatives of large groups in conflict meet to attempt reconciliation, the
movement one observes in their deliberations is not a steady progression towards
‘togetherness’ but rather an oscillation between closeness and separation” (Volkan
This has been demonstrated by the squabbles each side has produced as peace talks have progressed. Talks have continued with bated breath as tensions over Venezuela threatened to derail talks, just after a deal on agrarian reform was announced.

As such, the fate of the conflict cannot rely solely on tenuous peace talks. Other mechanisms of reconciliation must be activated outside of formal peace agreements. These mechanisms should address the grievances of the civilian populace, not just those of the FARC and the government. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission completed by a third party would aid in justice and truth, as would international pressure and policies that enforce strict human rights standards. Furthermore, when concocting a lasting solution it will be important to assess both the FARC, the Colombian government, and the United States government’s frame of reference (Ross 2006: 306). As historical analysis shows, the actions of each party are often interpreted differently by the conflict’s various participants. For example, when the FARC bombs oil pipelines, they do so as an act against United States imperialism and capitalist economic policies that prevent the nationalization of resources. However, the Colombian and United States government view this as an act of terrorism and a threat to state interests. The FARC’s involvement in the cocaine trade could be analyzed along similar principles - the FARC seeing it as a method to ensure the needs of the revolution, and the needs of coca growers, and the government viewing it as criminal and vagrant behavior done to undermine state authority and security. No matter which party is codified as “correct” or “wrong” throughout the conflict (though I contend that no participants in this conflict can be so
simplified) “the fact is, however, that any matter invested with emotional significance is no longer trivial” (Ross 2006: 307 in Rothbarth and Korostelina). As such each party’s interpretations of events and their reasoning behind them cannot be cast off as frivolous, false, or wrong. Instead, they must be openly addressed and accounted for. Congruently, interests that drive the conflict, both ideological and resource based, must be addressed and nullified. However, this may prove difficult after years of discursive vilification of the enemy.

However, a first step in this process must be the actual validation of one each opposing side’s claims to discontent. They cannot be cast away as “backwards”, “imperial”, or “amoral”, but must be addressed accordingly. In Fallen Elites Bickford (2011) demonstrates the social and psychological effects of flawed political and socio-economic policies on former NVA soldiers. Similar to the unification of post-Cold War Germany, peace between the Colombian government and the FARC is contingent upon “the fusing of two radically different ways of imagining” the state (Bickford 2011:8). The cessation of the armed conflict in Colombia relies on the unification of competing ideologies about how “economic and political life should be structured, how citizens should live and act, and how society should govern itself” (Bickford 2011:111). Bickford’s work demonstrates how complete unification can be hindered by political and socio-economic policies that delegitimize the loser and re-write history to the victor’s behest. Individuals, particularly military actors, loose their identity, their sense of self, and often cling to the past in a desperate attempt to mitigate the pain of the present. This hinders unification and increases the possibility for another revolutionary movement to
develop. Certainly then the second item on the peace talks agenda, the FARC’s political participation, is of critical importance. However, it still must not overshadow the concerns of citizens themselves.

The current frame of the peace talks does strive to address many grievances that have long fueled that conflict. However, without the involvement of the civilian population, an accord will not ease the pain of past ills and facilitate a broader fusion of society. Furthermore, if items on the talks agenda are only addressed at the surface level, and not structurally, issues will continue to persist.
CHAPTER 10:

CONCLUSION: LESSONS IN MILITARIZATION AND UNITED STATES INTERVENTION

“It is an unfortunate fact that we can secure peace only by preparing for war.” John F. Kennedy

Counterinsurgency intervention in Colombia should not be used as a model for United States intervention. As history has demonstrated, counterinsurgency is not a successful long term plan for any nation, be it Iraq, Afghanistan, or Colombia. This type of warfare elides the fact that the United States is intervening with another nation’s affairs for imperial interests, and draws attention away from the militarism of the whole affair through the use of discourse that paints an image of humanitarian intervention bringing “development” to lawless areas. However, arguing against counterinsurgency operations, or militant operations in general, does not mean that one is arguing for the United States to be an isolationist nation. It instead implies a shift in United States intervention, one that focuses less on militarized interference and more on humanitarian and developmental aid. Instead of being a nation with a military-industrial complex, one that is easily swayed by defense contracts and academic funding derived from the Pentagon, the United States could be a nation true to its founding principles, one that is
more concerned with the well-being of all citizens than the well-being of corporations and politicians re-election campaigns.

As globalization continues to redefine the boundaries between nations-states, continents, and worldviews, the effects of United States global economic and social militarization will continue to reverberate and affect American citizens themselves. We have all become connected. United States international militarized policies, whether enacted through economic sanctions or guns and bombs, like a contagion, will spread the negative effects of militarization. As Catherine Lutz (2001) demonstrates in Homefront, American interests do not lie within the bounds of militarization. Instead, the United States should focus its interests and energy on addressing the economic, social, and political preconditions that facilitate conceptions of militarization and civil unrest.

However, in order to do so, the United States must first come to terms with a new definition of statehood, one that is not defined by physical or mental territorial control and acquisition, but by territorial service. We have entered an age of a new type of imperial conquest. No longer are quests of domination fought on a battlefield with clearly demarcated boundaries and winners and losers. No longer are kings deposed and mocked after losing a battle. No longer are the palace riches divided among soldiers. Today battles are not as overt. They are waged in discursive policy documents and international power plays. Rulers and states are not captured and taken as spoils of war- they are enticed into doing the economic and militarized bidding of the powerful United States through economic and discursive persuasion- or, could be replaced by CIA coups as is what was attempted in Cuba and occurred in Iran and Guatemala. Yet, history has shown
the failings of imperialism whose side-effects include vast abuses of power and inhumane treatment of people. Though every war, every conflict, and every situation differs, the conflict in Colombia can be used as an example of what not to do, but also as an example of continued hope and perseverance for a brighter future.

Overall, peace will not be achieved through simple talks and an accord, but will be a long and complex process that incorporates a litany of political and economic initiatives that facilitate the reincorporation of the FARC into the citizen population (Bickford 2011). These processes will break down the identity barriers that have been constructed, reinforce socio-economic and political differentiation, and will integrate the voices of the larger Colombian populace under the united heading of “citizen”. Furthermore, the larger processes of militarization must shift. Under the United States and Colombia’s current militarized socio-economic environment, concerns of the military and aggrandized multinational corporations presume all others. Concerns of civilians are silenced or muffled in favor of armed actors and large-scale economic growth. This cannot continue. Peace will emerge when all civilians have an equal voice and government actors emphasize policies that provide political and socio-economic upward mobility instead of terror and displacement.
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Chelsey G. Dyer grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina. She attended North Carolina State University where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology in 2011. She then moved to Virginia to pursue her scholastic interests in Colombia and Anthropology. She will receive her Master’s in Anthropology from George Mason University in 2013.