

COLOMBIA IS LIVING A



Colombia is now in a period of turbulent peace, an ambiguous transition from direct violence –which ended with a fragile and incomplete peace agreement between the two sides in the conflict– and a subtle and indirect violence euphemistically called “progress”.

This, at least, is the opinion of Fredy Cante, professor and researcher at the Universidad del Rosario. Editor and coauthor of the *Hand-book of Research on Transitional Justice and Peace Building in Turbulent Regions*, Cante says that several fronts of the FARC guerrillas, who recently signed a peace agreement, will presumably lay down their arms but continue to participate in the lucrative businesses of drug trafficking, coltan, and gold, the resources representing their biggest income source.

“What was signed was a negative peace,” he maintains, “because the silencing of the guns puts an end only to the explicit and bloody violence. Positive peace, on the other hand, generates social justice and fair treatment, defeating iniquity and structural violence.”

TURBULENT PEACE



Several examples in the world demonstrate that with negative peace, violence persists in its most atrocious forms. This is the case in Guatemala, where a generation of young people was trained to fire weapons in guerrilla militias. When the peace agreement was reached in the middle of the 1990s, they found no way to integrate into society, and migrated to urban gangs known as maras, which now engage in extreme levels of violence.

“The FARC will go down in history as abominable exploiters of human life,” says Professor Cante, “practising kidnapping, drug trafficking and extortion, solely to enrich themselves and

live in opulence. There is no question that their practices are worse than those that motivated their armed struggle, which was the exploitation of workers as described by Marx.”

FROM GUERRILLA GROUP TO PARA-STATE

The FARC’s decision not to allow any public images of themselves surrendering their arms reveals their wish to continue to be even greater than an army, a kind of para-state. “Anything done clandestinely is antidemocratic,” says the professor.

In addition, this is a clear sign that the Havana Peace Accords were incomplete and the negotiations suffered from serious defects such as leaving certain extremely important problems for Colombian society unresolved, especially drug trafficking and the extraction of natural resources.



The environment is clearly affected by extractive business activities, which are the most lucrative for the State, guerrillas, and paramilitary groups.



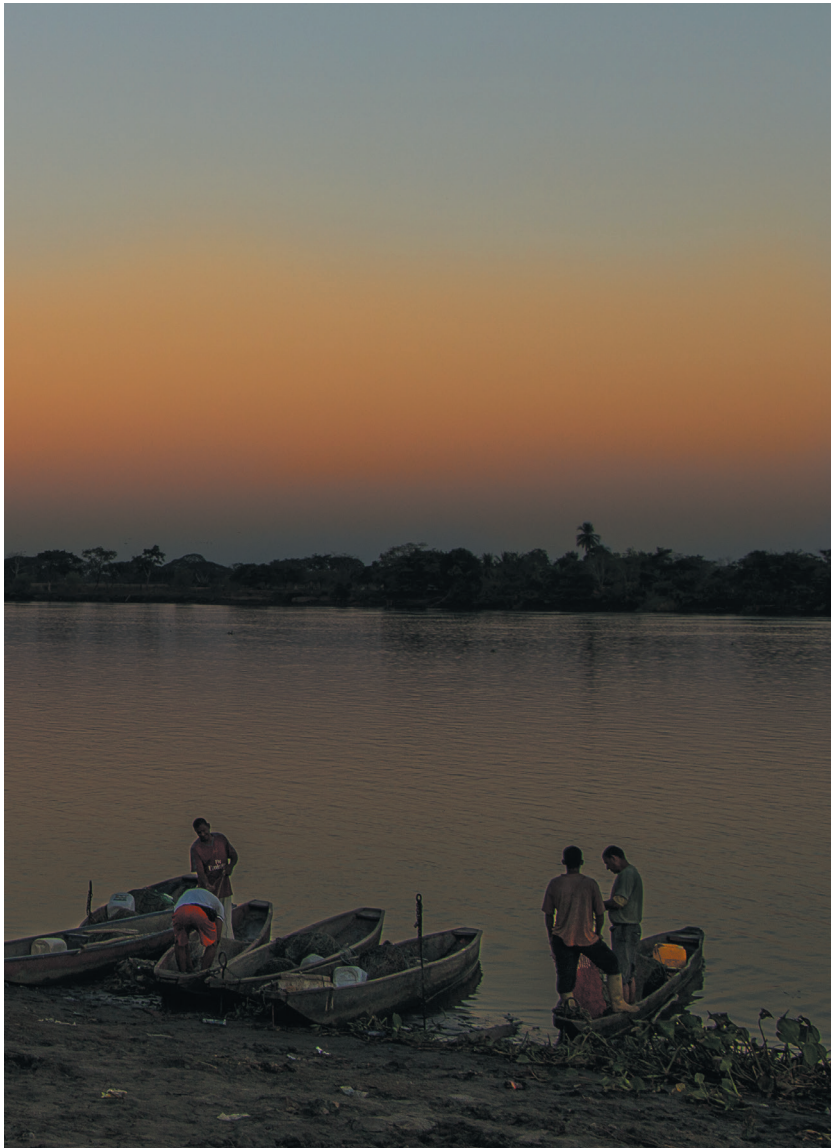
And it is the extractive activities of the State, the guerrillas, and the paramilitaries that are most lucrative for them, while they simultaneously damage the natural environment. “The FARC have defiled the forests of Guaviare, where they perform the role of a State in extracting coltan and gold, and forcibly displace the indigenous population of the region, known as the Nukak Makú.”

Professor Cante argues that steering the country toward a true, non-turbulent peace will require an effort on multiple fronts, particularly in political, economic, and social spheres. These efforts should be undertaken collectively, simultaneously, and from the perspective of a common vision. Non-predatory progress will demand frugality, a leisure-based outlook, and the preservation of the natural environment.

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In his book *Turbulent Peace, Power, and Ethics*, Cante explains attempts to understand progress based on an ecological economy and anti-consumerist thinking. “The thinkers and leaders of the degrowth philosophy advocate reducing production and consumption because excessive consumption is at the root of long-term environmental problems and social inequality,” he states.

At the present time, high rates of economic growth evoke prosperity, increased consumption and investment. Unfortunately, this also means the suffering of distant people and future generations due to the deterioration of the natural world brought on by those living today. “The exhaustion and contamination of natural resources is the inherent cost of material progress,” he affirms.



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Professor Cante stresses that we must re-think what he identifies as Colombia's vassal-state relationship with the United States. "As long as that country continues its inordinately-consumerist behavior and continues to manufacture and sell arms, there will be no let-up to the acute turmoil in different parts of the world. On the contrary, it will become even more pronounced."

In this respect, there is a fault in the worldwide peace ranking, since neither the US nor the European Union feature among the most "violent" nations, despite their wide involvement in those that are listed.

Professor Cante teaches a course at the Universidad del Rosario called Nonviolent Political Action, which refers to non-destructive but confrontational activities, to be distinguished from passive resistance. It works by impacting people on an emotional level, assaulting them, but not physically, through using crude, unembellished messages that stir and spur them to change their attitudes towards social injustices.

Peace is not an impossible dream. "It's possible to achieve virtuous collective action through voluntary social cooperation in fraternity and solidarity, as long as all or, at least, most people engage in cooperative behavior (altruism and reciprocity) to advance common goals such as the rejection of war and the preservation of nature," concludes Professor Fredy Cante. ■

We need policies that go beyond talk. It is not enough to say that we must develop alternatives for coca-cultivating peasants. We must make the decision to legalize drugs and not spray crops with chemicals that engender grave environmental consequences. It would be worth our while to promote markets where coca can be distributed legally as tea or in medicinal creams, for example.

NO MORE MINERAL EXTRACTION

In economic terms, Colombia must promote activities that do not require the extraction of natural resources. The oil example is dramatic: countries such as the United States are major consumers of both fossil fuels and illegal drugs such as heroin and cocaine, all of which contribute to turbulence around the world.

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