



**COUNTER-INSURGENT FORESTS:  
The Militarization of Conservation in the AMEM region, Colombia.**



© Federico Ríos

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**Date of Submission: 17 August 2020**

A thesis submitted to  
the Board of Examiners  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of  
Master of Arts in Conflict studies & Human Rights

**Name of Supervisor:** Dr. Luuk Slooter

**Date of Submission:** 17 August 2020

**Programme trajectory followed:** Research Project (15 ECTS) & Thesis writing (15 ECTS)

**Word Count:** 21737

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## **ABSTRACT**

Following the peace agreement signed between the FARC-EP guerrillas and the Colombian Government in 2016, deforestation in Colombia has increased exponentially. This increase was particularly significant in the AMEM (Area Manejo Especial de la Macarena) region. The Colombian government decided to launch a military campaign, called Artemisa, in April 2019 to combat the increase in deforestation in National Natural Parks. This policy is the result of the definition, for the first time in Colombian national history, of environmental degradation as a national and international security priority. Its implementation involves the continuation of violent actions against the local population stigmatized and criminalized as responsible for deforestation in the AMEM region. But it does not affect large landowners, whose capital finances deforestation in the region. This thesis examines the political implications of the implementation of this military campaign, in terms of state control of the territory.

## INTRODUCTION

On 24 November 2016, after four years of negotiations the Government of Colombia concluded a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC-EP), in La Habana. This agreement put an end to the longest civil conflict on the American continent, which lasted for over 50 years. However, conflict in the country did not end with the agreement, or rather, violence did not. The perennial presence of armed violence in a democratic regime, known as the Colombian “paradox” (Rodríguez Garavito, Rodríguez Franco and Duran Crane, 2017, p. 8) continues. As Paul Richards (2004) explains in *No Peace, No War: Anthropology of Contemporary Armed Conflict*, it is rarely possible to draw a clear line between civil conflict and peace. The author claims that it is necessary to stop considering war as a special socio-political status (or isolated event), considering that both violence and the absence of violence constitute both moments of peace and war. However, a significant change in the form of violence has taken place in Colombia since the peace agreements. This is clearly expressed in the *UN Report on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders* (March 2020), stating: “while the overall homicide rate in Colombia has continued to decline since 2011 and since the signature of the Peace Agreement (...) this decrease is in contrast to the increase in the killings of human rights defenders, including social leaders, since 2016” (p. 6)<sup>1</sup>.

Many believe that the post-agreement period is stained by the blood and violence against human and environmental rights, and their defenders. This violence appears to be supported by institutions and a government that silently watches those who commit it. The main source of fear expressed by people whom I encountered in Colombia was the State. This was expressed to me by many social workers and students during my short stay in Bogata, and backed up by the graffiti that appeared throughout the city after the national strike in March 2020. The words

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<sup>1</sup> UN Security Council. (2020). *United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/239)*. Originally published March 26, 2020 [online]. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/united-nations-verification-mission-colombia-report-secretary-general-s2020239>. (Accessed: 15 June 2020).

"murderous State" or "terrorist State" recur on the walls of Bogotá, flanked by the number of social leaders killed in the period following the signing of the peace agreement.

The State is considered by many to be a murderous institution that acts with impunity because it helps to kill anyone who opposes the expansion of the agricultural elite. It spreads panic to achieve silence. It buries the dead and does not punish or seek the perpetrators of the murders. The ghost of the alliance between the State and paramilitary troops<sup>2</sup>, responsible for 80 percent of the massacres committed during the civil conflict against the civil population, still invokes fear in many people. This is easily understandable considering that “historically, the impunity rate for murders of human rights defenders in Colombia has stood at around 95 percent” (Ibid., 8).

The collusion of paramilitary groups with the regular army is what nowadays concerns the most. This is also the focus of *Cuáles son los patrones?* (2018)<sup>3</sup>, important research funded by the Netherlands, Spain, and Colombia, with the support of international peace programs and universities researchers. Its aim is to investigate the death of social leaders in Colombia in the post-agreement period, and the State’s impunity. The report concludes that the peak of killings in 2018 coincides with the highest rates of deforestation (ibid., 16). In March 2020, The UN special rapporteur, Michel Forst, internationally voiced the severity of the situation that the country is living in the post-agreement years. “From 2016 to 30 June 2019, Colombia was the country with the highest number of murders of human rights defenders in Latin America (...). Human Rights defenders are killed and abused for keeping the peace, acting against the interests of organized

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<sup>2</sup> The relationship of paramilitary groups with the Colombian state is controversial. The *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) is the name of the national group formed in 1997 by the union of several local groups. It remained in force until 2006. In that year, after years of peace agreements with the government and demobilizations, they were finally dissolved. However, the phenomenon of paramilitarism in Colombia is not over. Many scholars have attempted to analyze the continuity, transformation, and hybridization between today's criminal groups and AUC paramilitaries. For a focused assessment e.g.: Garcia Perez, P. (2016). “La privatización de la violencia en Colombia y las AUC: de las autodefensas al paramilitarismo contrainsurgente y criminal”, *Izquierdas*(27)[online]. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4067/S0718-50492016000200009>; Zelik, R. (2015). *Paramilitarismo: violencia y transformación social, política y económica en Colombia*. Siglo del Hombre Editores [online]. Available at: <https://books.openedition.org/sdh/598?lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> CINEP. (2018). *¿Cuáles son los patrones? Asesinatos de Líderes Sociales en el Post Acuerdo*. *Cinep.org.co* [online]. Available at: <https://www.cinep.org.co/publicaciones/en/producto/cuales-son-los-patrones-asesinatos-de-lideres-sociales-en-el-post-acuerdo/>. (Accessed: 31 June 2020).

crime, illegal economic activities, corruption and illegal land holdings and for protecting their communities” (UN Security Council, 2020, p. 6).

What attracted me most in the beginning of my research, was the link between human and environmental violence. It surprised me to discover that deforestation in the Colombian Amazon rainforest had increased in the post-conflict period, and reached an all-time peak in 2018. As many international and national newspapers suggest, the rising levels of deforestation as a consequence of FARC-EP’s armistice are impressive in the AMEM region. The AMEM region is the first natural reserve declared in Colombia, and it is also where the guerrilla presence exponentially spread throughout the civil conflict. It was previously called La Macarena Natural Reserve in 1948, then expanded and transformed into AMEM (Area of Special Management of La Macarena) in 1989. This area, of 3.891,20 hectares, includes today four National Natural Parks (NNP) and 19 municipalities, in the departments of Meta and Guaviare. It is the region of convergence of the Amazonian, Andean, and Orinocience socio-biological systems. For a long time, it was considered the stronghold of the FARC-EP guerrilla, and since the signing of the 2016 Peace Agreement, it is suffering permanent deforestation. In 2018, 70 percent of all deforestation in Colombia took place in this region, while in 2017 it accounted for 65 percent of the total deforestation. In 2017, compared to 2016, deforestation increased by 106 percent<sup>4</sup>. As discovered, through the analysis of newspaper and academic articles, the increase in deforestation was a predictable, albeit underestimated scenario. Over the last years, the Colombian government signed multiple international agreements that declared its commitment to reducing deforestation: the Convention to Combat Desertification (1998) (UNCCD); the Convention on Biological Diversity (1999) (CBD); the Kyoto Protocol (2001); Paris Agreements (2016) among others. In the post-conflict period, two additional strategies were implemented to curb deforestation to zero net by 2020, then extended to 2025: the Comprehensive strategy on controlling deforestation and Forest management (2017) and the National Council to Combat Deforestation and Other Associated Environmental Crimes (2018). Despite this, the 2018-2022

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<sup>4</sup> Data on deforestation trends are published quarterly by the Colombian government institution IDEAM-Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales. <http://www.ideam.gov.co/>. (Accessed: 17 July 2020).

National Development Plan (NDP) lists the accepted deforestation index as higher (220 hectares/year) than the annual average ever reached before peace was declared.

In April 2018, with the sentence 4360, the Supreme Court of Justice ruled in favor of a group of 25 youth, who sued the Colombian Government for not protecting their right to a healthy environment. The court's decision ordered the Colombian government to preserve the Amazon rainforest by curbing deforestation and to respect its international commitments. Despite a direct order by the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJ), the government has made no effort to work with local communities to achieve these goals. Further it has not made any changes to the objectives of its NDP with regards to deforestation. In April 2019, Colombian president Duque decided to launch a military campaign, called *Artemisa* (as the ancient Greek divinity of forests) to fight against the “deforestation hemorrhage”. This campaign has been so far implemented in the National Natural Parks, but, as announced by the Colombian President, his will is to extend it to the entire country's territory. The environmental protection was framed for the first time as a national security priority, as explained by the Minister of Defence, Guillermo Botero<sup>5</sup>. In a manifesto of November 2018, 30 peasants and indigenous' organizations expressed their dissatisfaction with the posture adopted by the Colombian State, describing the latter as political stigmatization. Some months later many peasants, who had been residents of the AMEM region for many years, were arrested and accused of environmental crimes, and on different occasions their houses have been burnt. These actions were declared as human rights violations by the Colombia Jurists Association (CCJ)<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> El Espectador. (2019). “El presidente Iván Duque lanza campaña nacional para frenar la deforestación”. 8 April. [online]. Available at: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/medio-ambiente/el-presidente-ivan-duque-lanza-campana-nacional-para-frenar-la-deforestacion/>. (Accessed: 13 July 2020).

<sup>6</sup> To visit the organization's website: <https://www.coljuristas.org/>. (Accessed: 10 August 2020).

In the light of these puzzling events, I formulated the following research question: What political implications, in terms of land management and control, does the implementation of the state's policy of "militarisation of conservation" entail in the AMEM region in the post-conflict period?

The purpose of my thesis is to analyze the recent policies of conservation in the AMEM region through the lens of political ecology. This discipline studies how political and economic factors influence the environment (and its degradation), and how the control of the environment influences and reflects politics. This theoretical approach was clearly summarized in the introduction by Peluso and Lund (2011) to a volume of studies dedicated to the new frontiers of land control. The authors underline the need to investigate the changes that the modalities of territorialization, enclosure, and violent conservation are facing in the contemporary world. As they argue, in fact: "New mechanisms of land control and new actors notwithstanding, practices and technologies of governance and control, subtle or violent, are still employed to acquire, secure, and exclude others from land in intense competitions over control" (ibid., p. 668).

## **Methodology**

In this section I explain my methodology and the structure of the thesis. The epistemological approach that I have adopted for my research is, according to Mason (2018), that of critical theory, which she describes as: "life is determined through social and historical processes and power relations - researcher seeks to uncover these and question the taken-for-granted" (Mason, 2018, p. 8). This epistemological approach is consistent with the overarching theoretical framework of my research, namely that of political ecology, and more specifically with my analytical framework. This choice is consistent with my ontological position since my interest is to understand the socio-political structures of the post-conflict Colombia, analysing state environmental protection policies in the AMEM region. In particular, I am interested in investigating the "underlying mechanism" (ibid.) behind the implementation of the state's policy of "militarization of conservation", which I observe as a process, both historical and discursive.

The research methodology that I have adopted is the result of a dialogue between theory and evidence. This choice is the consequence of the impossibility to do research in Colombia due to the COVID 19 pandemic, and therefore to collect interviews or data from observation. This led me to modify my research question, that otherwise would have concerned the study of local perception and the consequences for people involved in the militarization of conservation. The theory thus represented an important component of my research, because it defined the way in which I decided to structure my thesis. In this sense, following Mason, I can argue that theory has “generated” my data (ibid., p. 22). My data collection has been, first of all, generated from deconstructing the analytical framework’s complexity. Through the study of the academic literature, I realized the existence of multiple definitions that described a similar process, i.e. the use of extraordinary and often violent means (such as the army) for the purpose of nature conservation. By theoretically breaking down the concept of “militarization of conservation” I was able to identify three concepts that I used as theoretical lenses to understand the phenomenon in Colombia. These are forest conservation (or political forest), land grabbing, and (the process of) environmental securitization. This theoretical deconstruction provided the skeleton for empirical research, and helped me in defining four subquestions: 1) How was the implementation of policies of conservation linked to State’s land management and control in the AMEM region before the 2016 peace agreement? 2) How was the adoption of the militarization of conservation legitimized in the post conflictual Colombia? 3) Which are the main consequences, in terms of political violence, of the implementation of the militarization of conservation in the AMEM region in the post conflict period? 4) Why does deforestation drastically increase in the AMEM region in the post-conflict period?

At first, I was reading a considerable number of newspaper articles on the theme of increased deforestation in the post-conflict period and on the Artemisia campaign, from its foundation to various episodes of its implementation. I focused in particular on the analysis of Colombian newspaper articles, through the online archive of the two major national newspapers (El Espectador and El Tiempo). I then reviewed various international articles, published in particular

in Mongabay-LATAM<sup>7</sup>, but also on European and American newspapers. In addition to that, I looked for political statements of the local grassroots movements regarding the implementation of this campaign, through blogs, Facebook pages, and videos published on youtube. I then began to channel the knowledge gained and relate it to theory. I divided the thesis by trying to answer the sub-questions. I wanted to answer the first question in the first chapter. The second and third in chapter two. And the fourth in chapter three.

In the first chapter, I used the concept of “political forest” (Peluso and Vandergeest, 2001) as a theoretical lens. This concept was coined by the two authors to describe a historical division of the political processes of forest conservation in Southeast Asia from the late colonial period to the present day. To apply this concept to the Colombian case study, I searched for data that helped to reconstruct the history of the State's action in the AMEM region. I used exclusively academic sources and historical research on the region funded by the *Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica* (CNMH)<sup>8</sup>. This is the Colombian national organization that was founded after the peace agreement to increase the national knowledge of the civil conflict. Academic research on the region is scarce, due to the violence that affected the region during the civil conflict and the presence of guerrillas in the forests, which made it impossible or very complex to access for both human and scientific and biological scientists. I selected the few articles that concerned the implementation of the State's environmental conservation policies from a social perspective. I found the ethnographic works by Ruiz Serna (2003) and Espinosa (2003, 2006) particularly interesting and useful.

In the second chapter, I used the Copenhagen School's conceptualization of the environmental securitization process. I have analyzed the process of discursive construction of environmental degradation and in particular the increase in deforestation as a national security issue in Colombia. I have selected three particularly significant political and discursive events of the post-conflict period. The 4360 sentence of the Colombian Supreme Court of Justice, the

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<sup>7</sup> Mongabay-LATAM is a website with news and information about conservation and environmental science. Available at: <https://es.mongabay.com/>. (Accessed: 7 July 2020).

<sup>8</sup> To access their publications: <https://centrodememoriahistorica.gov.co/contexto/>. (Accessed: 12 August 2020).

President Duque's presentation of the Artemisa military campaign in April 2019, and a discourse by the former Colombian President Santos on the increase of deforestation. I thus compared the actual strategies for nature conservation with those implemented by the Colombian State before the 2016 peace agreement in the same region. To do this, I used academic literature and newspaper articles from that time (2005/2007). I've then analyzed statements and interviews extrapolated from newspaper articles, videos, communiqués of the grassroots associations (ANZORC, ASCAL-g), and complaints of human rights violations reports of human rights violations carried out by the Commission of Colombian Jurists (CCJ).

In the third chapter, I used the concept of land grabbing as a theoretical lens. The analysis of newspaper articles (both national and international) and academic articles, led me to define the increase in deforestation in the post-conflict period as a land grabbing process. Academic studies on this topic are still scarce. I, therefore, took into account all the sources that I have found by searching on Google Scholar and throughout the bibliographies of the articles already analyzed. I have also analyzed land redistribution policies, and in more detail the Integral Rural Reform (IRR) contained in the 2016 Peace Agreement, and the National Development Policy (NDP) 2018/2022. I have completed my analysis through the use of academic sources of political ecology, related to land grabbing in Colombia and the historical role of the State in this process.

## **1. THE MILITARIZATION OF CONSERVATION: A THEORETICAL REVIEW**

The analytical framework that I have chosen for my research is “militarization of conservation”, or green militarization. It was defined, for the first time by Lunstrum (2014) as: “the use of military and paramilitary personnel, training, technologies, and partnerships in the pursuit of conservation efforts” (p. 817). This modality of conservation is a recent phenomenon, that is garnering a complex character and an international echo today, becoming an “intensifying pattern of militarization transforming conservation practice around the world” (Lunstrum, 2014,

p. 817). This intensification is also reflected in the academic community, and more specifically in the field of political ecology. This phenomenon has been studied and defined in many ways by various authors. And more specifically: green militarization (Duffy 2014; Lunstrum 2014); green violence (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2016); war by conservation (Duffy, 2016); accumulation by securitization (Massé and Lunstrum, 2016). These diverging definitions highlight different and convergent aspects of the same process, whose main character is the resort to physical and structural violence in the disguise of nature conservation.

### **1.1. Coercive conservation**

Although it is assuming increasing prominence in the contemporary world, this phenomenon is not entirely new, but it is grounded in a modality of “coercive conservation” (Peluso 1993) or “fortress conservation” (Brockington, 2002; Brockington, Duffy and Igoe, 2008). Coercive conservation began to spread in the global South in the 1980s (Peluso 1993). Since then, several international pacts have been signed for nature conservation, that “assume that nation-States have the capacity, internal legitimacy, and the will to manage resources within their territorial boundaries” (Peluso, 1993, p. 199). Many States embraced Western environmental rhetoric to extend State control over vast areas of the country. and this “has led to a militarization of the resource *conservation* process” (ibid.).

The distinctive aspect of this modality of conservation is its spatial dimension (Nash, 2018). Coercive conservation acts primarily through the delimitation of natural space with barriers and boundaries. These define an inside and an outside, and therefore which natural space deserves to be protected, and which can continue to be the subject of agricultural practices or the extraction of natural resources (Peluso 1993; Peluso and Vandergeest, 2001). Conservation results in the expropriation of land from the local population, which is included in the new boundaries of protected natural reserves. Instead of encouraging community conservation practices, these boundaries serve as a barrier of exclusion for the local population which is then expelled from their land (Brockington, 2002). Conservation thus has become a practice of government and control of the territory that has the features of an imperialist neo-colonialism (Peluso, 1993;

Brockington, 2002), supported by Western environmentalist discourse, and applied as a form of violent expansion of territorial sovereignty by "developing" States.

## **1.2. Environmental securitization**

Over the last decade, there has been “a significant break from earlier phases of fortress conservation and war for biodiversity” (Duffy, 2016, p. 238). This shift stems from the new framing of environmental issues as emergency situations from the 1990’s onwards (Peluso and Vandergeest, 2011; Lombard 2016; Ybarra 2017), and as national or international security issues driven by discourses of war (Massé and Lunstrum, 2016). This process, called environmental securitization (Waever, 1995; Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998), is a necessary precondition for the public legitimization of the possibility to adopt extraordinary means, such as military and paramilitary ones, in order to preserve the environment. As Deudney (1990) shows, there has been a growing tendency to link environmental problems to internal security issues in both the liberal and conservative speeches in the United States. Famous is also Gorbachev's discourse at the UN General Assembly, when he suggested that “the threat from the sky is no longer missiles but global warming” (Harris, 2001, p. 122, cited in Trombetta, 2007, p. 5). For the first time in 1992, in a publication funded by the World Bank, global methodological standards were established on how to address a growing problem of global security: the environment (Peluso, 1993). A passage of this text explicitly summarizes this position, when stating that: “The military is concerned primarily with national security, and it is increasingly apparent that many threats to national security have their roots in inappropriate ways and means of managing natural resources” (ibid., p. 215). As Waever (1995) argues “the obvious reason for putting environmental issues into the security agenda is the possible magnitude of the threats posed, and the need to mobilize urgent and unprecedented responses to them”. (Waever, 1995, p. 58). Indeed, environmental security can “range from relatively concrete things, such as the survival of individual species or types of habitat, to much fuzzier, large scale issues, such as the maintenance of the planetary climate and biosphere” (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998, p. 23).

## **1.3. COIN strategies and violence**

The overlap of the environmental issue with security practices and discourses has been analyzed by multiple authors (Ojeda 2012; Lunstrum 2014; Duffy 2014, 2016; Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2016; Marijnen and Verweijen, 2016; Marijnen 2017; Ybarra 2017) with regard to the combination of conservation practices, counter-insurgency strategies, and increased violence, especially in conflict or post-conflict environments. The global discourse that labels the environment as a matter of international security is what legitimizes, according to many authors, the resort to “green violence”. This is “the deployment of violent instruments and tactics towards the protection of nature and various ideas and aspirations related to nature conservation” (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2016, p. 2), which often turns into “green wars” (Ybarra, 2017). Conservation is today, according to Ybarra (2017) “ a global project that authorizes violence in protected areas” (p. 6). Marijnen (2017) instead, highlights how it is international development programs that induce the use of violent instruments in nature conservation.

A common assumption is that the growth in physical violence reflects “a rise in violent rhetoric sometimes advocating extreme forms of punishment for those committing wildlife crimes” (Büscher and Fletcher, 2018, p. 105). However, the people living near or inside the forests are those who more continuously suffer the consequences of this violence (Verweijen and Marijnen, 2016). This violence results in actions such as coercive patrolling, surveillance, intimidation, against local inhabitants, that are often framed as enemies of nature or allies of those who commit wildlife crimes (Verweijen and Marijnen, 2016; Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2016; Dunlap and Fairhead, 2014). When violence does not affect the local inhabitants physically, it does so in a structural (Galtung 1969) or symbolic way (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970). And put them under a regime of “violent enclosures” (Dressler and Guieb, 2015). As coercive conservation, the militarization of conservation results in the confinement of natural areas, which restricts the use of natural resources that are central to people's lives, and their access to land. As Verweijen and Marijnen (2016) argued “both counterinsurgency and conservation are driven by framings that draw boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate forest dwellers, legitimate and illegitimate resource and land use, and legitimate and illegitimate forms of violence” (p. 3).

As Duffy (2016) underlines, in the late neoliberal global phase security and counter-insurgency (COIN) strategies appear as synonymous. This global tendency, which intensified after 9/11, is also reflected in environmental protection, and illustrated by the “fortress approach to conservation” (Duffy, 2016, p. 239), through a “much fuller integration of conservation objectives with global security concerns” (ibid.). The transformation of conservation modalities reflects an increasing convergence between the international security paradigm with the fight against an internal enemy, or the terrorists (Duffy, 2016). This determines the adoption and experimentation of more and more complex control technologies, such as trap cameras and drones (Duffy, 2014). And the intensification of violence against those who commit environmental crimes, which are increasingly accused of terrorism, or framed as internal enemies (Duffy, 2016, p. 241). As Ferradas (2004) notes “environmental concerns are increasingly becoming conflated with other current forms of securitization, such as those concerned with terrorism, popular unrest, and narcotraffic” (p. 420). In the Global South, in particular, it is increasing the “war by conservation”, which was defined as “a new phase of conservation which combines anxieties about global security, with environmental concerns and counter-insurgency (COIN) techniques” (Duffy, 2016, p. 238).

The link between conservation and counterinsurgency is a global, western funded, discursive trend. However their reciprocity is especially evident in conflictual or post-conflictual contexts, where it is “normal” for States to embrace counterinsurgent practices and logics (Duffy et al., 2015). As Dutta (2020) notes “conservation work in politically disturbed areas where counterinsurgency work is being undertaken” (p. 2) Conservation is often used to legitimize the continuation of counterinsurgency actions in territories controlled by rebel groups (Woods, 2019). As it is in the case of Guatemala's *Maya Biosphere Reserve* (Ybarra 2012; Devine, 2014), where the State is implementing COIN strategies in the pursuit of conservation, which are very similar to those adopted during the country's civil war against leftist armed groups. Violent conservation results in the reserve area in forced evictions of peasants, increased army presence, the creation of military outposts, and the discursive construction of the ecological predator (the peasants) as an internal enemy (Devine, 2014, p. 985). Similarly, in Colombia, the use of armed

forces to protect the *Tayrona National Natural Park* is closely linked to the use of counterinsurgent strategies. This is anything but casual, because it is inscribed in the political and economic history of the country (Bocarejo and Ojeda, 2016, p. 177). Violence in this case results in a racialized division of the population. While indigenous are included in the touristic industry, peasants are erased and criminalized, as they were "natural" enemies for environmental protection (Ojeda, 2012, p. 371).

#### **1.4. Profit and conservation in neoliberalism**

Many authors (Ojeda 2012; Bocarejo and Ojeda, 2016; Massé and Lunstrum, 2016; Büscher and Fletcher, 2018) are interested in researching the links between conservation and economic profit, whether it is a cause or a product of nature conservation. This relationship is inscribed in the neoliberal change that has affected global society over the past 30 years. The moral ideology of conservation has been transformed since the 1990s, moving from an imperialist to a neoliberal paradigm (Brockington and Duffy, 2010). The laws of the market are those that today govern the discourses and practices of conservation (Neumann, 1998, 2004; Büscher and Whande, 2007), and define new modes of conservation on a global scale. The new paradigm of conservation remains anchored to an imperialist dimension, because “conservation discourse revolves around the subjugation of the so-called ‘developing’ world by the ‘developed’ world” (Nash, 2018, p. 15). While previously the subjects of conservation were the States, today they compete and clash in the conservation process with private actors, environmental corporations, international funders and environmental NGOs (Vandergeest and Peluso, 2015; Devine et al., 2018). In the contemporary world, capitalism is taking on a green dimension (Ojeda 2012), which arises from the will and need to profit from what remains from the destruction of nature by capital (Büscher and Fletcher, 2018). As Ojeda (2012) explains “capital is supposed to be the most effective ally in saving the world from the environmental destruction it has done so much to produce” (p. 359). What has been destroyed before, through the extraction of natural resources, now needs to be preserved, through a power that is characterized by its increasing intensification. Intensification, as a concept, resumes Nealon's interpretation (2008) of the meaning that Foucault gave to this term, in its study of power, which is the power tendency to increase until the point to result in

saturation and total penetration (in Büscher and Fletcher, 2018, p. 106). As Büscher and Fletcher (2018) argued, intensification of pressure could thus be the most appropriate overarching framework to emphasize the increasingly central role of environmental and conservation concerns within the global political economy as a whole. This intensification is given by the total pervasiveness of the economy on the political and cultural discourses.

Western cultural hegemony speeches influence processes of environmental securitization by constituting nature as having economic value, as an endangered commodity that must be safeguarded (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2016). Environment as a threat is “imbricated within Eurocentric notions of ‘wilderness’, and the corresponding desire to territorialize conservation spaces that are insulated from human impacts, habitation, and influence” (Holmes and Cavanagh, 2016, p. 201). This desire also converts conservation into a source of profit. This profit comes from processes of confinement, territorialization, and privatization in the name of conservation (Ferradas, 2004). And it is reflected in the proliferation of natural parks and protected areas on a global scale (Igoe and Brockington, 2007). This phenomenon has been defined as “green grabbing” by Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones (2012): “the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends in emergent processes of commodification and privatization for capitalist networks” (p. 238). As Kelly and Ybarra (2016) argue, Fairhead et al. consider the expropriation of land as a consequence of the global commodification that appears a common socio-political feature in late neoliberalism (p. 172).

Ecotourism and the creation of natural private paradises are the main material implications of the links between profit and conservation (Devine and Ojeda, 2017). Which is often what justifies the use of violent means in biological environments that have been turned into nature reserves. Security, and safe tourism, are increasingly becoming slogans that hide great economic investments and contribute to the legitimization of militarised nature conservation interventions (Devine, 2014; Lunstrum, 2014; Marijnen and Verweijnen, 2016). As Massè and Lunstrum (2016) argues: “namely, in cases where conservation challenges are framed as security issues and treated as such, and where conservation and related tourism development are realized by security actors and logics, we are increasingly seeing opportunities for accumulation” (p. 230). The

“threesome relationship” between securitization, accumulation and conservation was summarized with the concept of “accumulation by securitization”, described as “a dynamic in which capital accumulation is enabled by practices and related logics of security in ways that often provoke dispossession, with such dispossession itself further enabling accumulation” (ibid., p. 230). Ojeda (2012) defines this process, which she studied in the *Tayrona National Natural Park*, as the “double strategy of touristification and militarization” (p. 371).

### **1.5. Conservation and territorialization**

The militarization of conservation has profound political and economic repercussions. In order to increase the knowledge on the phenomenon of militarization of conservation, it is necessary to understand the way in which it takes place, what economic factors it implicates, how it leads to an increase in political violence in conflictual or post-conflictual contexts. Moreover, it is important to study how it is linked to a process of State territorialisation (Duffy et al., 2019). The latter is the least studied aspect in academic literature. Therefore, it is one of the primary ambitions of my research to explore precisely this aspect. As Busset and Gautier (2014) argues: “the concept of “territory” and the related terms of “territoriality” and “territorialization” are relatively understudied” (p. 2) in political ecology. In line with Peluso and Vandergeest (2015, p. 387) and Busset and Gautier (2014, p. 2) I find the definition offered by Robert Sack, as the most useful for my research. He defines territorialization as an “attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area” (Sack, 1986: 19). So that, “territorialization is about excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, and about controlling what people do and their access to natural resources within those boundaries” (Vandergeest and Peluso, 2015, p. 388).

The relationship between territorialization and conservation is little studied among critical scholars of political ecology. However, there is a debate on the effects that the implementation of conservation militarisation has on State control of the territory. Or rather, whether this is weakened or strengthened as a result of this policy. Different authors highlighted (Peluso, 1993; Brockington 2002; Lunstrum 2014; Dressler and Guieb, 2015; Bocajero and Ojeda, 2016;

Marijnen, 2018) that the spatial control is a direct consequence of the process of conservation of natural space and natural resources by violent means. In the contemporary context of the neoliberal economy as a global political paradigm, however, conservation is implemented and financed by the State, together with multiple national and international private actors collaborating or competing with it. Lunstrum (2018) focuses on how conservation NGOs and private funds, instead of reducing the State power, reinforce it. This permits to re-think the State as the main actor in the process of economic and political power accumulation. As Lunstrum, other authors “move beyond the false binary of globalized markets and local biomes to think through the ways that global conservation interventions serve to violently instantiate national territoriality” (Kelly and Ybarra, 2016, p. 172). The opposite opinion is held by Marijnen (2018), who notes that the militarization of the conservation of the *Virunga National Park* by private actors leads the inhabitants to perceive the authority of a “State within a State”, or an extra-State militarization (ibid., p. 791). Woods (2019) instead, explicitly claims that the use of militarized conservation is a means adopted by the State to expand its territorial control in peripheral areas controlled by armed rebel groups, or inhabited by populations in conflict with the central administration.

In the Colombian case, the process of territorialisation has been studied in relation to the adoption of conservation practices financed by international investors, in particular by REDD+<sup>9</sup>. Conservation, through the payment of ecological services to ethnic communities, and the establishment of new National Natural Parks (the *Chiribiquete National Park* in particular), is analysed as an attempt by the State to increase control over the territory in the post-agreement period (Heine et al., 2020). Similarly, prior to the peace agreement, the promotion of eco-tourism in *Tayrona National Park* was analysed as an opportunity for the State to expand control in territories controlled by armed groups (Bocarejo and Ojeda, 2016). However, there are no academic studies analyzing the State's environmental conservation practices since the beginning of the Artemisa campaign, and therefore since the declaration of the environment as a national security priority. Furthermore, there are no studies in the field of political ecology dealing with

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<sup>9</sup> Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+). For more information: <http://www.fao.org/redd/overview/en/> (Accessed: 12 August 2020).

the region I have investigated. This region is particularly interesting because it was an emblematic arena of the civil conflict, it hosted the first nature reserve that was declared in Colombia and today includes four national natural parks.

### **1.6. A theoretical reconceptualization**

The purpose of my research is to broaden the theoretical understanding of a growing phenomenon at the international level, through the analysis of the militarization process of conservation in the AMEM region in post-conflict Colombia. I am particularly interested in filling the gap that exists in the study of the relationship between the militarization process of conservation and the process of State territorialization (in conflict or post-conflict contexts).

In order to broaden the understanding in political terms of the phenomenon of the militarization of conservation, I first of all provide a conceptual reconceptualization. As observed, the phenomenon of conservation has been defined in many ways, since 2014. In detail, the definitions found through the analysis of the academic literature on the subject are:

*Green militarization*: “the use of military and paramilitary (military-like) actors, techniques, technologies, and partnerships in the pursuit of conservation”(Lunstrum, 2014, p. 817).

*Green violence*: the deployment of violent instruments and tactics towards the protection of nature and various ideas and aspirations related to nature conservation (Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2016, p. 2).

*War by conservation*: A new phase of conservation which combines anxieties about global security, with environmental concerns and counter-insurgency (COIN) techniques (Duffy, 2016, p. 238).

*Accumulation by securitization*: A dynamic in which capital accumulation is enabled by practices and related logics of security in ways that often provoke (land) dispossession, with such dispossession itself further enabling accumulation. (Massé and Lunstrum, 2016, p. 230)

Through the superimposition of these definitions, I propose a new one that includes different practices and characteristics of the conservation process, and that once broken down will allow me to analyze the process of militarization of conservation in Colombia. In line with Duffy et al. (2019), among the various names I have decided to adopt the “militarization of conservation”, “because of the military origins and models that inform and guide these interventions “(ibid., p. 66).

*Militarization of conservation*: a violent model of conservation, in which the use of military and paramilitary (military) actors, techniques, technologies, and COIN strategies is legitimized through a process of securitization. It is often provoked by (land) dispossession, with dispossession itself allowing further accumulation. (My definition).

To understand and analyze the process of militarization of conservation I use three concepts, which constitute the theoretical framework of my thesis, and that I explain in the next three chapters. Here I offer a brief presentation and an explanation of the usefulness of these concepts for my research. The concepts that I use are: 1) Political forest, 2) (the process of) securitization, 3) land grabbing.

- 1) The concept of “political forest” was coined by Peluso and Vandergeest (2001) to describe the specific conservation methods that concern the ecological space of forests from the post-colonial period to the present day. I decided to use this concept because it refers to the conservation of the biological space of the AMEM region, which is the forest. This concept is part of the research and conceptualization of conservation within the theoretical discipline of political ecology. The authors' attention is therefore focused on the study of how forest management influences and is influenced by political and economic factors, both national and international. This concept allows me to analyze the conservation practices of the region in the AMEM region in a historical dimension and in relation to the State interest and will to control the territory.

2) As observed from the analysis of the academic literature, the process of securitization normally legitimizes the militarization of conservation. As Balzacq et al. (2016) argue: “Ordinarily, scholars refer to securitization theory in singular, assuming that we can ferret out a unique theory that the concept of ‘securitization’ really corresponds to. In the literature, however, there coexist various theories of securitization” (p. 103). In analyzing the process of discursive construction of deforestation as a national security priority of Colombian national policy, I decided to refer to the "unique theory" of securitization. That is, that of the Copenhagen school, which first formulated it. In the words of Williams (2003) the Copenhagen school has provided “one of the most innovative, productive and yet controversial avenues of research in contemporary security studies” (p. 511), by defining security as a “speech act” (Waever, 1995).

3) As mentioned in the literature review, many authors have studied the cause and effect relationship that exists between conservation militarisation and land accumulation. This relationship is well explained by Massé and Lunstrum (2016) through the concepts of land dispossession and accumulation. However, critical scholars, including many scholars of political ecology (Igoe and Brockington, 2007; Brockington and Duffy, 2010; Borrás et al., 2011; Fairhead, Leach and Schoons, 2012; Hall, 2013) have made extensive use of the concepts of primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession to analyze the global land grab (Hall, 2013) and the ways in which this relates to the new modalities of conservation (Massè and Lunstrum, 2016). As Massè and Lunstrum explains: “The concepts utility rests in their ability to capture a process whereby land and resources are enclosed and privatized and how this frequently leads to the dispossession of rural populations and concentrated accumulation of capital in the hands of a few” (ibid., p. 229). The concept of land/ green grabbing is then presented in the last chapter to explain the process of accumulation in relation to the increase in deforestation (against which the Artemisa military campaign was

launched), referring to the concepts of primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession.

## **2. LA MACARENA: A POLITICAL FOREST**

This chapter is the presentation of the research case study, the AMEM region. This presentation takes place through a historical contextualization of the region, in relation to the role that the State has assumed as an agent of natural conservation, colonization, and control of the territory. In this area of the country, the State has played a coercive role towards the inhabitants, often using repressive violence, and at the same time, it has been characterized by its institutional absence. The history of the region is illustrated through the use of the concept of “political Forest” coined by Peluso and Vadersgeest. After introducing the concept, I proceed to divide the history of the region into four periods. This chronological division is what the authors outline to describe the political phases of the forests of Southeast Asia, their object of research, in relation to national and international conservation policies. The first three periods are analyzed in detail in this chapter. The fourth period, that of contemporaneity, is instead only introduced, being the subject of analysis in the following two chapters.

### **2.1. Political Forest: A theoretical introduction**

Vandergeest and Peluso coined the term “political forests” to highlight that forests are not independently existing physical entities by themselves; rather, they are “produced through politics” (2015, p. 173). The authors, in fact, argue that: “political forests produce and are products of particular political-ecological relations, congealed and convergent in material, ideological, discursive and institutional relations as well as claims by States or other governing

bodies” (ibid., p. 162). This historical process has been organized by the authors in four “non-exclusive and overlapping periods” (Devine et al., 2018, p. 3), from the late colonial period to the present day. The first period, which goes from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to 1930, is that of “territorial colonialism” (Vandergeest and Peluso, 2015, p. 167). The second and third periods overlap chronologically, running from 1945 to 1990. However, they are characterized by divergent trends, and therefore distinguished by the authors. The exploitation of resources and conservation are combined, in this historical phase, with counter-insurgent policies, respectively the result of US global economic hegemony and the pervasive anti-communist paradigm of the Cold War. The fourth period, the least developed by the two authors, is the one from the end of the Cold War to the present day. While the two researchers studied the forests of Southeast Asia, the division into periods provided by the two authors is not perfectly matching with that of the AMEM region. It offers, in any case, a theoretical conceptualization useful to reflect on the State policies of conservation and territorialization of the Colombian State in the AMEM region from the 1930s until today. To define the AMEM forests as political spaces, as Devine et al. (2018) write referring to Guatemala, is therefore useful in order to understand both the increase in deforestation that occurs in the region today and the State policy of militarization of conservation, as the result of a long history of violence.

## **2.2. The first period: between 1930 and 1948**

The definition of forests as an object of legislation played a key role in the development of cultural projects of State legitimation and new forms of land control (Peluso and Vandergeest, 2001: 763). The first period is characterized by professionalization and regulation of natural spaces (ibid.), according to common logics, but through specific and local modalities (ibid., 2006a). In the late or post-colonial period there was “the institutionalization of forest management as a technology of State power” (Peluso and Vandergeest, 2001, p. 762). The natural territory was defined as a private (State) property. Scientific knowledge was applied to nature to define its value. Resources were numbered and taxed (ibid.). The inhabitants’ practices were transformed into rights, or criminalized (ibid., p. 766). In this period the categorization of

natural space as an object of conservation, through exclusion (what is not a forest) and inclusion (what is a forest), was gaining ground (Vandergeest and Peluso, 2015, p. 163). The adjacent excluded natural space was used as spaces of natural resources extraction (rubber in particular) or for the cultivation of specific crops (cocoa, coffee, tea). In this period, economic exploitation and embryonic forms of conservation are described as forms of civilization.

The forests of the AMEM region were, in this historical phase, objects of territorial conquest, deforestation, and extraction of natural resources (in particular rubber). The first period begins with the settlement of the white colonizers and a process of deforestation and extraction of natural resources in the 1930s. The State's action was mainly aimed at the productive recovery of vast areas of the country inhabited by indigenous peoples, not subjected to central government policies. The exploitation of natural resources and territorial conquest coincided at this stage with the idea of civilization and progress. Private rubber companies, of which the *Rubber Company* is the best known, were subsidized by the State to extend its control over the territory and make it productive (López Löffsner, 2018, p. 56). It was the beginning of a cycle defined as “colonization-conflict-colonization”, which affected vast regions of rural Colombia, but explicitly characterized the region between the department of Caquetà, Guaviare and Meta (Fajardo, in Molano et al. 1989). This cycle describes the close relationship between forms of violence and processes of territorial conquest that has characterized Colombian history from the 1930s until today (ibid.). In this period, the conflict was between white settlers and natives, and violence was exerted against the latter through forms of submission, or through physical elimination or exploitation of their labor force. This was the moment in which the agrarian structure has changed with respect to the colonial period. Before that, in fact, “the *hacienda* (large estate), that was a patent heir of colonial institutions, continued to dominate social, political and economic life after independence” (Thomson, 2011, p. 17). From this moment on, the State became instead the promoter of the territorial conquest, financing peasants and private companies for the acquisition of new lands. The confinement and the definition of the natural space as protected did not take place in Colombia during this historical phase, but shortly after.

### **2.3. The second period: between 1948 and 2001**

The second period is that of "forestry for development" (Vandergeest and Peluso, 2015, p. 170). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its Forestry Division have been decisive at this stage in giving a principle of global homogeneity to conservation policies and in defining the biological canons for the protection of animal and plant species (ibid., p. 168). Through these actions, economic development was affirmed as a way to reconfigure the natural space of forests. The biological form of these spaces became an object of global political interest, transcending national rules and borders. In this period hybrid governmental practices were created to govern natural spaces, from the union of global and local norms, the product of the interaction of European forest models, American ecological theories, site-specific ecologies (Peluso and Vandergeest, 2006b, p. 360). "FAO forestry practices, institutional developments, and discursive strategies contributed to a transnational/universal discourse of forestry and development, which picked up where the colonial-era civilisational discourses left off" (ibid., p. 374). Forests become "a development enterprise based on State accumulation" (Peluso and Vandergeest, 2006a, p. 32), in which the ecological discipline collides with the extractive one (ibid., p. 40). The exploitation of resources and conservation work together also at this stage, but are united through the concept of development.

In the AMEM region, the government traced the boundaries of the nature reserve during this period, while it continued to subsidize the colonization of new lands around it. Those policies were influenced by the global pressure for the economic development of remote forest areas (and by the political repression of leftist groups). Conservation accompanies economic development. This, in practice, however, represented only an attempt by the State to impose its authority in a territory from which it remained absent as an institutional actor. During this phase, another fundamental aspect outlined the State's policies, namely the repressive practices against the new settlers, who proclaimed themselves "independent republics". This repression was strongly linked to the birth of the FARC-EP as an armed group of political struggle. The conflict between

these inhabitants, or settlers, and the State also passed through environmental conservation. While the State didn't show any kind of cooperation with the new inhabitants, they were demanding independence and the possibility of political self-organization.

### *2.3.1. Between repression and political self-organization*

In the AMEM region, the relationship between violence and occupation that characterized the first period continued over the next two decades. However, the causes and forms of violence that it produced were changing. In fact, the relationship between colonization and violence was no longer the result of a civilization project, but the consequence of political struggles. The war between conservatives and liberals for political power passed to history under the name of *Violencia* (1946/1964), and caused over 20,000 deaths and the displacement of over 2 million people from their lands (Reyes, 2009). "The ruling Conservative party used police and military forces to terrorize liberals and communists (...) but gradually the violence became increasingly class-based; pitting landlords against peasants" (Thomson, 2011, p. 20). This historical phase produced one of the largest migratory processes of the 20th century, and thus the colonization of new lands by peasants fleeing political violence or State repression (CNMH, 2017, p. 32). In the AMEM region, Molano (1987, 1989) distinguishes between two distinct processes of colonization. Those who arrived from the *Arari* river, fleeing from the war between liberals and conservative, from 1946 to 1955, and those from *Guayabero*, in the "columns of march", escaping from military repression since 1955.

The geographical conformation of the territory (which is difficult to reach even today) and the high concentration of people fleeing military violence, facilitated the creation of autonomous and community-managed territories, called "independent republics". The new inhabitants were mostly people without economic means and escaping political violence (Ferro and Uribe, 2002, p. 62). A strong spirit of community and independence developed between them, along with the feeling of distance from the central government. Doña Pancha, an ancient inhabitant of La Macarena, interviewed in 2013, recounts:

*“When we arrived here, one survived thanks to the help of the neighbors and everyone here helped each other because here there was no money to pay for a day's work. We didn't have any money (...). We came with what we needed to open the farm and we only had the morning sun to work. (...). And when a new neighbor arrived, one of us would help him with the money supply while he was setting up”* (CNMH, 2017, p. 34. My translation).

During the second phase of “La Violencia”, known as *Violencia tardía* (1965-1973), these territories suffered strong government repression (CNMH, 2017, p. 17). The State’s military action was particularly concentrated on the repression of these forms of social self-organization, which soon evolved into politics, and then into armed resistance against the State. According to many critics, it was the strong and violent State offensive against these communities that transformed the peasant self-defense organization into a guerrilla movement, the FARC-EP (CNMH, 2013, p. 123).

### *2.3.2. La Macarena, the natural reserve*

In the meantime, the State was trying to impose itself as an environmental authority in the region. *La Macarena* was declared the first nature reserve in Colombia in 1948, and the new inhabitants were consequently defined as illegal by the Colombian State (Ruiz 2006, p. 2; Ruiz-serna, 2003, p. 190; CNMH, 2017, p. 14). The 1959 law 2 established that the only permitted activities in the natural reserves were forestry and scientific investigation (López Loffsner, 2018, p. 57). Therefore the State didn't provide any roads, schools and hospitals in the area, since it has been declared as a natural reserve. The only authorities representing the central government were the environmental institutions, but they were mostly acting as repressive agents, entering in the farms and burning or destroying fences and tools (Ruiz Serna, 2003, p. 190). The population was claiming at that moment for greater decision-making and organizational autonomy. The State's environmental management, instead, has remained vertical and not cooperative in its practices and everyday effects in *La Macarena* (Espinosa, 2006; Ciro, 2018). Over the decades, formal illegality has led to growing tension between the State and the population. In addition to conservation policies, the colonization of areas adjacent to the recently

declared natural reserve was subsidized. The UN, the Colombian Minister of Agriculture, and the Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute (INCORA) were trying to combine economic development through the expansion of the agricultural frontier, with the fight against the newborn leftist armed group (Esquivel Triana, 1998, p. 122; CNMH, 2013, p. 132).

### *2.3.3. Environmental self-management and coca crops*

During this period the first attempts at political self-organization and environmental conservation were established. Many rules of cohabitation, including many environmental ones, were established by the FARC-EP guerrillas, and the JACs (popular action meetings). These were popular bodies that to all intents and purposes played an administrative, legislative, and institutional role in the region. They were not mechanically subjugated to FARC-EP, but in a collaborative relationship with them. And together they created an independent customary legislative code, which also served to regulate the territory with environmental policies (Espinosa, 2003, p. 6). They mostly defined the type and quantity of natural resources that were permitted to be extracted via activities such as fishing, agriculture, and tree cutting (Ruiz-serna, 2003: 192). As Morales (1989) reports: “The guys have managed to organize the population, to substitute the coca crops; they have also managed to get fishing back into the rivers, to balance the management of the forest and even of the reserve itself” (cited in Enciso Rueda, 1990, p. 151. My translation). The cultivation of illegal crops, and the extraction of natural resources (timber, gold, rubber, quinine, wood) were the most prolific and popular productive activities in the region (Esquivel Triana, 1998, p. 120). The acidic Amazonian soil, and the flooding of the rivers *Ariari* and *Guayabero* made traditional agriculture difficult, as well as the isolation of roads made trade impossible.

After a brief period of mass marijuana production, it was replaced by the cultivation of coca (since 1978). The FARC-EP started to regulate this trade, because they had vested interests in it due to the economic benefits and an undisputed territorial military control that it brought them (Cirio 2018, p. 118, Thoumi 1997 in López Loffsner, 2018, p. 62). A leader of the region explained to *El Espectador*:

*“Already in the 1980s, coca cultivation had spread, swept away peasant crops and created an economic base that allowed the imposition of its own tax system, called gramaje, charged as a voluntary or compulsory contribution to settlers. The economic funds of the FARC were rapidly strengthened. And so did its troops, its armament and its social and political influence”* (El Espectador, 2020, February 26. My translation)<sup>10</sup>.

The first economic crisis came after a short period, due to the intervention of the Colombian government and the USA against drug trafficking. Thousands of peasants marched for the first time in 1983, reminding the country of their presence and asking the State for infrastructural improvements, and the construction of schools and health posts (López Löffsner, 2018: 63). The cultivation of coca was described by peasants as a necessity, due to the impossibility of other forms of agriculture and the lack of infrastructure necessary for their marketing. It was only at that time that the nation realized the existence of groups of peasants that inhabited that distant and unknown region (Ferro and Uribe, 2002). The pervasive presence of the guerrillas, the absence of state institutions and the cultivation of coca as the peasants’ main activity, gave shape to the image that until today is associated with the region and its inhabitants. Since that moment, the region began to be universally considered as the headquarters of the “narco guerrilla”, and the inhabitants as settlers, which were occupying the forest, and were cultivating coca crops. This categorization grows in the following years, until today.

#### **2.4. The third period: between 2002 and 2016**

The Cold War period represents the period during which forests were attributed to a clearer political connotation (Peluso and Vandergeest 2011a, p. 254). In this period, forests were described as hideouts for dissident armed groups and were named jungles, synonymous with political violence (Peluso and Vandergeest 2011a, 2011b). Representing them as “jungles”,

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<sup>10</sup> Arley Bolanos, E. (2020). “Petróleo, terratenientes y colonos: la disputa por la tierra en La Macarena”. *El Espectador*, 26 February [online]. Available at: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/territorio/petroleo-terratienientes-y-colonos-la-disputa-por-la-tierra-en-la-macarena-articulo-906409>. (Accessed: 12 July 2020)

allowed the development of geographical and political imaginaries used to justify State violence, and generate territorial control (Peluso and Vandergeest 2011a, p. 254). The counterinsurgent militarization was normally accompanied by an economic productivist re-appropriation of the jungles, to which a recolonization or reorganization of the space follows. The ancient inhabitants, categorized as guerrillas, were replaced. The socio-environmental configuration of these spaces was radically transformed, and “some became production forests and protected regions, others industrial agriculture, and others were allocated as smallholdings” (ibid., pp. 253-55). As the authors argue: “the political violence provided a justification as well as a mechanism, military deployment and tactics, for intensive and extensive national State intervention in landscapes over which it had had only weak hegemonic power. Political violence preceded both forest enclosures and State territorializations” (ibid., p. 275).

#### *2.4.1. The Plan Colombia in the AMEM region*

This period, as the two authors theorized, perfectly describes what happened in the AMEM forests. However, the chronological periods do not coincide perfectly. The repression of the State was transformed into a counterinsurgent strategy after 2002, and even more so after the end of the Cold War. Until then, as already analysed, the State has mostly behaved repressively, mainly against the local population. However, this repression was not manifest systematized and had never completely undermined the authority of the guerrillas in the region. The third period is that of the application of counterinsurgency strategies in a natural space that was framed as a dissident jungle. The State’s willingness to reconquest the territory, joined a new economic planning, and resulted in the implementation of COIN strategies both against guerrilla warfare and civil population. The consequences of these repressive actions were also dramatic for nature, although some military actions were legitimized in the name of conservation.

Between 1998 and 2002, the war against the armed insurgents was suspended in order to encourage peace talks between the Pastrana government and the FARC. And a 42.000 km<sup>2</sup> disarmed zone, that included all the AMEM region was declared by the government. The consequences of a negotiation that never led to an agreement, however, turned out to be dramatic. Between 2002 and 2006, the new President Uribe implemented a military strategy

called the *Recovery of the Zone of Distension*, which was part of the security national plan *Democratic Security Policy* (DSP). This was sustained by a “US\$6 billion package of US military aid launched in 1999” and pledged to “reinforce and guarantee the rule of law throughout the territory through a comprehensive effort between military, police, and civilian government agencies to improve security and generate the conditions for economic development” (Delgado, 2015, p. 409). A second phase, called *Politics of Consolidation of Democratic Security* (PCDS) followed in 2007. The military strategy was combined with the administrative one, with the purpose to rebuild a new order. “Stabilization of *cleared regions*, that was at the center of the military’s campaign, required institutional coordination to “bring the State back” where it had been supplanted by the insurgency, or, to create an institutional presence that had been historically non-existent” (ibid., p. 409).

#### 2.4.2. *The counter-insurgent environmental strategy*

The AMEM forest was considered as the most dissident region in Colombia. For it, a precise military plan was designed in 2009, called the *National Plan for Territorial Consolidation*. The most famous military attack was *Sodom*, during which alias "el mono Jojoy" (the FARC 's front 1 commander) was killed in La Macarena in 2010, after days of bombing. One of the objectives of this military-administrative plan was to transform La Macarena into an eco-tourist paradise (Espinosa, 2006, p. 156). In practice, it was the destruction of coca crops, through manual eradication first, and fumigation with glyphosate afterward, to defeat the economy of both the guerrillas and the peasants (ibid, p. 157). Uncontrolled aerial fumigations and continuous violence were legitimized in deep lands, theaters of the “anti-drug struggle” (Ciro, 2018).

The FARC-EP had to retreat into the Amazon jungle (Fundación Idea para la Paz (FIP) 2011, p. 9; López Loffsner, 2018, p. 68). The local population was considered as part of the guerrilla warfare, or as an ally, and treated accordingly: “The peasant coca leaf grower moved between different imaginaries: rootless settler, destroyer of the forest, puppet of the guerrilla and auxiliary of the "illegal" armed groups” (Iglesias 2003 cited in Ciro 2019, page n.s. My translation). This categorisation mainly concerned the inhabitants of rural regions, where the presence of FARC-EP remained strong even during the years of the State's military reconquest. As some

inhabitants of La Macarena have testified, the arrival of the national army increased their trade, but “the peacefulness that was experienced in urban areas was not the same as in rural areas, where people were living in fear” (FIP, 2011, p. 12. My translation). As Espinosa (2003) notes: “Coca, the presence of the guerrillas and the "illegal" nature of many human settlements in reserve areas characterize the main problematic aspects in the peasants' lives, since this allows many inhabitants to be considered criminals and therefore subject to state repression” (p., 5. My translation).

Between 2002 and 2010, many rural areas in the southeast turned into war zones, and many families escaped from violence and repression. Most families in the AMEM region flee and leave their land due to the military intervention that directly favored land grabbing for the entrance of big capital (Grajales, 2017, pp. 21-25). Large estates were assigned by the State to the agrarian elite from Antioquia for breeding, agro-industry and oil (FIP, 2011). This agrarian elite mostly coincided with the paramilitary forces (AUC), that in the region were organized above all around the figure of alias "Cuchillo", the commander of the Anti-subversive Popular Revolutionary Army of Colombia (APAC) (ibid, p. 7). A Statement by peasants' associations of the region denounced the abuses committed by paramilitaries, and their connivance with the National Army in 2009 (PrensaRural, 2009, November 12)<sup>11</sup>. As Vargas (1999) points out: “Ranchers, investors and legal commercial farmers have created and strengthened private armies, presented to public opinion as a defense against guerrilla abuses. However, these armed groups serve as a means to violently expropriate land from indigenous people, peasants and settlers” (ibid., page n.s.).

What mattered most to both the government and the landowner-paramilitaries was the extinction of the guerrillas from those territories, and the acquisition of control over their coca plantations. A violently extractive agricultural model joined the spread of fear and the sowing of death among the population so that many villages were completely destroyed, abandoned, or

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<sup>11</sup> Comunidades Campesinas San Vicente del Caguán y La Vega. (2009). “Paramilitares extorsionan y amenazan a pobladores en San Juan de Lozada y La Macarena, Meta”. *Prensa Rural*, 12 November. Available at: <https://prensarural.org/spip/spip.php?article3239>. (Accessed: 13 June 2020)

incorporated into vast estates. Aerial fumigations caused the destruction not only of coca crops, but of any plant species. These glyphosate fumigations created extensive damage to the natural environment, modifying the forest ecosystem. Furthermore, the destruction of any plant species caused by the herbicide has pushed those families who have continued to live in the region to abandon agriculture in favour of livestock farming. So that Aerial fumigation directly contributed to the increase in deforestation (Vargas 1999; Dexter and Visseren-Hamakers, 2019).

## **2.5. The fourth period. The present day**

The fourth period is the least studied and theorized by the two authors. This is the period from the end of the Cold War to the present day and is characterized by the emergence of the environment as a global security priority. It is the period that coincides, both internationally and in Colombia, with the expansion of militarization as a coercive State practice of conservation, normally legitimized by the need to preserve and protect nature. It is the period of sustainable development, of the collision of interests between State, NGOs, and international conservation bodies. It is the period in which “biodiversity conservation as political forests' *raison d'etre* is affirmed” (Devine et al., 2018, p. 3).

The fourth phase of the political forest of the AMEM region begins with the 2016 Peace Agreement. After the guerrillas' armistice, the political and economic balance of the region is definitively changed, even if the State's military action has similar characteristics to those adopted previously. The political present of AMEM has its roots in the past of violence in the region, and in particular in what I have described as the third period of the political forest. That was characterized by the union between state territorialization and the use of counterinsurgent strategies, in a forest area considered and described as a dissident jungle. In the fourth period, the State's policy is the implementation of the militarization of conservation. Land and green grabbing, securitization, and the use of military forces and COIN strategies are unified today through environmental conservation. The definition of nature conservation as a national security priority reflects the political and economic preponderance that the ecosystem protection has

gained on an international level. This outlines a new political and economic scenario which, however, wink at the past of violence.

### **3. THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT: BETWEEN SECURITIZATION AND COIN STRATEGIES**

This chapter analyzes the process of securitization that preceded and legitimized the implementation of a military campaign for nature protection in post-conflict Colombia. The chapter is divided in two parts. In the first part I analyze the process by referring to the concept of securitization of the Copenhagen School, which is introduced theoretically. The process of discursive construction that led to the implementation of the Artemisa military campaign in April 2019, and the definition of the environment as a national security priority, is then analyzed through the analysis of three political episodes. In the second part I highlight a relationship between the government speeches that explain the strategies of the current military campaign, with the environmental strategies implemented by the Uribe government (2002/2010) in the same geographical area. The relationship of continuity is represented by the same discursive representation of the enemies of nature (the guerrillas and the local inhabitants) as a national threat. And from the adoption, in both cases, of counter-insurgency strategies against the local population. Then, some representative episodes of the violence that the current environmental protection campaign creates in the AMEM region are highlighted.

#### **3.1. The Securitization Theory**

In international relations, the analysis of what defines something as security has not been problematized for a long time. Security was regarded as something existing, or self-evident (Trombetta, 2007). How Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998) argues, normally in international relations, “security is about survival” (ibid.: 21). Waever (1995), radically modified this definition by defining security as a “speech act” (ibid., p. 52; Buzan, Waever and de Wilde,

1998, p. 27). This conceptual assumption is well expressed in the book *Security: A new framework for analysis* (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998), the masterpiece of the Copenhagen School.

Weaver developed his new conceptualization of security mainly based on Austin's philosophy of language (Trombetta, 2007, p. 13). The philosopher, in the book *How to do things with words* (1962), explained the existence of verbal expressions that go beyond the regime of knowledge limited to truth or falsity. The constative utterance, as "it is raining", can be true or false, because it is the description of a fact that uses reality as a yardstick. He then defined another category of language and called it performative. This includes actions performed through language, such as "I told you not to" when the performance is implicit, or "don't" when it is explicit. In the same way as actions, these expressions may or may not succeed, regardless of whether they are true or false.

Weaver (1995) applied the possibility of language to create or modify reality to the concept of security. This leads the Copenhagen school to define securitization as a speech act with "a specific form of social praxis that should have a specific rhetoric structure and follow specific rules" (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998, p. 204). This process can be summarized in three main actions that the social or political subject of securitization must perform:

- 1) The definition of a referent object as a security issue. "Security is a self-referential practice because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue" (ibid., p. 24).
- 2) The explanation to a relevant audience that the adoption of extraordinary means is necessary to address it. "In security discourse, an issue is dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority; Thus, by labelling it as security, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means" (ibid., p. 26).
- 3) The recognition of the need for exceptional means to address that issue by a relevant audience. "Securitization is a collective phenomenon" (ibid., p. 204). In this sense,

“security (...) ultimately rests neither with the objects nor with the subjects but among the subjects” (ibid., p. 31).

In short, according to the Copenhagen School, the securitization process is “the staging of existential issues in politics to lift them above politics” (ibid, 1998: 26). Through the process of securitization, objects that are not part of the public debate (non-politicized), or are part of it (politicized) are transformed into national or international security priorities. As Balzacq, Leonard and Ruzicka (2016) explain: “securitization combines the politics of threat design with that of threat management” (p. 495). Security policy has been studied by the Copenhagen school in five areas: military, political, societal, economic, and environmental. The last one is the area that interests my analysis. And that according to the authors is the one in which the adoption of extraordinary means is more easily justified, because it “concerns the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend” (Buzan 1991, pp. 19/20 in Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998, p. 8).

### **3.2. The process of environmental securitization in Colombia**

The process of environmental securitization begins in Colombia following the signing of the 2016 peace agreement. From this moment on, the threat due to environmental degradation (and in particular the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest) shifted from having little relevance in the national political debate to being defined as a central security issue. This change can be observed through the analysis of three representations of the environmental problem, which I considered particularly significant for my analysis: 1) The Sentence 4360 of the Colombian Supreme Court of Justice that declares the Amazon rainforest subject of rights. 2) The definition, through a speech by President Santos (2010/2018), of the environment as an economic and political national priority. 3) The declaration of deforestation as a problem of Colombian internal security, and the creation of a military unit for the protection of the environment in April 2019. Securitization is analyzed as a process of discursive construction of environmental degradation

(mainly represented by increased deforestation), as an internal security problem, which started in 2018 and culminated in April 2019.

To start with, on 5 April 2018 the Amazon rainforest was declared subject of rights by the Colombian Supreme Court of Justice with the sentence number 4360. The Court ruled in favor of 25 young people who had filed a motion of no-confidence against the Colombian State for violating their right to enjoy a healthy environment by failing to protect the Amazon from deforestation. The Court ordered the government to stipulate an intergenerational pact for the life of the Colombian Amazon (PIVAC), with the active participation of the affected communities, scientific organizations, and environmental investigation groups. The result should have been a Territorial Plan to reduce deforestation to zero net and thus mitigate the effects of climate change. Moreover, within 48 hours after the ruling, all national and regional bodies should have increased their action to mitigate deforestation, through the adoption of legislative and military actions, if necessary (Corte Suprema de Justicia, 2018)<sup>12</sup>.

By referring to the securitization theory, I define the Supreme Court of Justice as the subject, and international and national public opinion, represented by the 25 young people, as the legitimizing audience. This sentence, in fact, was produced on the global wave of demonstrations against climate change<sup>13</sup> that have internationally increased the perception of environmental degradation as a global threat against which immediate measures must be adopted. So that the historical importance of this sentence has been internationally acclaimed<sup>14</sup>. The adoption of extraordinary means did not necessarily concern the use of military forces, in this case. This, in

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<sup>12</sup> Corte Suprema de Justicia. (2018). STC 4360-2018. Available at: <https://cortesuprema.gov.co/corte/index.php/2018/04/05/corte-suprema-ordena-proteccion-inmediata-de-la-amazonia-colombiana/>. (Accessed: 16 June 2020).

<sup>13</sup> I refer in particular to the international environmental movement *Fridays For Future*.

<sup>14</sup> "In historic ruling, Colombian Court protects youth suing the national government for failing to curb deforestation". (2018). *Dejusticia*, April 5 [online] Available at: <https://www.dejusticia.org/en/en-fallo-historico-corte-suprema-concede-tutela-de-cambio-climatico-y-generaciones-futuras/>. (Accessed: 12 July 2020).

fact, was indicated as the last possibility, to adopt only if community and administrative strategies would have failed. Great attention was given, at every point of the sentence, to the importance that local communities should have to reduce the process of deforestation. Despite this, the sentence played a legitimizing, albeit perhaps unintentionally, role for the implementation of the *Artemisa* military campaign. The strategies to curb deforestation with the active contribution of local communities were never implemented<sup>15</sup>. The sentence 4360 was instead used by the Colombian government as a form of public legitimacy to support repressive actions against the local population. It has thus been perceived as a form of injustice by the inhabitants of the communities most affected by deforestation in the AMEM region, and a direct cause of the violation of their human rights.

Secondly, the peace agreement between the FARC guerrillas and the Colombian government has opened up considerable possibilities for economic development in Colombia. Many are linked to the development of a green economy, which, according to the dictates of the most recent neoliberalism, must combine sustainable economic development, with environmental conservation, and promote economic profit from it as well. As President Santos explained at the 4th International Environmental Fair<sup>16</sup> (20/25 June 2018):

*“We have been transforming, during our government, green growth into an issue of national priority. And we transformed it as well in a transversal policy, as indicated in the National*

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<sup>15</sup> Semana Sostenible (2018). “El manifiesto contra la deforestación que pocos escucharon”. 26 October [online] Available at: <https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/medio-ambiente/articulo/el-manifiesto-contra-la-deforestacion-de-la-macarena-que-pocos-escucharon/4291>. (Accessed: 21 May 2020).

Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina (ANZORC). (2018). “El Gobierno Duque le hizo la silla vacía al campesinado de la Macarena, le traían propuestas para frenar la deforestación”. 22 October [online]. Available at: <http://anzorc.com/el-gobierno-duque-le-hizo-la-silla-vacia-al-campesinado-de-la-macarena-le-traian-propuestas-para-frenar-la-deforestacion/>. (Accessed: 21 May 2020).

<sup>16</sup> It is the most important public event in Colombia regarding environmental sustainability and promotion of new technologies for the environment. It takes place every year, and hosts governmental and academic representatives. For more information: <https://feriademedioambiente.com/>

*Development Plan. And our policy explained in very simple terms, is to consolidate an efficient economy that reduces the impacts on our environment. And how are we doing that? With concrete actions. With specific actions. One of them, the most important, is to preserve what we have. This wealth (the environment) must be protected, it must be preserved”* (Presidency of the Colombian Republic, 2018, June 21. My Translation)<sup>17</sup>.

In this speech, the environmental protection is mainly linked to economic interest. However Santos' discourse clearly shows that environmental conservation is becoming a priority issue of the Colombian government's national policy. According to the theory of securitization, it is possible to define this attention as the antecedent to the definition of the environment as a matter of internal security, which will come into effect with the creation of the *Artemisa* campaign. If we continue with the analysis of President Santos' discourse, this "anticipation" becomes clearer. Deforestation has increased considerably, particularly in the Amazon region, as the President explains. Concrete action is needed to prevent it from continuing to increase. And this concrete action is military action. As he argues: *“So, there are 15 battalions of our Army that are jungle and high mountain battalions, and I have already instructed the general commander of the Military Armed Forces, General Mejía, to arrange for all these battalions to have as their main mission the protection of our environmental resources”* (ibid.).

The subject of securitization is in this case the State, represented by the President of the Colombian Republic, and the audience is once again both national and international public opinion. Environmental conservation is not currently associated with an internal security problem. Nevertheless, extraordinary means are already presented as necessary for its defence.

Thirdly, the culmination of the environmental securitization process was reached with the creation of the *Artemisa* campaign. President Duque announced the creation of this campaign

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<sup>17</sup> Presidencia de la República de Colombia. (2018). “Palabras del Presidente Juan Manuel Santos en la instalación de la VI Feria Internacional del Medio Ambiente”. 21 June [online]. Available at: <http://es.presidencia.gov.co/discursos/180621-Palabras-del-Presidente-Juan-Manuel-Santos-en-la-instalacion-de-la-VI-Feria-Internacional-del-Medio-Ambiente>. (Accessed: 27 July 2020).

through a video shot at the Macarena on April 28, 2019. The video is shot outdoors, on a hill below which a green but flat, treeless landscape can be seen. Duque, wearing a blue shirt, is surrounded by parliamentarians, including the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of the Interior. They are also dressed in blue, while the representative of *Amazon Vision*<sup>18</sup> and the president of National Natural Parks (PNN) wear white shirts. The latter close the front row. The back row consists only of senior military offices and national police commanders, all in uniform. The message is visually clear. President Duque begins his speech by explaining that the design and creation of the *Artemisa* campaign was decided a few days earlier. “*The purpose of this campaign is to fight the crime of deforestation, which endangers the entire country*” (Presidency of the Colombian Republic, 2019, April 28. My translation)<sup>19</sup>. He then gives a brief review of the numbers of hectares lost in recent years, and the natural wealth of Colombia. The Colombian President argues that it is necessary that every citizen is aware of this dangerous crime. It is in this regard that, in the definition of national security policy, he explains, a central role has been given to the protection of biodiversity. “*The strategic interest of national security is the protection of water, the paramos and the Amazon forest*” (ibid.). The *Artemisa* campaign will be permanent and will be based on inter-institutional work, to reach “*three fundamental points: ending deforestation, recovering the humid tropical rainforest, arresting and prosecuting those responsible for this culture of deforestation*” (ibid.). Duque then speaks of the military campaign itself as a culture, which will extend from national parks to the whole territory. It is a culture that was created to protect but also to show the whole country and the international community that there will no longer be any tolerance for deforestation. He concludes by saying: “*And I want to congratulate the heroes of Colombia. The soldiers, policemen, marines, technicians, and pilots*

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<sup>18</sup> *Amazon Vision* is a government programme aimed at reducing deforestation and promoting sustainable development. For more information:

<https://visionamazonia.minambiente.gov.co/en/what-is-amazon-vision/>.

<sup>19</sup> Presidencia de la República de Colombia. (2019). “*Declaration of President Iván Duque at the presentation of the Artemisa Campaign against deforestation*”. 28 April [online]. Available at:

<https://id.presidencia.gov.co/Paginas/prensa/2019/190428/Declaracion-del-Presidente-Ivan-Duque-en-la-presentacion-de-la-Campana-Artemisa-contra-la-deforestacion.aspx>. (Accessed: 12 July 2020).

*of our Air Force, who have allowed the country to see the birth of the first campaign of this nature that Colombia has” (ibid.).*

The State, the subject of the securitization process, has clearly defined, on this occasion, the need to use extraordinary means, i.e. the adoption of military forces, to deal with deforestation and environmental degradation. The relevant audience, which was asked for the legitimacy to carry out such action, is in this case the national population.

### **3.3. The environmental securitization between yesterday and today: the FARC-EP guerrilla as a natural enemy of the State**

In the post-agreement period the legitimation for adopting extraordinary means is discursively constructed through the definition of the ancient enemy of the State, that is, the guerrilla warfare, as an environmental threat rather than a political one. The Artemisa campaign is in fact mostly mainly aimed at fighting what are defined as the “drug trafficking mafias”, or the guerrillas' dissidence. The existence and identity of an internal enemy are always clearly defined in the government's announcements. The fight against deforestation is associated with that against illegal mining and drug trafficking, for which the guerrillas are always accused of being the only responsible. In July 2019, for example, several gold mining machines were blown up in the region (Semana Sostenible, 2019, October 22)<sup>20</sup> and on other occasions, laboratories for processing coca leaves were burnt (El Tiempo, 2019, September 14)<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Semana Sostenible. (2019). “Nuevo golpe a la minería ilegal de oro en Antioquia, Chocó y Caquetà”. 22 October [online]. Available at: <https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/impacto/articulo/nuevo-golpe-a-la-mineria-ilegal-de-oro-en-antioquia-hoco-y-caqueta/47216>. (Accessed: 12 July 2020).

<sup>21</sup> El Tiempo. (2019). “Erradicación de coca en el Guaviare para combatir la deforestación”. September 21[online]. Available at: <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/conflicto-y-narcotrafico/erradicacion-de-cultivos-ilicitos-para-combatir-d-eforestacion-en-el-guaviare-412440> (Accessed: 12 July 2020).

As announced by the Colombian Minister of the Interior during a press conference in March 2020, over 244 operations have already taken place in the mark of the *Artemisa* military campaign, and have permitted the recovery of 3,500 hectares of forest. The actions carried out “*have been concentrated mainly against front 1, 7 and 68 of the FARC dissidence (...) by inflicting heavy punches to their troops (...) but today another police brigade against drug trafficking is needed*” (El Espectador, 2020, February 24. My translation)<sup>22</sup>. According to the Minister of the Interior, this will be “*the result of a renewed and strengthened strategy of President Duque's Defense and Security Policy, with the aim of unifying and developing new capabilities in the defense of natural resources*” (El Tiempo, 2020, February 25. My translation)<sup>23</sup>. As he adds, flanked by the commander of the National Police and the Army commander general:

*“The actions of illegal groups and drug traffickers this weekend have left dozens of hectares of devastated forest in La Serranía de la Macarena and the Tinigua National Natural Park, forcing us to be ruthless with those who destroy nature. There will be no retreat from the areas of the nature parks where criminals intend to settle, there will be no sanctuaries of crime that our public forces will not be able to reach”* (ibid.).

The securitization process occurring today, strongly recalls the discursive mechanism and the repressive practices implemented during the two phases of *Plan Colombia*<sup>24</sup>. Conceived by the Colombia and US presidential administrations in 1998, it was then transformed in the *Democratic Security Policy* (2001/2006), and the *Strategy to Strengthen Democracy and Integral*

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<sup>22</sup> These declarations were expressed at a press conference held by the Minister for the Interior following the fires in the La Macarena Nature Park on February, 22, 2020, and reported by: El Espectador. (2020). “Tres claves para saber qué pasó con los incendios de La Macarena”. 24 February [online]. Available at: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/medio-ambiente/tres-claves-para-saber-que-paso-con-los-incendios-de-la-macarena-articulo-906168/>. (Accessed: 14 July 2020).

<sup>23</sup> El Tiempo. (2020). Fuerza de Protección Ambiental combatirá la deforestación en parques. 25 February [online]. Available at: <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/conflicto-y-narcotrafico/conforman-fuerza-de-proteccion-ambiental-para-proteger-parques-naturales-465812>. (Accessed: 13 July 2020).

<sup>24</sup> *Plan Colombia* is a US-funded military and diplomatic campaign to combat drug cartels and guerrilla warfare in Colombia. It existed in its original form from 1998 to 2015. It was then transformed into *Paz Colombia*. It was defined as an “armed peace” in a famous book by Kytto (2000).

*Development* (2007/2011) (Rojas, 2007, p. 16). The explicit aim of this political, military and administrative strategy was to stop drug trafficking by hitting the foundations of the guerrillas (Estrada Álvarez, 2001). What is relevant, however, is the environmental interest of that strategy. To protect the same places (the AMEM region) from the same enemies (drugs and guerrillas) similar military strategies were applied. As Uribe said: *“The world must know, the ecologists must know the following: National Natural Parks like La Macarena have been totally violated by the narcoterrorism of the FARC, with 3,000 or 4,000 hectares of coca planted”* (cited in Espinosa, 2006, p. 156). The strategy chosen by Uribe at the time was to eradicate by hand, so as not to offend the ecological sensitivity of the international community (Semana, 2006, August 3)<sup>25</sup>. Using environmental rhetoric, the government justified an extremely risky and costly programme to free natural treasures from the cocaine that suffocated them. As Presidential Councillor Hoyos Aristizabal explained: *“With the security support of Army and National Police troops, the eradicators have managed to enter regions that for years were the domain of illegal armed groups and uproot extensive hectares of coca crops, which were directly affecting primary forests and important water sources”* (cited in Espinosa, 2006, p. 157. My translation). The strategy of manual eradication lasted only a short time, due to the more than 20 deaths inflicted by FARC-EP on the national army. On August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006 the government decided to fumigate the National Natural Park La Macarena. As president Uribe declared: *“The world needs to understand our need to fumigate, to prevent our people from being massacred by terrorism”*. Furthermore, as the Minister of the Environment added: *“The country cannot forget that the real predators of the environment in this park are the drug traffickers and the guerrillas”* (El Tiempo, 2006, August 4. My translation)<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Semana. (2003). *“La Macarena: una costosa aventura”*. (2003). 3 August [online]. Available at: <https://www.semana.com/on-line/articulo/la-macarena-costosa-aventura-analisis/80270-3>. (Accessed: 23 July 2020).

<sup>26</sup> El Tiempo. (2006). *“26 muertos obligaron a fumigar Parque La Macarena”*. 4 August [online]. Available at: <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-2126268>. (Accessed: 22 June 2020). For a focused assessment on this topic: Gonzalez-Plaza, S. (2007). *“La erradicación manual de cultivos ilícitos en la sierra de La Macarena: un ejercicio sobre la futilidad de las políticas”*. Bogotá: Universidad del Rosario. Available at: [https://www.urosario.edu.co/urosario\\_files/09/098e73b3-9e90-4af1-968a-58c996c990c5.pdf](https://www.urosario.edu.co/urosario_files/09/098e73b3-9e90-4af1-968a-58c996c990c5.pdf)

The FARC-EP have undoubtedly contributed to environmental degradation, through the production of illegal substances, the sabotage of oil pipelines, and the construction of new roads in the forest (Mendez Garzón and Valánszki, 2019). Despite this, it is necessary to stress that the forest was not only a hiding place for the guerrillas, but a living space. The forests and their preservation were therefore a priority for the guerrilla group. The cutting of trees, when excessive, was sanctioned in the region with economic fines or physical punishment. As an inhabitant of the AMEM region explains to Mongabay-LATAM: “*When the [FARC] was here, they managed to take care of 20 percent of all the ranches and keep them within the mountains, and there was a law passed by the FARC that permitted them to cut down a maximum of five hectares. People who didn’t comply were sanctioned*” (Mongabay LATAM, 2018, April 20)<sup>27</sup>.

The effectiveness of Plan Colombia in stopping drug trafficking is still under discussion today. According to many, it only increased the problems already existing, affecting the social base that was living and still living cultivating coca. *Una vieja guerra en un nuevo contexto* (2011), is an investigation promoted by the Colombian Centre for Research and Education (CINEP). The authors highlighted how the construction of the new State territoriality promoted during *Plan Colombia*, through the military and administrative re-conquest, only increased structural problems, and resulted in an increment of both armed violence and social conflict in rural regions. These consequences are the same that risks creating the implementation of the Artemisa campaign in the AMEM region in the post-conflict period. As well as the *Plan Colombia's* strategies have proved to be of dubious efficiency in stopping drug trafficking, in the same way the Artemisa campaign risks being ineffective in stopping deforestation (Van Dexter and Visseren-Hamakers, 2019, p. 8). As during the military strategy implemented during the Uribe government, the militarization of conservation takes place through the adoption of counterinsurgent speeches and strategies. The enemy to fight, at least on a discursive level, is the

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<sup>27</sup> Mongabay LATAM. (2018). “Open destruction in the Colombian Amazon after FARC’s exit”. 20 April [online]. Available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/04/open-destruction-in-the-colombian-amazon-after-farcs-exit/>. (Accessed: 14 July 2020).

guerrilla warfare, their criminality and illegality. In practice, however, military actions are concentrated mainly against peasants.

### **3.4. The counter-insurgent violence of the Artemisa campaign**

Peasants, who are those suffering the most tangible repercussions of the *Artemisa* military campaign, are often pointed out as actors of deforestation and as allies of the guerrillas. As the former Colombian President Santos explained, questioning himself about the causes of deforestation:

*“What's going on there? Poverty, the poorest peasants are deforesting. Illicit crops are an immense incentive to deforest, and then behind them arrive the big mafias, the dissidents of the guerrillas, and the peasants continue to penetrate the forests, continue to deforest”* (Presidency of the Colombian Republic, 2018, June 21. My Translation).

Since the beginning of the *Artemisa* campaign, more than 130 people have been arrested and charged because they were living in the natural reserves. It was never taken into account, however, that many families have been living there since before it was declared the AMEM. In October 2019, for example, some peasants were accused of invasion, their livestock requisitioned and three of them were hospitalized for injuries caused during the military operation. Some days later, following investigations whose objective was to record the “territorial control for the conservation and defence of the protected region” (Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, 2020, February 22)<sup>28</sup>. The *Artemisa* military forces were concentrated on seven different points in the Tinigua Natural Park. In this way, according to the government, they carried out “the recovery of 1,500 hectares of forest, arrested 8 people, set fire to 16 houses and destroyed the village bridge” (ibid.). The peasants arrested were defined by Norberto

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<sup>28</sup> Comisión Colombiana de Juristas. (2020). “Organizaciones sociales y de derechos humanos rechazan atropellos de la fuerza pública a campesinos moradores del Parque Nacional Natural Tinigua”. 22 February [online]. Available at: [https://www.coljuristas.org/nuestro\\_quehacer/item.php?id=282](https://www.coljuristas.org/nuestro_quehacer/item.php?id=282). (Accessed: 14 July 2020).

Salgado, military commander of the “Brigada de Selva 22” as members of an armed group dedicated to drug trafficking (France 24, 2020, June 28)<sup>29</sup>.

The operation, according to the Colombian Commission of Jurists (CCJ), was conducted with the massive use of helicopters and heavy artillery and warfare. It led to the arrest of various members of the JACs, destroyed several families' houses, and violated the human rights of 5 minors that have been captured and then separated from their parents. The same procedure (the excessive use of military force and violence) was denounced on April 25, 2019 in the Chiribiquete National Natural Park, and more recently in the National Natural Park La Macarena (El Espectador, 2019, October 29<sup>30</sup>; CCJ, 2020, February 22). The conservation of nature, is the means by which today the military presence in the region risks turning into systematic, and operations against civilian population, into legitimate. Although there is continuity with the past State's repressive action, what mainly differs is that environmental conservation makes the public discourse that supports governmental militarization more understandable, both nationally and internationally.

What happened after the fires on February 22<sup>th</sup> is a dynamic that clearly illustrates the State repression against the local inhabitants. Almost 500 hectares burned in the National Natural Park La Macarena, in a horizon of flames that illuminated the night, as it appears from various videos on the web. To understand who are the real responsables of these fires is a complex issue that requires an in-depth analysis. In the region, in fact, the fire rate increased by 800 per cent from 2016 to 2018 (Armenteras et al., 2019, p. 20). However, this seems to be clear and unambiguous for the government. The Interior Minister Holmes Trujillo, has not hesitated, to define the dissidence of the FARC responsible for the fire. According to what he Stated: they use areas of

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<sup>29</sup> France 24. (2020). “Deforestación: las heridas abiertas en el suroriente de Colombia”. (2020). 28 June [online]. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/es/20200628-colombia-deforestacion-heridas-abiertas-federico-rios-liga-contra-silencio>. (Accessed: 27 July 2020)

<sup>30</sup> El Espectador. (2019). Operativo militar contra la deforestación en la Amazonia levanta ampolla. 29 October. Available at: [www.elespectador.com/noticias/medio-ambiente/operativo-militar-contra-la-deforestacion-en-la-amazonia-levanta-ampolla-articulo-886853](http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/medio-ambiente/operativo-militar-contra-la-deforestacion-en-la-amazonia-levanta-ampolla-articulo-886853). (Accessed: 17 June 2020).

the park “as air bases and corridors of mobility for criminal activities, which compromise not only strategic resources of the nation, but the life, integrity and rights of the communities” (El Espectador, 2020, February 23. My translation)<sup>31</sup>. He also added that “they are deforesting to plant coca, continue killing, continue destroying the environment, and contaminate water sources. That's what drug trafficking does” (ibid.). Although the dissidence of the FARC-EP is framed as responsible, peasants are suffering the State's repressive action. The stigmatization against those defined, still after decades, as settlers of the Amazon rainforest and accused of being allies of the guerrillas, continue. 24 peasants were arrested on the same day, tried for environmental crimes, sentenced to leave the region, and banned from transporting or marketing cows within the National Natural Park. They were caught in the act of cutting down trees, and accused of deforesting 1,800 hectares in five years. As it is written on the report of the preliminary trial, however, most of these people, 16 out of 20, don't own any piece of land in the National Natural Park (La Silla Vacía, 2020, March 1)<sup>32</sup>.

A video<sup>33</sup> effectively represents the opinion of the inhabitants of the municipality of Puerto Cachicamo on the army presence. It was filmed by the population in order to draw national and international attention on the violent effects that nature conservation has in the region. As Termin Oviedo, the leader of *Puerto Cachicamo* explained in a video of October 2018: “There have been assassinations, by strangers, and then questions arise. There is uncertainty about what is happening, and why accidentally it is happening right where there is the presence of the public force” (ibid.). The leader then explains that he already had several problems with the army, such as death threats and intimidations. The end of the video is particularly incisive to understand the discursive and material form of these threats. The Colonel, leader of the soldiers

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<sup>31</sup> El Espectador. (2020). “Ecocidio en la serranía de La Macarena (Meta)”. 23 February [online]. Available at: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/medio-ambiente/ecocidio-en-la-serrania-de-la-macarena-meta-articulo-906046>. (Accessed: 26 June 2020).

<sup>32</sup> La Silla Vacía. (2020). “La chispa que prende los incendios de La Macarena”. 1 March [online]. Available at: <https://lasillavacia.com/chispa-prende-los-incendios-macarena-75683> (Accessed: 26 June 2020).

<sup>33</sup> “Líder social de Puerto Cachicamo (Guaviare) en peligro”. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_I9c2V38xEM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_I9c2V38xEM). (Accessed: 30 June 2020).

lined up to stop the demonstration, told Termin Oviedo to go home and make love to his wife as if it were the last time. The threat was seized by the people who, together with him, were demonstrating against the presence of the army in the territory and provoked cries of contempt towards the soldiers.

According to the peasants, the State, today as yesterday, manifests itself in the region only through the army. The State is in fact absent as an institution, as during what I have termed the third period of the political forest. It does not even cooperate with the locals for the conservation of the nature in which they live. It does not build the infrastructure necessary for trade in agricultural products and does not promote programs to support family farming. The words used by Termin Oviedo to explain the reasons for the demonstration organized in his municipality (linked to the next start of the Artemisa campaign), well summarize this common perception: *“it seems that we are doing something illegal, but we are demonstrating all the anxieties that we have in front of the public force, which is the only State presence on the territory”*. As *Ciro Rodriguez (2018)* explains: “the rural communities of the AMEM region have been making the same demand over the last thirty years: to stop militarization. In lands of “State's absence”, is it not contradictory for the inhabitants to ask for the Army's withdrawal?” (p. 10. My translation). The armed presence of the State, legitimised through a securitisation process, is linked today to the increase in deforestation in the region. This phenomenon is analysed in the following chapter.

#### **4. FOREST GRABBING**

In this chapter I interpret deforestation in the AMEM region as the opening of a frontier for the accumulation of both public and private capital. The chapter is divided in two parts. The first part is a conceptualization of the land grabbing phenomenon in relation to the concepts of primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession. The causes of deforestation in the AMEM region are then examined. The analysis of newspaper articles and academic literature help in framing deforestation as a result of a land grabbing process, previously made impossible due to

the presence of FARC-EP guerrillas. This process is often described as caused by the State absence. The second part of the chapter is aimed at overturning this interpretation. My hypothesis is that deforestation is not caused by the absence of the State in the region, but rather by its presence. This responsibility is derived mainly from three factors. The state's policies related to land management in the post-conflict period; the policies implemented by the current government to combat deforestation; a reflection on the historical relationship between the State and big landowners.

#### **4.1. Land grabbing: a theoretical framework**

Land grabbing is a phenomenon that occupies a predominant position in academic discipline of political ecology since 2006. This phenomenon has been defined in many different ways, “throughout academic and grey literature” (Holmes, 2014, p. 458). Academic discussions concern the extension of the expropriated territory (large estates, small plots); the identity of the dispossessors (foreign investors, national elites, governments, or even small farmers); and the quality of what is expropriated (land for agriculture, water, natural reserve) (Hall, 2013; Holmes 2014). It has been defined, for example, as a “new colonialism” (Benjaminsen and Bryceson, 2012, p. 1), as “the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends (...) (that) in some cases involve the wholesale alienation of land, and in others the restructuring of rules and authority in the access, use and management of resources” (Fairhead, Leach and Scoones, 2012, p. 238), or as “the capturing of control of relatively vast tracts of land and other natural resources through a variety of mechanisms and forms involving large-scale capital” (Borras et al, 2012, p. 405).

In order to conceptualize land grabbing the concept of primitive accumulation is normally used, together with Harvey's “revisitation”, namely accumulation by dispossession (ABD) (Massè and Lunstrum, 2016). These concepts are mainly used as synonymous. However, as Hall (2013) points out: “There are substantial tensions and ambiguities over their meanings in the foundational texts by Marx and Harvey, and they are employed to mean quite different (and

sometimes unclear) things, and in pursuit of different intellectual projects, by different authors” (p: 1583). Marx (1992 [1867]), in explaining primitive accumulation, refers to the phenomenon of enclosures and the abolition of collective ownership of land. “The plundering of State property, the theft of common land, the terrorist usurpation of feudal and clan property, all this constitutes the idyllic methodology of primitive accumulation” (ibid.: 884-885 cited in Ruggiero, 2013, p. 59). An adequate definition of the latter is certainly more complex, given the vastness of the phenomena that Harvey (2003) includes in his attempt to explain it. In a synthetic way, it is possible to describe it as the cyclic reproduction of primitive accumulation (Harvey, 2004, p. 74) in present-day capitalism, in which land is transformed into financial commodities. What Harvey wants to point out is that primitive accumulation has never ended, but has changed over the time.

Land grabbing, as well, is a vast phenomenon that changes its form as the needs of capital change, as the socio-political conditions modify, as the natural resource exploited change. Neoliberalism policies result in the centralization of economic and political powers, and global space. The cyclical contradictions of capital lie in the mechanism of spatial accumulation, through which: “new dynamic spaces of capital accumulation ultimately generate surpluses and have to absorb them through geographical expansions” (Harvey, 2004, p. 67). The use of these two different and overlapping definitions to define land grabbing is the reflection of a broader discussion, that distinguishes primarily between modes extra-economic or economic appropriation (Hall, 2013: 1591). The former means the appropriation obtained by force or illegal actions. The latter means the massive purchase of land sold by previous owners as a result of economic crises. As Massé and Lunstrum (2016) explain, Marx's concept is more linked to violence than to an economic relationship between classes. Other authors, starting from this relationship, have extended it through the incorporation of elements more directly linked to the economic sphere. “Luxemburg (1951 [1913]), for example, pointed to the dual character of capital accumulation, namely its economic means of accumulation via the expanded reproduction of the social relations of capitalism on the one hand, and its non-economic means via force, violence, and dispossession on the other.” (Massé and Lunstrum, 2016: 229).

What is today defined as land grabbing, is the same process that characterized earlier periods as well, but as Marx well summarizes, it has been increasingly enabled by legislative practices since the 18th century (Ruggiero, 2013: 58). The legality (as well as illegality) of land grabbing is, in fact, regulated by the same laws which make what is necessary for capital profit legal. As Harvey (2003) explains, the concrete methods of land accumulation, adapted flexibly to the changes in capitalism, while its dynamics remained the same. This perennial return is what is happening in the AMEM region today, and more generally in post-conflict Colombia. I analyze the increase of deforestation as a process of land grabbing that follows the modalities of primitive accumulation but inserted in a context of neo-liberal economy. And therefore as the overlap between primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession.

#### **4.2. The increase in deforestation in the AMEM region**

Deforestation in the AMEM region increased following the FARC's armistice. This increase was a predictable social and economic consequence (Mongabay LATAM, 2018, September 10)<sup>34</sup>. It was so foreseeable that Parques Nacionales Naturales (PNN) funded a comparative study on four countries that suffered increased deforestation in the post-conflict period. Based on this, *Environmental Sustainability in Post-Conflict Countries: Insights for Rural Colombia* (Suarez et al., 2018) was published. As the title of the article suggests, the aim was to produce a case study to be used as a warning and prevention in Colombia. According to Álvarez (2001) the deforestation increase was an already predictable consequence during the negotiations between the FARC-EP and the former Colombian president Pastrana (2001/2002). As Maria, sub-director of PNN, informs me during our interview “we knew that this would happen”, referring to the increase in deforestation. But what exactly happened?

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<sup>34</sup> Mongabay-LATAM. (2018). “Land hoarding: what Colombia's new administration has inherited”. 10 September [online]. Available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/09/land-hoarding-what-colombias-new-administration-has-inherited/>. (Accessed: 30 June 2020).

#### 4.2.1. The main drivers of deforestation

Based on the empirical material that I gathered and informed by academic literature, mostly related to other American countries, I can identify three key motives for deforestation in the AMEM region today: (1) cattle ranching; (2) drug trafficking (mainly related to cattle ranching); (3) expansion of the agriculture frontier.

Firstly, the main driver of deforestation in the AMEM region today is cattle ranching. As sustained by Dexter and Visseren-Hamakers (2019): “forests that were protected during the war have fallen to land grabbing, particularly conversion to cattle ranching as a form of securing land claims as part of land speculation” (p. 2). Maria described me in a synthetic and effective way the form that cattle ranching is giving to NNPs. She was completely shocked after visiting La Macarena during a conference in February 2020. *“There are huge pasturelands, it's unimaginable. I knew it before, but the visual impact is devastating. I still cry when I think about it. These (the land expropriators) are not peasants, they are four entrepreneurs of Antioquia”*, she told me. She then described to me the extent, the high cost, and the speed of deforestation, and considered these factors as clear signs of the responsibility of large investors. According to the director of the Corporation for the Sustainable Development of the northern and western Amazon (CDA), interviewed by a journalist on the causes of deforestation:

*“the first is cattle ranching. They (the peasants) cut down one or two hectares and plant for self-consumption. The problem is the people who arrive, who are not from the region, with large capitals, armored trucks and armed escorts. They arrive in a village and hire the inhabitants to cut down the forest, the forest reserve areas, the primary forests. When we arrive to carry out the operations, those who are there are the peasants. Deforestation is not cheap.”* (El Tiempo, 2019, May 27. My translation)<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> El Tiempo. (2019). “Un campesino no tiene 2 millones para tumbiar una hectárea de bosque”. 27 May [online]. Available at: <https://www.eltiempo.com/vida/medio-ambiente/asi-es-el-negocio-de-la-deforestacion-en-el-guaviare-367604>. (Accessed: 30 June 2020).

The same dynamic occurs in the forest of Panama, on the border with Colombia, according to Mongabay LATAM. The government authorizes small-scale farmers to cut down trees in the area surrounding the National Natural Park. Peasants are then pushed to deforest by big cattle ranchers, who buy the plots newly obtained at a ridiculously low price. It is “a vicious circle”, according to Zanarte, an engineer who has been working for years in the *Darien National Park* (Mongabay LATAM, 2018, March 31)<sup>36</sup>.

Secondly, deforestation can be a consequence of drug trafficking, which is also related to cattle ranching. As I was informed by a lawyer during the interview for our collaboration, the subject on which they believe it is urgent to investigate is the “mega drug trafficking project”. This would affect the whole country in the post agreement period, but it is particularly related to the AMEM region. This mega-project would consist, as he explained to me, in the State's legalization of land acquired through accumulation by narco-cattle ranchers, in order to promote and facilitate their coca production and trade. The purchase of large expanses of land for money laundering from drug trafficking has been a common practice in Colombia since the 1990s (Grajales 2017, p. 22). The narco-cattle ranching's cycle of production generally consists of three phases: the purchase of land to laundry money from drug trafficking, coca production, and breeding.

The symbiosis between drug trafficking, breeding and deforestation is also a common aspect in other American countries. It has been described by Mongabay LATAM as a sort of leitmotif of deforestation in the contemporary Central/South America (Mongabay LATAM, 2018, March 31). Narco-cattle ranching was in fact described as the engine of the drastic increase in deforestation in the *Maya Biosphere Reserve* in Guatemala (Devine et al., 2018). Narco-cattle ranching began to expand in the Mayan forest following the drastic measures adopted by the

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<sup>36</sup> Mongabay LATAM. (2018). “Ganadería y narco deforestación: la lenta desaparición de los bosques en Centroamérica”. 31 March [online]. Available at: <https://es.mongabay.com/2018/03/ganaderia-narcodeforestacion-la-lenta-desaparicion-los-bosques-centroamerica/>(Accessed: 30 June 2020).

Mexican government against drug trafficking in the early 2000s. As the authors claim, it is a doubly profitable trade for landowners. “Narco-cattle ranchers in the Peten, buy cattle with drug profits in cash. They illegally graze and fatten the animals in the Maya Biosphere, and then smuggle them over the border to sell them in the dry season to licit buyers in Mexico or Guatemala, who provide receipts-money laundered “(ibid., p. 10). In recent years, as conservation actions have intensified as deforestation continues to increase, rural communities living near or in the forest, have to protect themselves from both governmental threats of expulsion and death's threats by drug traffickers (ibid., p. 13).

A third important driver of deforestation is the expansion of the agricultural frontier. Colombia is the world's fourth largest producer of African palm oil. This monoculture has radically transformed the rural landscape of Colombia and represents one of the major causes of the expansion of deforestation in the Amazon region in the post-conflict period (Taussig, 2018). Clerici et al. (2020) sustained that: “paramilitary groups operate in areas where African oil palms (*Elaeis guineensis*) and cattle ranching are dominating, such as the low watershed of Ariari river” (p. 6). A Colombian investigative report analyzed the increase in deforestation as linked to the increase of this monoculture in three municipalities of the AMEM region in 2017 (Semana Rural, 2018). Among those, the Colombian municipality of *Puerto Rico* is the easiest example, to understand how the process of intensive agriculture produces deforestation. This municipality is divided into three areas. Two of them are part of the NNP *La Serrania de La Macarena*, where no intensive agriculture is allowed but deforestation is increasing. The other one, instead, hosts mainly African palm monocultures. As Velásquez, a peasant leader of the municipality declared, referring to the expansion of African palm cultivation:

*“we know that there are landowners with a lot of money who sponsor the peasants to deforest 100 and 200 hectares. They hire groups of people and tell them to mark about 200 hectares, keep*

*10 or 20 for them and cultivate it. They pay them \$10,000 for this job” (Mongabay LATAM, 2017, June 6)<sup>37</sup>.*

#### 4.2.2. Deforestation as a process of land grabbing

The main causes of deforestation in the AMEM region can be easily aligned with the process of land grabbing, which started in the post-agreement period, as indicated above. Testimonies about deforestation as a consequence of land accumulation, moreover, can be found in countless articles and inquiries published both in national and international newspapers. As a peasant leader explained to *El Espectador*:

*“Since the signing of the Peace Agreement, people of dubious reputation from the Cauca Valley and Antioquia arrived to this territory to colonize these lands. They were saying to people who were begging at traffic lights: “Hey you, are you a farmer? Yes, sir. Well, listen, I want you to go and colonize that part in Meta or Guaviare. You go cut 3,000 acres, take 10 for yourself and the rest for me. That’s why in 2017 deforestation soared” (El Espectador, 2020, February 26. My translation)<sup>38</sup>.*

Materials produced by the academic community support this hypothesis; albeit reaching divergent conclusions, multiple studies recognize and assess the relationship between armed conflict and environmental degradation. While some highlight the damage of armed conflict to nature, others emphasize its conservation potential. Very few studies and all recent ones focus on the increase of deforestation in the post-conflict period. A notable exception is the research paper by Grima and Singh (2019). The Colombian increase in deforestation shows significant similarities to that observed in Perú by them. Therefore, the Peruvian case is particularly

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<sup>37</sup> Mongabay LATAM. (2017). “One cow per hectare: deforestation in Colombia after FARC’s exit”. (2017).6 June [online]. Available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/2017/06/one-cow-per-hectare-deforestation-in-colombia-after-farcs-exit/>. (Accessed: 30 June 2020).

<sup>38</sup> El Espectador. (2020). “Petróleo, terratenientes y colonos: la disputa por la tierra en La Macarena”. 26 February [online]. Available at: <https://www.elespectador.com/colombia2020/territorio/petroleo-terratenientes-y-colonos-la-disputa-por-la-tierra-en-la-macarena-articulo-906409>. (Accessed: 30 June 2020).

instructive from the perspective of this analysis. Like Colombia, Perú has also experienced prolonged civil conflict between government and guerrilla warfare, whose claims and political actions concerned ownership and access to land. Although no peace agreement has ever been officially reached, this conflict is considered to be over and the guerrillas defeated. Since their withdrawal from the forest, deforestation has exploded. Among the causes for this, the authors list the State absence, the non-implementation of agrarian reforms and the land accumulation in the hands of landowners and multinationals (ibid., p. 270).

In Colombia, academic studies found that deforestation has increased considerably since the peace agreement was signed, but “still, the region is far from being completely understood by the scientific community” (Hoffman et al, 2018, p. 379). Previous studies on the Colombian context are scarce because “decades of intense conflict in the region and the presence of different armed groups have made deforestation processes difficult to observe and analyse for researchers” (ibid.) With regard to the AMEM region, Harvard researchers applied *Synthetic Aperture Radar* (SAR) to monitor deforestation, and confirmed that deforestation dramatically increased during the post-agreement period, mainly due to cattle ranching and land grabbing (Herndon et al., 2019). Clerici et al. (2019, 2020) argue that peace has led to a power vacuum, filled up with the fragmentation of illegal groups expanding across the territory, and that this situation has allowed the expansion of large estates, identified as the main cause of deforestation. Armenteras et al. (2019) show that following the peace agreement, fires in protected regions of the Amazon region have increased sixfold due to the private accumulation of large land regions. The FARC-EP, motivate the authors, have carried out, during years, territorial and ecological control, “while today actors on the ground have responded to the power vacuum before any institutional response has coalesced” (ibid., p. 22). Murillo-Sandoval et al. (2020) explain the same dynamic, by using the concept of “gunpoint conservation” (Alvarez, 2003). The aim of their analysis is to explain why the FARC-EP's withdrawal, “led to increases in large-scale cattle ranching, coca cultivation dispersal, and speculative illegal land markets each of which contributed to the widespread forest disturbance” (Murillo-Sandoval et al., 2020, p. 1).

The common point of these research findings is that the increase in deforestation is dictated by the process of accumulation of land and capital in areas that previously were considered as “off limits” (Sandovaal et al, 2020) due to the FARC-EP's presence. As Francisco Parra, regional coordinator of *Cormacarena* explains, “*the FARC didn't allow to touch this region, which was strategic for them*” (Verdadabierta, year n.s. My translation)<sup>39</sup>. Numerous authors interpret the power vacuum as the opportunity that allows illegal land grabbers, armed groups and guerrilla dissidence, to expand in the area. The only analysis that explicitly opposes this interpretation is that of Alvarez (2001, 2003). The author argues that forced eradication policies, and the implementation of agricultural development policies would have been likely to have a negative effect on deforestation, causing greater damage than the production of illicit crops.

According to the local inhabitants' perception, the army presence, justified by the fight against deforestation, enables what it should counteract. Or better said, the militarization of conservation directly incentivizes a process of land grabbing. Of which, deforestation is the most evident effect. The strategy adopted by the government appears to the local grassroots organizations as part of a larger plan, which foresees the forced removal of the families, to facilitate the entry of large landowners and multinationals. In their opinion, peasants are accused of being responsible for deforestation, but as a leader of the La Macarena communal city declared:

*“There are many other people who financed the indiscriminate deforestation. The tomb of an hectare costs around 500,000 pesos, but the small farmer does not have the capacity to cut down 200 hectares per year. The small farmer cuts down a maximum of five, but they are being persecuted and prosecuted today”* (El Espectador, 2020, February 26. My translation).

As a journalist states, commenting on the arrests of 24 peasants following the fires on February 2020 (see previous chapter) the country “is waiting to understand who are the mafias responsible for deforestation, that is, the strong and economic arm that pays the farmers and settlers who live near the wooded land to end with the life of hectares of the forest” (Semana Sostenible, 2018,

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<sup>39</sup> “Derechos Humanos en el post conflicto Colombiano”. Available at: <https://verdadabierta.com/especiales-v/2018/ddhh-posconflicto-colombiano/>(Accessed: 15 July 2020)

December 18. My translation)<sup>40</sup>. Those defined by the journalist as “mafias”, are here framed as big landowners favoured in their process of hoarding land not only, as the peasants claim, by the army presence but also by state politics and its land policies.

### **4.3. The State’s responsibility in the process of deforestation**

This analysis contrasts with framing land grabbing as a phenomenon caused by a power vacuum. Rather, it is here described as a process favoured by the Colombian State's policies of land redistribution and environmental conservation. Two significant policies are then analyzed: 1) the non-implementation of the Integral Rural Reform (IRR), which was the first point of the 2016 peace agreement, and the implementation of a counter- agrarian reform represented by the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2018. 2) The definition in the National Development Plan 2018/2022 of a higher deforestation limit than those reached before the signature of the 2016 peace agreement. I conclude with a reflection on the historical relationship between the big landowners (especially farmers) and the State.

Firstly, since the signing of the peace agreement, a new political financial regime was applied to the still partially virgin land, the “new agrarian frontier” (Grajaes, 2017, p. 23). This frontier should have been used to promote horizontal and democratic agricultural development. At least according to what argued by President Santos (2011/2018), while he was referring to the government's new plans for the post-conflict Amazonia:

*“This will be the great definition of our future, this will stimulate the development in the countryside, big investments. But there is enough land for the peasants, for those who don't have*

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<sup>40</sup> Semana Sostenible. (2019). “2019: la cuota inicial para torcerle el brazo a la deforestación en Colombia”. 18 December [online]. Available at: [.https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/medio-ambiente/articulo/un-ano-de-anuncios-para-ponerle-tatequieto-a-la-deforestacion-en-colombia/48116](https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/medio-ambiente/articulo/un-ano-de-anuncios-para-ponerle-tatequieto-a-la-deforestacion-en-colombia/48116). (Accessed: 15 July 2020).

*any land. We have 40 million hectares to cultivate and 60 million to protect*” (Presidency of the Colombian Republic, 2018, June 21. My Translation).

In reality, however, the government has only favoured large capital investments that peace has made possible. The redistribution of land, which was envisaged in the peace agreement, in fact, never occurred. According to many, the only way to ensure a lasting peace in Colombia would have been through an integral and sustainable land reform (Morales, 2017, p. 7). As in *La paz ambiental: retos y propuesta para el posacuerdo*<sup>41</sup> it is specified: “if the conflict revolved around natural resources and the environment, the success of the peacebuilding process would be shaped by multiple socio-environmental factors” (Rodríguez Garavito et al., 2017, p. 12. My translation). The peace agreement, called “Territorial Peace”, mainly revolved around land. During the negotiations, in fact, land has been recognized by both sides (the Colombian government and the FARC-EP guerrilla) as the main structural cause of the civil conflict during the last 50 years (FARC-EP, 2016)<sup>42</sup>. Land reform, called Integral Rural Reform, was therefore the first of the six points of the peace agreement. The main points of this land reform were the allocation of 3 million hectares of State land to landless citizens (Acuerdo final, 2016, p. 13)<sup>43</sup>, and the constitution of a land register (ibid., pp. 18/19). Informality in land ownership in Colombia was over 80 percent at the beginning of peace negotiations between the government and the FARC-EP guerrillas (FAO, 2012)<sup>44</sup>. The absence of formal recognition in land

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<sup>41</sup> *Environmental peace: challenges and proposals for the post-agreement* (My translation) is an important research founded by Dejusticia (an independent research Colombian institute) on environmental causes as a determining factor for the construction of a democratic peace process in post-conflict Colombia

<sup>42</sup> Estado Mayor central de las FARC-EP. (2016). “Palabras de Rodrigo Londoño con ocasión del segundo aniversario de la firma de los Acuerdos de La Habana”. Available at: <https://www.farc-ep.co/comunicado/palabras-de-rodrico-londono-con-ocasion-del-segundo-aniversario-de-la-firma-de-los-acuerdos-de-la-habana.html>. (Accessed: 23 June 2020).

<sup>43</sup> ACUERDO FINAL PARA LA TERMINACIÓN DEL CONFLICTO Y LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE UNA PAZ ESTABLE Y DURADERA. 12 November 2016. Available at: [https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/sites/default/files/Fotos2016/12.11\\_1.2016nuevoacuerdofinal.pdf](https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/sites/default/files/Fotos2016/12.11_1.2016nuevoacuerdofinal.pdf). (Accessed: 12 July 2020).

<sup>44</sup> Soto Baquero, F. and Gómez, S. (2012). “Dinámicas del mercado de la tierra en América Latina y el Caribe: concentración y extranjerización”. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [online]. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i2547s.pdf>. (Accessed: 17 July 2020).

ownership directly favors the accumulation of land in the hands of the few who have large amounts of capital. Changing this structural problem is of fundamental importance to counter the trend of land accumulation and therefore political, economic and social inequalities.

In Colombia there has been a land reform, followed by a counter-agrarian reform every six years since 1963 (Parades Leguizamón, 2011, p. 2). The tendency of political power not to implement changes in land management policies and the formalization of land ownership seems to have not changed in the post-conflict period. The 2016 IRR has been strongly attacked by the country's elites. On several occasions it has been defined as a *coup d'état* by former President Uribe (EFE, 2015, September 26; LaFM, 2019, June 29)<sup>45</sup>. He is undoubtedly the most important political personality of the last two decades in Colombian and a member of the Colombian conservative party. The latter promotes the interests of the large landowners' elite, which is the same elite that supports President Duque (2018/today), and has promoted his election. The National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2022<sup>46</sup> approved by the Duques's administration is, to all intents and purposes, an agrarian counter-reform because it modifies the agreements reached by the FARC-EP guerrillas with the previous government. By doing so, it nullifies the peace agreement in itself, being the Integral Rural Reform, as already pointed out, the first and main point that should have been implemented to allow a democratic transition in Colombia. The main points that allow to analyze it as a counter- agrarian reform are: 1) The non recognition of the importance of participatory and community dynamics in the protection of territories. 2) The non-existence of a plan for delimiting the agricultural frontier, through an integrated participation between the national, regional and local institutions. No mention is made of the

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<sup>45</sup> Agencia EFE. (2015). "Uribe dice que los acuerdos con las FARC son un "golpe de Estado a la democracia". 26 September [online]. Available at: <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/politica/uribe-dice-que-los-acuerdos-con-las-farc-son-un-golpe-de-estado-a-la-democracia/20000035-2722933>. (Accessed: 17 July 2020). LAFM. (2019). "Uribe dice que el proceso de paz fue un golpe de Estado". 29 June [online]. Available at: <https://www.lafm.com.co/politica/uribe-dice-que-reforma-la-jep-no-tendria-que-afectar-congresistas-de-farc>

<sup>46</sup> Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2018-2022. Pacto por Colombia, pacto por la equidad. Available at: <https://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Prensa/Resumen-PND2018-2022-final.pdf>. (Accessed: 12 July 2020).

economic resources to be allocated, nor the temporal objectives, are defined. 3) No mention is made of the redistribution of State's land or of poverty reduction plans in rural regions. 4) The definition of the need to finance agricultural enterprises with a high productive value and strategic importance as the main objective of this policy (NDP 2018/2022, pp. 32-54). This policy is disadvantaging the beneficiaries of the Integral Rural Reform, namely the landless farmers and the political autonomy of their communities. Moreover, it also directly favours the class of large landowners. These are, as I stressed in the first part of this chapter, the main actors in the process of deforestation, carried out in order to expand their land holdings. This National Development Plan therefore favours the accumulation of land at both national and regional level. In the AMEM, its implications are manifested in the increase in deforestation.

Secondly, the current government's National Development Plan is extremely controversial with regard to the environmental protection and raises many doubts about the government's real willingness to limit deforestation. First of all, it contradicts the various international agreements signed by the government to curb deforestation<sup>47</sup>, and in particular the last international founded strategy, called *National Council to Combat Deforestation and Other Associated Environmental Crimes* (CONALDEF), approved in 2018 by the Duque's administration. In the NDP 2018-2022, in fact, it is accepted a deforestation limit of 220,000 hectares per year (NDP 2018, p. 195). This value is higher than those reached annually before the signing of the agreement (Semana Sostenible, 2019, May 6)<sup>48</sup>. It is interesting to note that by accepting deforestation at this limit, an area as large as the entire AMEM region would be completely deforested in 15 years. This was defined by the environment minister María Claudia García as a policy that does not contradict the objectives contained in the CONALDEF. The national environmental strategy has been

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<sup>47</sup> The Paris Agreement (2015) is the last and more important international agreement signed by the Colombian government to fight against environmental degradation. This and the others are listed in the Introduction

<sup>48</sup> Semana Sostenible. (2019). "La meta de deforestación del Plan Nacional de Desarrollo empeoró". 6 May [online]. Available at: <https://sostenibilidad.semana.com/opinion/articulo/la-meta-de-deforestacion-del-plan-nacional-de-desarrollo-empeoro/4408>. (Accessed: 23 June 2020).

funded with €366 million from Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, in addition to \$180 million that Colombia already received in 2015 (Reuters, 2019, December 11)<sup>49</sup>. The aim of this strategy is to eliminate livestock farming and intensive agriculture (internationally considered as the main causes of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest) from 150,000 hectares of forest by 2021, and to curb deforestation to zero by 2025. According to the minister, the NDP is not in contradiction with the strategy financed by international donors because “*deforestation has a growing trend of at least 20 to 25 percent per year. The trend shows that in 2022 deforestation will reach almost 350,000 hectares. So, going from 350,000 to 220,000 hectares means that we are preventing 150,000 hectares from being lost*” (El Tiempo, 2019, March 10)<sup>50</sup>. Secondly, the acceptance of deforestation as necessary for economic development contradicts the definition of the fight against deforestation as a priority for national security, and therefore raises suspicions about the government's real intentions in implementing the Artemisa military campaign. These suspicions are heightened by the relationship between the State and landowners that has recurred in national history, and which has left traces of violence in recent history.

Land grabbing is an often violent and illegal phenomenon, as has been described in the theoretical analysis at the beginning of the chapter. This illegality needs and sometimes obtains the State's support to become legitimate. In Colombia, this was normally done either through counter-agrarian reforms or by titling state lands to private individuals, who cannot be

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<sup>49</sup> Reuters. (2019). “Colombia's Amazon forest gets boost with \$366 million protection fund”. 11 December [online] Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-forests-climate-trfn/colombias-amazon-forest-gets-boost-with-366-million-protection-fund-idUSKBN1YF2BD>. (Accessed: 17 July 2020).

<sup>50</sup> El Tiempo. (2019). “Frenar el crecimiento de la deforestación a 2022, ¿meta suficiente?”. 10 March [online]. Available at: <https://www.eltiempo.com/vida/medio-ambiente/plan-del-gobierno-duque-para-frenar-la-deforestacion-en-colombia-335636>. (Accessed: 10 August 2020).

beneficiaries of agrarian reforms (Ballvè 2012; Grajales 2012, 2017). This institutional support has been defined as a contract that “authorizes the authorizers” (Lund and Sikor, 2009). During the civil conflict, the agreement between landowners and governmental institutions was necessary because, “even when violence alone was enough to engineer a land grab, these ill-gotten resources had to be turned into official, legally recognized properties that could be sold, eventually to become part of the globalized agro-industrial sector” (Grajales, 2017, p. 27 ).

The alliance between the State and the big landowners is a recurring factor in Colombian history. This is based on their common interest in territorial conquest, which often takes place by violent means. The peace agreements signed between the paramilitaries United Self-defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) and the Uribe government in 2002, well summarizes this symbiosis. 70 per cent of those who benefited from it, in fact, were big farmers (Gutiérrez Sanín and Vargas, 2017, pp. 741/742). By comparing the testimonies of peasants evicted from their land by violent means with the land extensions registered as private immediately after the signing of the peace, it was also possible to observe the systematic nature of this symbiosis in regulating land ownership (Grajales, 2015: 541-60). These lands, obtained through legalised violence, have never been taken away from them and to be redistributed to those who lived there before, despite the high number of testimonies collected from victims of violence and forced evictions. As Fajardo (2014) explains: “These situations, which have occurred on a persistent basis, have largely been the result of the State's action in favour of the interests of exclusion expressed in political decisions concerning the occupation of the territory and the allocation of rights over it” (p. 6. My translation). This systematically recurring event induced Ballvè (2012) to describe the Colombian process of state territorialization as the result of an historical process of accumulation, sustained by the absence of agrarian reforms and the acquisition of state's land by private capital, often financed by violence (ibid., p. 618). In line with him, and contrary to widespread academic opinion on the increase in deforestation, it is possible to discard the power vacuum as the main cause of deforestation in the AMEM region today. It is instead possible to describe it as the result of the symbiotic relationship between the State and large landowners. Its material effect, today as in the past, is the violent repression and persecution of the human rights and environment defenders.

## CONCLUSION

The fundamental biological and political character of the AMEM region is that of being a forest space, which has been crossed by forms of colonization, exploitation of natural resources, and the application of counterinsurgent and repressive strategies towards the local inhabitants. The object of this research was the implementation of the state's policy of militarization of conservation in the region today. The focus lays in understanding the political consequence of this process, in terms of State's territorial control in the post-conflict period in Colombia. To explore it, an historical analysis of the relationship between conservation and territorial control in the AMEM region was provided by using the theoretical lens offered by the concept of "political forest", coined by Peluso and Vandergeest. This concept allows the analysis of the political present as a process of both continuity and discontinuity with respect to the State's action on that territory, and towards the local population. As observed by Van-Dexter and Visseren-Hamakers (2019) "in Colombia, depictions of the Amazon as a 'wild' 'no man's land' governed by 'law of the jungle' have been integral to the production of its frontier, as well as the normalization of violence associated with trajectories of agricultural colonization, the commodification of forests, and war" (p. 4).

One of the significant characteristics detailed in this assessment was the simultaneous absence of the State as an institutional body and its presence as an armed entity in the AMEM region for a long time. This double character has been particularly evident during what was defined as the third period of the political forest, and it is strictly linked to the political present. This analysis found that the fourth period of AMEM political forests began following the peace agreement signed by the Colombian Government with the FARC-EP guerrillas in 2016. This represents a political break moment for the whole country, and its effects have been particularly evident in the AMEM region. The fourth period of this region is characterized by the implementation of the policy of militarization of conservation. This militarization is taking place as a state response to the increase in deforestation since 2016, and it has been legitimized through a process of environmental securitization.

## **Research findings**

The analysis of the process of discursive legitimation that preceded the Artemisa military campaign is the most relevant aspect of this research paper. It illustrates, in fact, how the environment was framed as a national and international security priority for the first time in the Colombian history. This case study detects the implementation of the state's policy of conservation as a means to justify and prolong its repressive and counterinsurgent policies in the AMEM region. These are the same strategies that were already being implemented during the third phase of the political forest. What mainly differs today compared to the past is that the Colombian state is imposing its presence on the territory in an armed form in order to guarantee its conservation.

The protection of Colombian environmental resources was defined as a prerogative of the State. Symbolic and material barriers have been drawn between the friends of nature and the natural enemies of the State. Conservation defined the boundaries within which the State must act. And those within which the social actors, criminalized and stigmatized as responsible for environmental degradation, cannot act. Moreover, counterinsurgency strategies physically eliminate people whose presence hinders State's projects aimed at centralizing the territory in the form of both private and public capital. This analysis leads to a deeper academic understanding of the phenomenon of the militarization of conservation highlighting the effects of symbolic and structural violence that it causes in the AMEM region. Moreover, the Colombian State's discourse was influenced by the process of defining environmental degradation as a threat to international security that began in the 1990s. This implies that what's happening in Colombia is not an isolated case. Further researches are needed on the consequences that this mechanism of discursive legitimation could assume at the international level.

The other relevant aspect of this research is the reflection on the State's responsibility in the land grabbing process, of which deforestation is the most evident consequence. According to this

analysis, the increase in deforestation in the AMEM region today is not a consequence of a power vacuum. It is rather defined as favoured by national policies regarding access to land, its redistribution, and forest conservation. The policies examined, and in particular the NDP 2018/2022, do not counteract the hoarding of land in the hands of large landowners. On the contrary, they even allow to maintain, in the name of economic development, a limit of deforestation higher to those reached before the signing of the 2016 peace agreement. Contrary to what Massè and Lunstrum (2016) claim, the process of accumulation by dispossession is not always just a consequence of the implementation of the militarization of conservation. In the case of the AMEM region in the post-colombian conflict it is both a trigger and a result. In both cases, the subject of such action is the State. What is saved from the hoarding massacre of nature is preserved, and then further dispossessed. And this is the most significant difference with the violence of the past. At least in this case study.

What is normally interpreted as a process of accumulation caused by a power vacuum can instead be described as the opening of a new frontier of accumulation of land and capital. As conceptualized by Rasmussen and Lund (2017), a frontier “is not space itself. It is something that happens in and to space. Frontiers take place. Literally” (p. 388). The creation of this space takes place through a process of capital extraction, that replaces the previous social, environmental and political order (ibid). As Ballvé (2017) explains, by referring to the Colombian context of the post-agreement, capital reforms natural space through a mode of production based on the extraction of natural resources in a regime of violence. As the author argues: “what looks like State absence, as much in Colombia, as on the Niger Delta, can coincide, in reality, with its camouflaged presence (ibid., p. 171). The presence of the national army as the only authority in the AMEM region determines today the creation of a frontier, because the process of “frontier making sets the stage for territorialization by challenging the pre-existing regulatory mechanisms and authorities” (Hein et al., 2020, p. 40).

The process of land grabbing in the AMEM region began during the third period of the political forest. In the previous decade, the State's armed presence was aimed at recovering the territory both politically and administratively. The paramilitary forces not only supported the actions of

the State, but also the process of reconquest of the territory, which -from that moment on- was concentrated in large estates. The case of the AMEM region was not isolated but part of a historical dynamic of territorialisation through violence which affected the entire national territory during the more than 50 years of civil conflict. The only scholar who refers to a direct responsibility of the State in the land grabbing process in Colombia, and recognizes it as a project of territorialization, is Grajales (2012, 2013). According to the author: “land grabbing in Colombia does not occur in an stateless environment, but rather in the entanglement of private and public actors” (p. 218). Based on his analysis, the increase in deforestation following the peace agreement is defined here as a process of land grabbing directly favoured by the State to expand its control.

The analysis of the data collected for this research leads to the conclusion that the militarization of conservation coincides with a process of state territorialization. As already mentioned in the introduction, territorialization is defined as an “attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area” (Sack, 1986, p. 19). This broadens academic knowledge on the relationship between the militarization of conservation and state territorialization. As already noted, there is little attention among scholars of political ecology in dealing with it. The lack mainly stems from the contextualization of the militarization of conservation as a neoliberal conservation policy. The militarization of conservation is often analyzed as a process of a land/green grabbing, carried out by the State or private agents, but supported by international interests that undermine the State’s authority. However, as Ballvè (2017) observes, the presence of international actors or environmental NGOs interested in natural conservation, only increases the relationship between the State and landowners and their political and economic power in post conflictual Colombia.

In this case study, the environment conservation underlies the interest of the State to expand its control over a portion of the national territory through the use of armed forces. This hypothesis is supported by previous analyses on the implementation of conservation policies in Colombia. In

line with Ojeda (2012), the use of military forces in a natural reserve area is recognized here as the state's recourse to counterinsurgent strategies to acquire a portion of national territory out of its control. In line with Heine et al. (2020), nature conservation policies (like the creation of new National Natural Parks) are not simply framed as green grabbing (Fairhead et al., 2012), but rather as a process of territorialization. The analysis of the implementation of the military intervention in the specific spatial and temporal context taken into consideration, however, brings new features to the academic debate. New research is needed to deepen the interest and responsibility of the state, favoured by international institutions, in the increasingly widespread practice of using violent means to conserve natural areas.

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