

Repression and dispossession in the implementation of the Eastern Antioquia hydroelectrical complex

Represión y despojo en la implementación
del complejo hidroeléctrico del Oriente
antioqueño

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Abstract

This article sketches the role of state-sponsored violence in the implementation of the Eastern Antioquia hydroelectrical complex between 1964 and 1998. Through an historical analysis based on literature and media review, this paper argues that the 'development' strategy conceived by the Antioquia's elite to meet the growing demand of energy of the Medellín's industry was imposed on the local population, leading to systematic land appropriation and to forced displacement. Moreover, the persecution of the pacific local grassroots organizations directly triggered a 30-year-long cycle of violence that destroyed the region's social fabric, while benefiting the interests of the industrial elite of Antioquia.

Keywords: Violence, Economic development, Social Conflict, Colombia, Forced Displacement

Resumen

Este artículo esboza el papel de la violencia institucional en la implementación del complejo hidroeléctrico del Oriente Antioqueño entre 1964 y 1998. A través de un análisis histórico basado en la revisión de literatura y de los principales medios de comunicación regionales, este artículo sostiene que el modelo de "desarrollo" concebido por las élites antioqueñas para satisfacer la creciente demanda de energía de la industria de Medellín fue impuesto a la población local del Oriente antioqueño, lo que condujo a la apropiación sistemática de la tierra y al desplazamiento forzado de gran parte de los habitantes de la región. Adicionalmente, la persecución de los procesos de organización pacíficos locales por la defensa del territorio desencadenó un ciclo de violencia de 30 años que destruyó el tejido social de la región y benefició los intereses de la élite industrial antioqueña.

Palabras clave: Violencia, Desarrollo Económico, Conflicto Social, Colombia, Desplazamiento Forzado.

Resumen analítico

El complejo hidroeléctrico del Oriente antioqueño produce casi el 30% de la energía que se consume en el país (CCOA, 2019). Sin embargo, este proyecto ha acarreado no solo grandes pérdidas para el tejido social de las comunidades que fueron desplazadas en la inundación de la represa de Guatapé, sino también una sistemática represión violenta a los procesos de organización social pacífica que han defendido el derecho al territorio de las comunidades locales.

Siguiendo nociones de la teoría de acumulación por despojo de David Harvey y la teoría de desarrollo desigual entre el centro y la periferia de Samir Amin, este artículo propone revelar la relación de causalidad entre la imposición de un modelo de desarrollo fundamentado en las demandas energéticas de la industria antioqueña y el ciclo de violencia que afectó a los municipios de El Peñol, Guatapé, San Rafael, San Carlos, San Luis y San Francisco, entre 1964 (inicio de las primeras manifestaciones contra el proyecto hidroeléctrico) y la primera década de los años 2000. Finalmente, este artículo pretende contribuir a los debates relacionados con las causas históricas del conflicto armado en Colombia, y hace hincapié en la imposición de modelos de desarrollo que no representan el querer de las comunidades rurales.

Introduction

As a country with vast quantities of tropical unexplored regions and a scattered dynamic of power, the history of Colombia has been determined by a parallel of perpetual conflict (Gonzales, 2014) and the project of 'development', understood as the post-colonial plan of the regional 'criollo' elites to conquer, dominate and bring 'western' welfare to each region's hinterlands, mainly through the private-held colonization of virgin land made by the poor 'campesino' (Bernal, 1990).

These two features have been deeply linked: Colombia had twelve national civil wars and dozens of regional conflicts since its independence (Espinal, 2011). In most of them, land tenancy was a key source of contention and violence (Safford & Palacios, 2002) (Gonzales, 2014) (Machado, 2017).

The last two of these 'cycles of violence' (from 1948 to 1957 and from 1964 till nowadays) were especially determined by the 'land question', which served as *casus belli* for poor rural inhabitants to form and join liberal self-defence groups that eventually transformed into leftist guerrillas.

At the same time, the mid-20th century in Colombia was characterized by a slow-paced industrialization process that required a high degree of intervention of the state through infrastructure projects –roads, ports, dams, etc.– in historically agrarian areas, as well as the expansion of the agrarian boundaries through private colonization to meet the demands of transportation, energy, and food of the growing manufacturing sector. It was in those recently intervened and colonized areas where most of the episodes of the civil conflict have taken place in the last 70 years (Botero Ospina, 2004, p. 13).

The state's intervention of the rural areas in Colombia through sponsored peasant colonialism and through 'development' projects have had mixed effects for the local population. In some cases, major infrastructure projects in the Colombian rurality have been closely related with the high degree of power centralization and the lack of participation of the local communities in the decision-making process regarding their region's model of development. Following Marx's Primitive Accumulation, understood as the privatization and commodification of land as a precondition for capitalist accumulation (De Angelis, 2001, p. 7), colonialism leads to the destruction of communal property and forced displacement of the afro and indigenous communities in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Precisely, the last cycle of violence (1964-2021) has triggered a wave of more than 8 million displaced Colombians, who were forced to leave their land. The 'land question', or more precisely, the restitution of the land currently held by the state, the national landlord class, and the international corporations who were often allied with the right wing narco-paramilitary groups (Vega Cantor, 2002), to their original tenants, is one of the key unsolved issues of the Colombian armed conflict.

Concretely, the efforts held by the state to intervene the periphery have been far from generating well-being in the local communities. The most important port of the country is surrounded by a poverty rate of almost 70%, and the regions where oil is extracted (Catatumbo, Magdalena Medio, Arauca and Casanare) have been some of the most violent in the whole country.

Moreover, resistance to development projects and the quest for participation in the discussion of the growth agenda have been historically neglected by the establishment. This work aims to sketch the way in which the Antioquian elites benefited from the terror suffered by the grassroots peaceful resistance movements that struggled to protect the land and demanded fair compensation for the land loss in the construction of the Guatapé, Calderas, San Carlos, Jaguas and Playas dams and hydroelectric plants in Eastern Antioquia, causing not only hundreds of deaths and thousands of displaced, but also profound scars that affect the current land-protection initiatives of the region.

I argue that the 'development' strategy conceived by the political and economic elites in Eastern Antioquia, that lead to the construction of the hydroelectric complex of the region to meet the growing demand of energy for Medellín's industry, triggered a 30-year-long cycle of violence that specifically affected the local population throughout political persecution, land dispossession and forced displacement. Paradoxically, this period of violence did not significantly affect the legitimacy of the state or the regional

elites thanks to the ‘demonization’ of the local grassroots organizations and the official counterinsurgency terror strategy implemented during the cold war, preventing the establishment of links of cooperation with other regional movements affected by other ‘development’ projects.

Economic development and identity in Antioquia

Antioquia is the most populated and most industrialized department of Colombia. Having its economic, political, and cultural core in the middle of the Andean Mountain range, the region has developed its own notion of development: the free man that dominates the nature and trades its surplus to provide welfare to his family. This was poetically captured in the second verse of its anthem, written by Epifanio Mejía in 1868:

The axe that my elders left me by inheritance,
I love it because free accents resound with its blows.

However, its cosmovision and self-reflection as ‘*echado pa’ lante*’¹ also implicated the notion of superiority that legitimized the destruction of the nature and the colonization –in many cases, massacre– of other communities, as it occurred with the Embera Chamí indigenous communities in the Antioquian Colonization process between the mid-19th and the early 20th century (Franco Alzate, 2010, p.10), a historical fact deliberately hidden in the popular narrative of development of the *Antioqueños*.

Memory is a political tool and therefore different groups of power have tried to dominate the narrative regarding peace and war in Colombia to legitimate their policies with the public audience. As an on-going conflict, the ‘historical truth’ is still contested as can be seen in the current struggle regarding the National Centre for Historical Memory (*Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica*), where the conservative establishment is trying to deny the existence of an ‘Armed Conflict’ (Pulzo, 2020). The narratives of historically marginalized groups have been underestimated at best and silenced at worst.

1 Hardworking or forward-pushing kind of person.

The history told from the side of the indigenous, afro, women, LGBTI, farmers, and trade unionists remains absent from the public discourse, both because many of them were massacred but also because the perpetrators and their interests remain dominant in the State, the media, and the educational apparatus. This paper's purpose is to contribute to peace-building efforts through the development of alternative narratives 'from the bottom', and the creation of memory for the consolidation of democracy.

The relevance of hydroelectric energy in Colombia and the myth of sustainable energy

The post-war period brought an economic and demographic growth that justified the building of more than 40,000 hydroelectric projects that would end up damming more than half of the world's rivers in 140 countries (World Commission on Dams, 2000). Dams were promoted as the main tool to meet water and energy needs and to support economic growth (Ibid., p.12), no matter the substantial environmental and social consequences, especially in Latin America where massive hydroelectric projects were perceived as a demonstration of the national pride, regardless of the political affiliation.

Colombia largely depends on hydroelectric energy, with 68% of its demand covered thanks to its 28 major and 115 minor hydroelectric plants (Montes, 2019). The region with the highest hydroelectric potential is Antioquia, with 25 plants. Specifically, the region of Eastern Antioquia supplies 30% of the energy of Colombia (Quintero Hernandez, 2007, p.103). However, the damming of rivers and the construction of the plants have had major impacts in the local ecosystems. One paradigmatic case is El Quimbo Dam, whose construction was accountable for a major ecological disaster and the destruction of thousands of hectares of Humid Tropical Forest (Zimmerman, 2016).

Yet, probably the least recognized impact of hydroelectric projects in Colombia has been its role as promoters of violence, as we will analyze in the next section with the case of Eastern Antioquia. Other prominent cases are the Urrá Dam, built in the ancestral land of the *Emberá Katío* community (Castrillon, Jaramillo, & Mesa, 2012), where thousands of locals were forcefully displaced and their leader, Kimi Pernía, was murdered by a right-wing paramilitary group after he

denounced the *de facto* alliance between the narco-paramilitary organizations, the region's elites and the capitalists in favour of the construction of the dam (Verdad Abierta, 2010). Another case is the Hidroituango Dam, built over mass graves of hundreds of victims of three decades of war in the north of Antioquia. There, the *Ríos Vivos* and other movements are still threatened and murdered for defending the rivers and the local population (FD, 2019).

The debate over the social and environmental costs of dams remains unsolved in a context where climate change has hastened the inclusion of sustainable energy in the political agenda. International organizations like Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All), who has close ties with the UN and the World Bank, and the International Hydropower Association who lobby for the enhancing of hydroelectric projects as a way to meet the commitments on sustainable energy, portray hydropower as the cleanest, cheapest and most efficient energy source (Vidal, 2017). On the contrary, the NGO International Rives has highlighted the immense and irreparable costs on the ecosystems destroyed by damming, as well as the normalization of human rights violations that their construction has involved².

The industrialization of Medellín and the quest for new energy sources

The department of Antioquia dwells in the central north-western part of Colombia. It has its regional capital in Medellín, the second largest city in the country. The region has its economic, political, and cultural core in the central mountain range of the Andes, giving it a distinctive notion of identity thanks to its geographical isolation (Safford & Palacios, 2002, pp. 5-6), a sense of identity that was enhanced thanks to the region's economic success in the last century, which allowed its regional elites to gain enough popular support to carry out its 'developmental' agenda in the 50's and 60's (Restrepo Santamaría, 2011, pp. 87-88).

2 Projects such as the Belo Monte project on the Xingu river that would affect one of the main rivers of the Amazon and displace indigenous communities, the Ilisu dam in Turkey that will destroy the 4,000-year-old city of Hasankeyf and deprive of water the north of Iraq, and the Hidroituango complex in north Colombia that imposed the displacement of thousands of farmers, have provoked fierce opposition by civil society groups that demand the protection of nature and self-determination of local communities.

The industrialization of Medellín started in the early 20th century, with the establishment of the first small-size manufacturing companies in the city that derived from the initial accumulation of capital during the 19th century through gold extraction and non-monopolized coffee production in Antioquia's rurality (Botero Herrera, 1983, p. 102). However, it would be only after the Great Depression when the country started to adopt export-substitution policies (Sánchez Jabba, 2013) that would boost the industrialization process and transform Medellín into the industrial centre of the country.

The key sector for Antioquia's industrial development was the textile manufacturing, which grew at an exponential pace thanks to the cooperation of Medellín-based Fabricato, Coltejer and Tejicondor companies with the American military clothing sector in the second world war, shifting radically the economical dynamics of the country: in 1929 textile manufacturing represented 25% of the industrial aggregate, while in 1945 it accounted for 52% of it (Sánchez Jabba, 2013, p. 192).

Image 1: location of Eastern -*Oriente*- Antioquia. Source: Lopez, 2009.



In parallel to the economic boom, the persistent rural violence within the Conservative-Liberal civil war contributed to the rapid urbanization of the country where Medellín is a paradigmatic example, tripling its population from

360,000 in 1952 to 1,100,000 in 1973, growing at a pace of almost 10% per year between 1952 and 1964 (Ruiz, 2013, p. 246). Against the backdrop of an exponential increase in the demand of energy, both the national and the regional governments started to develop long-term plans to enhance the domestic energy production capabilities. The central government expected the tripling of the demand in a period of 15 years after 1948, and therefore, decided to create the National Plan for Electrification, which would involve the construction of several small-size dams and hydroelectric plants across the country in the 1950's (Ruiz, 2013, p. 246).

Meanwhile, the Antioquian economic elite, who had already co-opted for the regional political institutions throughout a united informal patronal front (Restrepo Santamaría, 2011, p.87), decided to create *Empresas Públicas de Medellín* (EPM), which would become the most important public company of the region providing 30% of Medellín's public budget thanks to its profitability (Ibid., p. 64).

Controlled since the beginning by the interests of Antioquia's capitalists (Ibid., p.74), the company started to develop mid-size hydroelectric projects such as *Guadalupe* and *Troneras* between 1957 and 1961, balancing for a brief period the energetical deficit of the region. Still, EPM calculated that the population growth would make energy scarce in Medellín by 1968. Thus, in the early 1960's, the company started to plan the most ambitious project of electrical generation in the history of Colombia: the Guatapé Dam and its hydroelectric plants (Tarazona Barbosa, 2016, p.53), which would be financed with a World Bank's credit.

Planning and building the Eastern Antioquia Hydroelectric Complex

The potential of Eastern Antioquia for electrical generation had been analysed since 1929. The National University concluded in the late 1930's that the region was endowed with the ideal conditions for the construction of different medium and large-size dams due to its geographical relief and abundance of rivers, that might ensure a long-term provision of water and electricity for Medellín and Antioquia (Ibid. p.56).

In 1959, EPM made a decision on the specific place where the then new project would dam the Nare River in the middle of the El Peñol valley, at only 45 km away from Medellín. The decision came after different proposals were discussed in the city council of Medellín, who until now represents the city ownership of EPM. Since the beginning of the preliminary studies of the project in 1959, both the inhabitants and the political representatives of the municipalities of Guatapé and El Peñol, the main towns affected by the dam, started to request reliable information regarding the scope and scale of the project without any satisfactory answer from either EPM or the national government (Ibid., p.66). There was no participation of the local communities in the decision-making process, and it was only in 1961 when the flooding of some areas of the territory was communicated to the local population (Gallego Blandón, 2017) that remained uncertain of the magnitude of the impact.

The area surrounding the Nare River in the El Peñol Valley was initially inhabited by the *Chibcha* and *Caribe* people, who fought the Spanish invaders in the early sixteenth century. After the indigenous tribes succumbed, the Spanish established the *encomienda*³ exploitation system, gradually mixing with the white and *mestizo*⁴ peasants and miners who steadily arrived to the region in the eighteenth century.

The last land reform of the colonial times in the 18th century created the distinctive economic feature of the region: the acquisition of the land by smallholders who expanded the agricultural frontier to the east, west, and south of Antioquia. In the east, landless peasants founded the current municipalities of El Peñol in 1714 and Guatapé (Franco Alzate, 2010) in 1811. Since then, the region was characterized by a strong livestock and agricultural production, as well as by distinctive conservative social and political values.

The construction of the Guatapé hydroelectric project was performed in two phases: in the first one (1964-1970), the powerhouse and the floodgates were constructed, while the second one (1970-1976) was centred on the filling of the first part of the dam. In 1978, the urban area of El Peñol was flooded and almost 5,000 people had to be transferred to the 'new' Peñol, with one quarter of Guatapé's rurality suffering the same fate.

3 Labour system established by the Spanish that rewarded the conquerors with the tribute and forced labour of the indigenous inhabitants of the American continent.

4 Person of combined native American and white descent.

The energy restrictions due to the industrial growth that Medellín suffered in the 1950's occurred in the rest of the country in the 1960's. This caused the government to radically change the existing electrical structure that relied on regional nodes that would autonomously provide and distribute the electric service.

Image 2: Eastern Antioquia Hydroelectric Complex. Source: Semana,2016.



In 1967, President Carlos Lleras created *Interconexión Eléctrica S.A.* (ISA), whose task was to centralize the diverse electrical systems of the country and create a plan to supply the growing demand of energy (ISA, 2020) with the support of the World Bank. In the early 1970's, ISA and EPM presented plans for the expansion of the Eastern Antioquia Hydroelectric Complex, which included the construction of four hydroelectric power plants (Jaguas, Calderas, Playas and San Carlos) and three dams (San Lorenzo, Punchiná and Playas) between the municipalities of San Rafael San Roque, Granada and San Carlos.

Those plants were built mainly in the 1980's, but grassroots organization have argued that none of those projects involved the participation of the local communities (CNMH, 2011, p.50) in the decision-making processes. As argued in the next part of this work, the lack of inclusion of the local communities in those projects contributed to the start of a 25-year cycle of political violence in the region.

Grassroot organization, civic resistance, and state violence

The advent of the hydroelectric power complex conceived by Medellín's economic elites was presented to the Eastern Antioquia's inhabitants as a 'development' plan that was accompanied with ambitious investments in vital infrastructure. In their narrative, these would guarantee the access to wider regional, national, and international markets, as well as to public services such as gas and electricity.

However, the lack of participation of the communities in the decision-making processes and the unwillingness of EPM and ISA to establish efficient means of communication with the local population (Tarazona Barbosa, 2016, p.204) worked as a breeding ground for the creation of several organized expressions of popular discontent in different communities impacted by the projects. Although these movements differed in their composition, scope, and time, they shared the same fate: indifference and repression by the political establishment of Antioquia.

After EPM and its contracting firm started to dig the first lands of the future dam in El Peñol, the local inhabitants realized the horrendous consequences of a project that would take, at least, 15 years, affecting their living conditions. According to the local newspapers of the time, EPM's project was not seen as a driver of regional development and well-being, but rather as an encroaching agent unaware of the socio-economic conditions of the territories and unwilling to negotiate or propose alternative ways of development for the locals (Tarazona Barbosa, 2016, p. 213).

As huge machinery had to go through the tiny streets of Guatapé and El Peñol, damages to the local infrastructure were caused, resulting in the creation of the first Committee for the Defence of the Interests of El Peñol (Ibid., p.205). Until 1978, at least six similar committees were created. The group initially aimed to stop the project through lobbying in the regional and national institutions and the organization of the local communities; however, as this goal proved to be unfeasible, its main goals shifted to a fairer compensation for the counterproductive effects of its construction.

In the following years, the tense atmosphere involved multiple civic strikes, road closing strategies, artistic demonstrations, and violent clashes with the police forces that reflected the community's willingness to defend the territory, even after the assassination of Demetrio Galeano in 1965 by an army officer due to his

opposition to sell his land (Olaya, 2017, p.130). In the case of Guatapé, the popular mobilization would be smaller considering that the affectation of its main urban centre was minor compared with the complete flooding of El Peñol town.

The first decade of resistance had two additional paradigmatic features. Firstly, the World Bank decided to temporarily freeze EPM's credit for a brief period, after some local strikes derived into violent confrontations in El Peñol, demanding the company to pursue effective and fair compensation policies. Nevertheless, EPM only committed to pursue wider research on the concrete long term economic and social impacts, as well as communicating the advances of the project more often. Secondly, the Catholic Church, or at least its local priests, encouraged social mobilization and worked in the defence of the community's rights (Lopez, 2009, p.92) (Gallego Blandón, 2017, p.55).

Between the 1969 and 1977, the protest continued mainly due to the delays and non-compliances of EPM and the Antioquia government regarding the construction of the 'new' El Peñol town (Gallego Blandón, 2017, p.13).

The 1980's implied the expansion of the popular mobilization to the surrounding areas, mainly in San Rafael and San Carlos municipalities, due to the construction of new dams and power plants, where, again, there was no participation or even proper socialization of the project with the local communities.

In San Carlos, 2,705 people were displaced in the 1970's, but contrary to El Peñol, ISA and EPM decided not to relocate the displaced communities (CNMH, 2011, p.51), destroying the cultural and social networks and traditions of the territories. Moreover, 3,350 workers arrived temporarily to the town, in a process that triggered the loss of local cohesion and identity according to the local inhabitants (Ibid., p.48).

In 1978 and 1979, different local demonstrations were held against the construction of the Punchiná Dam by farmers, teachers, and students, giving rise to the San Carlos' Civic Board and the Municipal Civic Union (UCM), a non-partisan initiative that broke the liberal-conservative hegemony in the city council in 1982 and 1984.

At the same time, the rise in the price of electricity in the region sparked the creation of the Eastern Antioquia Civic Movement, a grassroots movement conformed by the popular assemblies of each municipality, including the towns

affected by the hydroelectric projects. The movement organized three civic regional strikes between 1982 and 1984, and its agenda included both the demands of the communities affected by the hydroelectric projects and a fair energy price (Olaya, 2017, p.136).

The immediate reaction of Antioquia's elites to the riots was the political 'demonization', through the elite-owned media, and repression, through official (police) and unofficial means (death squads). The first strike held in September 1982 was labelled by the Antioquia's governor as a "subversive movement promoted by twelve anarchists" (El Colombiano, 1982, as cited in Olaya, 2017, p.133) and involved the detention of 500 protestors.

After the non-compliance of the commitments made by the regional government at the end of the first strike, the movement started a second strike in October, which was covered more extensively by regional media (mainly by the liberal-leaning *El Mundo* and the conservative-leaning *El Colombiano*). The strike also received support from civic associations in southwest Antioquia, Medellín, Villavicencio, and the Putumayo region (Olaya, 2017, p. 134).

In San Carlos, the civic movement brought together the different local political groups and guilds around the fair compensation and participation in the decision-making of the hydroelectric projects. Immediately, the group started to receive threats from right-wing paramilitary groups that had been recently formed in the surrounding Magdalena-Medio region and who represented the alliance between regions elites, the army, some self-defence rural armed groups and the drug-dealing mafia against the so-called 'socialist threat'.

In 1983, the terror started with the murder of the young doctor and social leader Julian Conrado by a death squad with the compliance of the town's police (Olaya, 2017, p.134). In early 1984, the region's civic movement decided to organize a new strike that was labelled, again, as 'extremist' and 'subversive' by *El Colombiano*, the main newspaper of the region owned by the Antioquia's conservative elite with close ties with the industrial sector. Such an action put the leaders of the movement under risk of death as the paramilitary groups strengthened in Eastern Antioquia.

With the scenario of a strong grassroots movement advancing in the region, the death squad strategy was enhanced: in 1984, three of the main leaders of the anti-hydroelectric and civic movements were murdered, while in 1985 the toll rose to thirty (Ibid., p.60), representing the end of the pacific grassroots organization

in the region. The retaliations continued until 1990 in San Carlos, San Rafael, Marinilla and Medellín, where former members of the movements –many already part of the different city councils and of the Assembly of Antioquia– were murdered or displaced.

Another consequence of the hydroelectric plan in Eastern Antioquia was the arrival of the FARC and the ELN leftist guerrillas in the late 1980's. The groups reached a major territorial control that lasted until the late 1990's, when the paramilitary groups started an armed confrontation with the motto “for every energy tower knocked down by the guerrillas, ten peasants will be killed in Eastern Antioquia” (CNMH, 2014, p.106).

Between 1998 and 2003, 80% of the almost 25,000 inhabitants of *San Carlos* were displaced, and hundreds were murdered. San Rafael, Granada, and San Roque –the other municipalities related with the second phase of the hydroelectric project– suffered a similar fate as the paramilitary groups and the army fought for the territorial control of the area. The relation between the state's army and the paramilitary groups is still the matter of judicial investigation, as there was virtually no clash between the groups in the region.

Conclusions

The agenda of ‘development’ imposed from the Antioquia's industrial elite on the people of Eastern Antioquia since the 1960's has radically shifted the economic, social, political and cultural realities of the region, transforming it into the main source of energy of Colombia through its hydroelectric complex. However, this transformation implied land appropriation, forced displacement, privatization of the water and the extermination of the grassroots organizations that opposed it, in line with David Harvey's Accumulation by Dispossession theory. This is not an isolated case, but rather the confirmation that often Colombia has embarked in a top-down model of developmentalism that neglects the socioeconomic realities and the will of the local population of the periphery. This contradicts the liberal assumption that portrays economic development as the sole force to guarantee that social cohesion stability is not largely short-sighted in the Colombian case.

Consequently, the Civic Movement of Eastern Antioquia –the unofficial name conferred to the various movements that fought against the imposition of an external ‘development’ plan and its unfair economic and social consequences

between 1963 and 1985– remains a paradigmatic example of multiclass and non-partisan civil resistance in Colombia. The criminalization of the grassroots movements started a bloody period in the region that diminished the civic movement, helping EPM and ISA to complete their hydroelectric projects. Additionally, it helped the regional government to expand its development agenda in the region, with projects like the Medellín-Bogotá highway and the José María Córdova International Airport.

This case also questions the role of the international institutions in supporting dispossession in the name of development on the region. The World Bank, the main funder of the hydroelectric complex, only protested the violation of human rights in the area for a brief period in the 1960's, but, neither them nor other institutions such as the United Nations or the Organization of America States fought to stop the extermination of the civic movement in the 1980's or demanded the Colombian state to compensate the victims.

Finally, the peace agreement with the FARC established the Special Jurisdiction of Peace (JEP), a transitional entity that aims to judge the crimes committed in the conflict, including the role of politicians and companies in the war and the efforts of the National Centre for Historical Memory (CNMH) to uncover the truth in cases like the extermination of the civic movement. This represents a valuable opportunity for the Colombian people to embrace a more democratic and inclusive dialogue over the future of economic development in the areas that suffered most from the armed conflict and to bring recognition to those who struggled peacefully for the rights of the local populations.

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