

Land grab and oil palm in Colombia



Summary

- Who and where?
- How has this come to pass?
- Ethically sound & long term response, or myopic & plutocratic option?
- Bud rot.
- Plan Colombia .
- Neo-colonial undertones.

Introduction - Narino

- Pacific planes, the Andean region and the Amazon rainforest
- 2005 national census: nationally indigenous and Afro-Colombian 3.4% and 10.5% of the population respectively, in Nariño 10.8% and 18.8%.
- Guinean coast of West Africa, accounting for its scientific name *Elaeis Guineensis Jacq*, and its more common name, 'African' oil palm.
- Growth.
- Uribe

*I would ask you (the Minister of Agriculture) to **quarantine** the businessmen of Tumaco and their Afro-descendent compatriots and not let them leave the office, it must be an office where you can lock them up until they reach an agreement. It has to be like this, especially if it is through perseverance that is has to be done . . . **Lock them up** there and propose the following to them, that the State [of Colombia] will provide for them, that they should reach an agreement about the use of the land and the Government will contribute capital and eliminate risk. Give them a date and say to them: **men, this is a meeting and we are not to adjourn until we reach an agreement . . .** Because we have to recognise the good and the bad here, in Meta and Casanare [two other Colombian departments] as well as in Guaviare there are a few formidable palm plantations, but in Tumaco there is nothing. And Tumaco has a road, and then think about the area north of there too, in the area of Guapi [a coastal town north of Tumaco], in El Charco which has excellent conditions and yet does not grow a single oil palm, but is instead smothered by the coca plant that we must eradicate.*

-Alvaro Uribe, Fedepalm Congress, 2006

Liberal law to conservative pragmatism

1986-1998. 1989: ILO (International Labour Organisation) Convention 169 (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' Convention); 1991: 'Constitution of Rights'; 1993: Law 70.

- Land tenure**
- Collaboration between Afro-Colombians and national Government.**

*The National Government will create a commission to study and to formulate a **developmental plan for the Black Communities**.*

*This commission will begin to operate once the President of the Republic is elected and with the approval of the National Development Plan CONPES. That plan will propose **long-term policies** and will become the frame of reference so that policies of the National Development Plan **respect the ethnic diversity** of the Nation and promote the sustainable development of those communities in accordance with their own vision. This will be a technical commission with ample knowledge of the realities of the Black Communities. And, in order to create it, the **proposals of the Black Communities** will be taken into account. The Department of National Planning will be responsible for **financing the expenses** for its proper functioning.*

- Article 57 of Law 70, 1993

The outgrower model is based on the following

- a central facility surrounded by growers who produce on their own land under contract;
- the provision of inputs and technical assistance to growers;
- guarantees to purchase the growers' crop subject to meeting predefined standards;
- growers typically receiving a pre-agreed percentage of the final sales price of their product, thus leaving them still fully exposed to price volatility.

- Cordeagropaz

- Politics of strategic alliance

*Increases in agricultural production and productivity... [and] ... **synergies that develop** between outgrowers (individual farmers), the outgrowers' association and the processing factory (the buyer of farmers' produce) are the keys to the success of the development effort and thus the possibilities of **reducing poverty**.*

Øygard, Borchgrevink, Lazaro and Temo (2002)

*First, the outgrowers face market risk posed by a **reduction in demand** from the buyer. Secondly, there is the risk that the processor will **abuse its market position to the detriment of the outgrowers.***

*For example, case studies reveals that outgrowers sometimes experienced late payments and denial of harvesting services. Thirdly, as Key and Runsten (1999) point out, with the investment of fixed resources and new cropping patterns to meet the buyer's requirements, **exit from the scheme becomes constrained** further reducing the producer's bargaining power.*

UN Conference on Trade and Development, 1st November 2006



But the reality of the model is thus . . .

- Service costs
- Abuse of power
- Subcontract companies
- Bud rot & “Hybrid Seeds”
- ‘African’ oil palm
- Rights for the land?

Alienation through mimicry

-What is the case for colonial mimicry?

There is a tension between the synchronic panoptical domination (stasis) versus the counter pressure of the diachronic nature of history (difference).

- Vigorous strategy
- Fetishization of colonial culture
- ‘Alienation’ of the small-scale farmer or cooperative

Landscape, nature and the body politic

- Land modelling and colonising forces of the past
- Past misdemeanours
- Body politic
- Ecological imbalance
- Fumigation

Neoliberal maintenance

- Local government ignored.
- *Caudillismo*
- Never a social revolution.
- Frente Nacional
- Plan Colombia
- Traditional practice.

The political ramifications

- **Undermine and monitor Afro-Colombians.**
- **Land tenure.**
- **Cooperatives over unions.**
- **Debilitating working relationship.**

Conclusion

- It is with caution that we call the *Elaeis Guineensis* by its commonplace name – the ‘African’ oil palm – given its historical connotations; although a ‘pioneer’ seed cultivated by large companies who employ people from the region, to imply that there is an inherent connection between its cultivation and their will to do so would be erroneous.
- The commercialisation of traditional practices was just one of the other possibilities presented by the region. The Government in Pasto had invested money in crop diversification schemes to fund a project that will produce other agricultural produce over a sustained period of time.
- However, given Colombia’s inherent conservatism, the perpetuation of neoliberal economics, the triumph of pragmatism over the socialist dream, the appearance of a miraculous ‘hybrid’, the ability to monitor minority groups and the often intangible articles of both the 1991 Constitution and Law 70 given modern interests and Government, it would require a revolutionary fulcrum shift for a Government with such a profiteering, myopic agenda to clear southern-western Colombia of the oil palm it so vehemently champions.
- The Supreme Court of Colombia has recently passed an ‘Auto 004’ which obliges the Colombian State protect 34 of the most endangered indigenous nations in Colombia, amongst which figure the Awá people. Perhaps through creating such spaces, as well as through continued international pressure, this time not from the multinational corporations, solutions and restraints can be put in place. Ideally, by allowing both the black community and the autochthonous to exercise the degree of autonomy and sovereignty that legislature might permit them, alternatives might arise; needless to say the reality of this depends on the direction taken under Santos’ Presidency.