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Necropolitics, peacebuilding and racialized violence: The elimination of indigenous leaders in Colombia

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A B S T R A C T

This paper proposes the concept 'necropolitics of peacebuilding' to analyse how contemporary geographies of peace and post-war violence are shaped by the articulation of race, space, politics and the coloniality of power. We explore how post-conflict programmes, plans and policies shape the uneven distribution of life and death, focussing in particular on the elimination of indigenous leaders. Drawing on research conducted in northern Cauca, Colombia, where many indigenous leaders have been threatened and murdered despite the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016, our analysis reveals four key factors: 1) The coloniality of power that treats their bodies as disposable and not fully human; 2) The juxtaposition of illicit economies and neoliberal extractivist enterprises in their territories; 3) Violent opposition to their autonomous political projects that aim to defend their land and forms of being; and 4) The disputed presence of peacebuilding programmes seeking to substitute illicit crops. Analysing the relationship between necropolitics, racism and spatial segregation is shown to be crucial to understanding the violence faced by indigenous leaders and communities in post-conflict situations. This paper thus makes an important contribution to understandings of the continuity of necropolitics within the context of peacebuilding.

1. Introduction

In 2016, the Colombian state and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC-EP) signed a comprehensive Peace Agreement, which represented a key opportunity for transforming the structural conditions that had fuelled one of the longest armed conflicts in contemporary Latin America. This Peace Agreement has been internationally acclaimed for its bottom-up peacebuilding territorial approach that calls for implementing development plans and programmes at different scales and brings the state into historically marginalized spaces heavily affected by war (Cairo et al., 2018; Koopman, 2020). Despite protecting the neoliberal and capitalist interests of the Colombian state (Vélez-Torres, Gough, Larrea-Mejía, Piccolino, & Ruette-Orihuela, 2022; Grajales, 2021), the Peace Agreement holds the promise of changing agrarian structures and the living conditions of rural people, as land inequality was identified as one of the main causes

of conflict. The Peace Agreement also pledges to replace the production of illicit crops, ensure political participation processes, cease the armed conflict, and allow for the reparation of victims. This new legal instrument was widely praised for mainstreaming gender and ethnic equality approaches, as well as recognizing LGBT rights (Koopman, 2020; Sachseder, 2020).

Six years after the signing of the Peace Agreement, however, many rural regions of Colombia are still affected by post-war violence and new, as well as old, armed actors have emerged. The murder of social leaders in Colombia, which was a constant feature throughout the internal armed conflict, has continued during the peacebuilding process, despite numerous decrees to protect them. These murders are attributed to a range of factors: social leaders' opposition to the cultivation and commercialization of illicit crops, and engaging in voluntary crop substitution (Marin Llanes, 2020; Mejía et al., 2019, pp. 2019–2039; Orbegozo-Rodríguez, 2021); supporting land restitution rights against

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landowners and industrial agribusinesses (Ballvé, 2012; Grajales, 2017); opposing national and transnational mining projects, and the exploitation of natural resources (Arbeláez-Ruiz, 2022; Vélez-Torres, 2014); facing the pervasive culture of militaristic neoliberal interests (Meger & Sachseder, 2020); and participating in public protests and national strikes (Defensores, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021). Although the precise number of deaths reported varies, national figures indicate that by March 2022, a total of 1326 leaders had been murdered since the signing of the Peace Agreement (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022). Indigenous leaders have been particularly affected, with 363 reportedly murdered, of whom 162 were in the Department of Cauca alone (Commission de la Verdad, 2022).

In this paper, we examine the racialized and spatialized violence directed at indigenous leaders, organizations and communities in northern Cauca, Colombia since the signing of the Peace Agreement. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics, "the subjugation of life to the power of death" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 39), we explore how contemporary geographies of peace and post-war violence in Colombia are shaped by the articulation of race, space, politics and the coloniality of power. Necropolitics is a particularly useful concept for bringing together racialization,[2] spatialization and coloniality in the analysis of the "continuum of violence" (Cockburn, 2004). We propose the concept "necropolitics of peacebuilding" to analyse the ways in which post-conflict programmes, plans and policies shape the uneven distribution of life and death. Our guiding questions are: Why are indigenous leaders facing similar or increasing levels of violence despite the implementation of peacebuilding policies and the demobilisation of armed groups in their territories? How is this violence simultaneously racialized and spatialized in the context of peacebuilding? How are indigenous organizations responding to threats of violence? Analysing racialized violence generates an understanding, not only of how insecurity, distrust and vulnerability are affecting indigenous leaders but also how peacebuilding needs to challenge the state's role in reproducing the coloniality of power, neoliberal dispossession and the reproduction of necropolitics.

We draw on data collected using a range of qualitative methods implemented between September 2018 and September 2020. In-depth interviews were conducted with 28 indigenous leaders from several communities in northern Cauca. In addition, 10 intercultural workshops were organised, during which the participation of members of indigenous organizations, amongst others, were recorded (see Gough et al., 2023). Reports, documents, declarations, and social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, websites, blogs) where indigenous social organizations express their views and experiences were also analysed, alongside the discursive content of pamphlets (*panfletos*) containing threats directed at indigenous leaders.[3] National and regional data on aggression, threats and homicide rates targeting indigenous peoples were retrieved from the annual reports of 'Somos Defensores' from 2017 to 2021.

Our research praxis, which is informed by decolonial, indigenous and Black feminist approaches, is sensitive to the risks and contradictions involved in writing about the suffering and intersectional oppression of racialized subaltern people. We are conscious of the pornotroping gaze, objectification of epistemic violence, extractivism and coloniality of knowledge that can be reproduced by researchers exploring the suffering of racialized victims and survivors (Brunner, 2021; Quijano, 2007; Weheliye, 2008). Being geographers and anthropologists, we are aware of the coloniality of our disciplines and our privileged positionalities in knowledge production. As a team composed of activist academic women who identify as Colombian mestiza, Venezuelan criolla, and White British, we recognize how our race, class, urban and heteronormative privileges intersect in our analysis of racialized pain. Although we are proponents of popular feminist education, social justice and engaged pedagogical research (Gough et al., 2023) we are aware of how unequal power relations shape our research praxis and of the ethical challenges of focussing on indigenous leaders, while leaving other groups unaddressed. This article is shaped by our emotional politics, as many of our local collaborators have been threatened, including four who were murdered, inflicting a collective sense of pain, loss and fear. We respect the bravery, resilience and commitment of these victims and their leaders, who continue to face threats and violence during peacebuilding.

Following this introduction, we discuss the forms of violence that emerge in peacebuilding contexts, highlighting necropolitics as a productive lens for analysing the structural relationship between violence, racism, spatial and political segregation. We then provide a brief overview of the Cauca region, addressing its long-term history of violence, coloniality and indigeneity. Subsequently, we explore changes in the rates of aggression, killings, and threats targeting indigenous people in Cauca between 2016 and 2021. The symbolic and racialized violence that circulates in pamphlets directed at indigenous leaders are examined to show how their bodies are subject to the economy and logic of 'elimination' (Wolfe, 2006), and the cruelty of necropower. We discuss how indigenous organizations denounce the murder of their leaders as an expression of genocide, before finally turning to examine how threatened social leaders respond to these forms of violence.

We argue that peacebuilding not only shapes the ways in which programmes are unevenly implemented, distributed, and experienced in space but also how and where post-war violence takes place. In other words, peacebuilding (as a state neoliberal project) entails the reproduction of necropolitics, as it determines who will live and die under the threat of post-conflict violence. Consequently, we contend that post-war violence not only varies across space and in intensity but is also deeply mediated by the coloniality of power and its racial dimensions (Cárdenas, 2022, pp. 1–20; Quijano, 2007; Suhrke & Berdal, 2012). In order to understand, predict and prevent post-war violence in post-colonial settings, peacebuilding policy makers need to understand how race, space, politics and coloniality (along with gender) have been historically articulated and continue to reproduce necropower, even when war has officially ceased. Thus, reducing post war violence not only entails the design and implementation of effective feminist gendered strategies (Cockburn, 2004) but also the development of concrete placed-based anti-racist strategies.

2. Necropolitics: post-war violence, race, space and coloniality

Following peace agreements, multiple forms of violence manifest in high homicide rates, instability, state repression, reconfiguration of criminal groups, corruption and inequality (Autessere, 2010; Berdal, 2012; Kurtenbach, 2013; Kurtenbach & Rettberg, 2018; Tobón, 2014). As Cynthia Cockburn (2004, p. 39) claims, "there is no abrupt cut-off line between war and postwar" instead there is a continuum of violence. This violence can be protracted and reach even greater intensity than during war (Berdal, 2012; Steenkamp, 2011). Typically, homicides increase during the first five years after the official culmination of conflict, producing insecurity and fear for the future, as well as undermining the legitimacy of government institutions (Berdal, 2012). Consequently, the distinction between political violence and criminality can be problematic (Schuld, 2013), and the relationships between armed actors, criminal groups and state forces are invariably complex (Kurtenbach & Rettberg, 2018).

Post-conflict violence is highly variable in intensity and scope, depending on the historical context, socioeconomic situation and external influences (Suhrke & Berdal, 2012). The ways in which conflict ends, policies are implemented to mitigate social divisions and

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[2] We use the term racialization to refer to the process by which racial meanings become relevant, extended or ascribed to a social relationship, practice, space or group (Omi & Winant, 2014).

[3] The names of individuals and indigenous organizations are anonymized unless their statements have been published in readily available media.

injustices, and reforms are carried out in the armed forces, all influence the intensity of the violence (Kurtenbach, 2013). Unequal land rights, social exclusion, inequality, the exploitation of natural resources, and the trafficking of marketable products are also key to understanding the causes of post-conflict violence (Autessere, 2010; Paris, 2004; Tobón, 2014). Typically, peacebuilding schemes are shaped by neoliberal governance models, which fail to address the social inequalities and structural injustices that often underlie the root causes of conflict (Howarth, 2014; Paris, 2004; Richmond, 2012).

Necropolitics can be a valuable lens for analysing post-war violence in postcolonial contexts (Haumschild, 2018). Drawing on this approach, we explore how peacebuilding in Colombia, as deployed by the sovereign state in negotiation with illegal armed groups, "… dictates who is able to live and who must die" and "under what practical conditions is the power to kill, to let live, or to expose to death exercised" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 66). Mbembe considers politics to be a form of war, thus peacebuilding politics can be seen as a new form or mutation of war. State security forces, dissident armed groups, paramilitaries and criminal networks continue to control the distribution of life and death, subjecting populations to the status of "living dead" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 40). Necropolitics helps highlight the racial dimensions of post-war violence, as race and racism are key technologies in "the exercise of bio-power" and the devastating experiences of otherness (Mbembe, 2019, p. 71). Armed actors and war machines use racial ideologies to determine when and how lives become disposable, and how some matter more than others (Mbembe, 2003, 2019; Smith & Vasudevan, 2017). For non-White racialized people, death is not extraordinary; it is "not so much an individualizing factor as a constitutive feature of their reality" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 251). Racism identifies, excludes, and facilitates a relationship between those who live and those who are killed or disappear, both during and after conflict (Lemke et al., 2011, p. 42).

Building on this framework, which links space, race, violence and coloniality, allows us to account for how the Colombian sovereign multicultural state, in conjunction with transnational corporations, armed groups (mobilized and demobilized) and security forces (Dest, 2020; Grajales, 2021; Hirstov, 2014), are distributing, managing and protecting the coexistence of life with the right to kill. Drawing on Mbembe, we argue that the politics of peace always entails necro-power, as it defines "who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not (Mbembe, 2019, p. 80, *italics in original*). Peacebuilding defines which spaces will be left "empty" by demobilized groups and reclaimed through the violence of dissident machines and state security forces, and in turn local populations become re-victimized. It is well established that coloniality and violence are deeply imbricated (Madonado-Torres, 2007; Sachseder, 2022). Peace in the colonies or post-colonies "is more likely to assume the face of endless war" (Mbembe, 2019, p. 76). Colonized spaces, i.e., territories where the liberal state is still aiming to arrive, are seen as inhabited by subjects who are not considered to be fully human. In the post-colonies, there are no citizens or enemies, the judicial order is suspended and distinctions between combatants and non-combatants are blurred, thus ending war and establishing peace is almost impossible (Ibid:77). In the colonies, the sovereign powers can kill at any time and in any way.

Settler colonialism (Wolfe, 2006) and the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2007) can also help understandings of the ways in which necropolitics is spatialized and racialized by neoliberal peacebuilding projects. As Speed (2017) argues, Latin American neoliberalism is still shaped by the racial settler state and the colonial logic of dispossession, extraction and elimination. Elimination is a territorial project that "… is lived through different scales of place, complicating narratives on indigenous dispossession of land and contemporary forms of indigenous collective death" (Zaragocin, 2018, p. 374). The settler colonial state uses the grammar of race to incorporate "indigenous peoples into the settler nation by simultaneously pursuing their elimination" (Morgensen, 2011, p. 53). The coloniality of power situates indigeneity below the line of being human, in the zones of non-being where humanity is constantly questioned and access to rights, resources and recognition are denied (Grosfoguel, 2016).

The dynamics between race and space are key in shaping necropolitics at multiple scales. Race alongside modernity has distributed life and death across all geographies spanning the globe (Price, 2010). Racial inequalities are spatialized and expressed in places, territories, regions, peacebuilding schemes, and necrogeographies (Delaney, 2002; Koopman, 2020; Leshem, 2015; Wade, 1993). The multiple root causes of racism are the "product of specific historical geographies, varying across place according to processes such as colonialism, migration, labour markets and built environments" (Kobayashi & Peake, 2000, p. 392). Spatial structures can historically accumulate racialized dimensions and shape hierarchies that are generally interconnected in terms of political economy (Wade, 1993). Racialization and spatial governance generate dehumanized and devalued bodies and operate in geographies that are considered closer to indigenous people than to mestizos (mixed-race) (Mora, 2017).

Racialized and spatial meanings are simultaneously inscribed in the bodies, experiences, and social relations of indigenous, black and dark-skinned mestizo populations through violence (Alves & Vargas, 2017; Vergara-Figueroa, 2014; Wade, 2022). Racism has been invisible and normalized in the peacebuilding process in Colombia (Koopman, 2020), even though a greater proportion of indigenous and Black people have been affected and displaced by violence and armed conflict in their territories (Rappaport, 1998; Wouters, 2001; Ng'weno, 2007; Oslender, 2008; Jimeno et al., 2011; Lugo & Pablo, 2015; Meger & Sachseder, 2020; Dest, 2020; Cárdenas, 2022, pp. 1–20; Courtheyn, 2022). The bodies and territories of indigenous peoples, including de-racialized indigenous peasants, have been subjected to multiple forms of racialized violence since they are constructed by the centralised white-mestizo political powers as being pathological, less than human and external to the nation (Courtheyn, 2022; Vergara-Figueroa, 2014). Violence, mainly perpetuated by paramilitary groups, state security forces, drug traffickers and guerrilla armed groups, specially targeted Black and indigenous women who have been treated as hyper-(sexualized), dehumanized, subordinated, invisible 'Others' (Sachseder, 2020, p. 165). Indigenous people, and in particular indigenous women, have been disproportionately affected by the territorializing actions of armed groups seeking to control land and illegal activities (Tovar-Restrepo & Irazábal, 2014). Violence in northern Cauca thus reflects and supports Colombian structural racism (Dest, 2020).

The spatialization and racialization of post-war violence in Colombia is also reinforced by neoliberalism, agribusinesses and global supply chains, which promote the privatization of territories rich in natural resources, along with the formation of violent spaces (Bocarejo & Ojeda, 2016; Grajales, 2021; Vélez-Torres et al., 2019). Racialized violence continues to be challenged and subverted by social organizations and their leaders, especially during mobilizations, processes of reclaiming land appropriated by sugar cane and mining industries, and narco-trafficking networks (Dest, 2020; Troyan, 2015). As Ballvé (2013) claims, state formation in Colombia feeds social conflict as it creates spaces and places for the exploitation of racialized labour and nature. Peace in Colombia has consolidated capitalism and its politics of dispossession (Almendra & Rozental, 2016). Recent studies of post-agreement violence and security in Colombia have analysed how subjects and activists perceive, understand and challenge post-war violence in their everyday lives (Berman-Arévalo & Ojeda, 2020; Chaves et al., 2020; Courtheyn, 2022; Nilsson & González Marín, 2020).

Focussing on northern Cauca, in this paper we explore the spatial distribution of violence and the nature of the racialized threats and attacks received by indigenous organizations and their leaders, how they understand these threats, and the actions the leaders adopt to mitigate the violence affecting their daily lives. Throughout, we show how post-agreement violence in northern Cauca is closely linked to the reproduction of necropolitics, the coloniality of power, and neoliberal peacebuilding.

3. Violence, space and indigeneity in Cauca

Northern Cauca is located in southwest Colombia between the central and western Andean mountain ranges. The region was selected as it is highly affected by colonial, republican and contemporary armed conflicts, as well as by long-term processes of land dispossession and exploitation of indigenous and Black communities (Hirstov, 2005; Rappaport, 1998; Taussig, 2005). A long history of racialized violence and resistance has shaped the formation of indigenous communities in the region, especially Nasa[44] people (Rappaport, 1998; Troyan, 2015). Since the sixteenth century, indigenous populations in Cauca have been subject to the violence of the coloniality of power, as their land and labour were appropriated and exploited by Spanish colonizers in the haciendas and mines. Space was racialized by colonial authorities with the creation of indigenous *resguardos*, i.e., areas granted to specific indigenous groups with community land titles (Rappaport, 1998). The *resguardos* were ruled by indigenous authorities including governors, first mayor, second mayor and trustees (Troyan, 2015). The *resguardos* remained embedded in colonial economies, however, whereby, in addition to a tribute, indigenous people provided the Spaniards with labour on the fields and in the mines. The violent processes of colonial dispossession spatially segregated indigenous peoples, who were expelled to mountains, forests and wetlands that were of less interest to mining companies and agricultural exporters (LeGrand, 1988).

During the wars of independence and the process of state formation, landowners and state liberal ideologists tried to cut back and even destroy the indigenous *resguardos*. Republican state laws spatialized and racialized indigeneity and violence in Cauca in 1890 (Law 89) by stating that people living in *resguardos* were minors, "savages" and not civilized, i.e., not fully human and hence disposable. Parts of some *resguardos* came under the power of state municipalities and were occupied by non-indigenous people or granted to missionaries. Consequently, indigenous people in Cauca were subject to the necropolitics of the coloniality of power and being, and the expansion of nation-state capitalism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Quijano, 2007), resulting in land dispossession, forced displacement, the imposition of tributes and services, share-cropping, the prohibition of speaking their language, and the criminalization of their religious beliefs (Hernández Delgado, 2006). Subsequently, during the twentieth century, land accumulation by sugar cane plantations in the Cauca plains expanded the agrarian frontier, generating struggles, violence and proletarialization, especially of indigenous and Black communities (Troyan, 2015, p. 12; Hirstov, 2005). The rural population experienced poverty and economic marginalization due to high production costs, dependence on intermediaries, and low agricultural commodity prices (Troyan, 2015, p. 28).

During the period of La Violencia (1920–1960) and the contemporary civil war, indigenous peoples were caught in the midst of state violence and armed groups struggling to gain control of their territories. Indigeneity represented an obstacle for armies and the consolidation of capitalist state neoliberal interests in Cauca, hence, violence against indigenous peoples became structural (Villa & Houghton, 2005). Landlords (endorsed by state officials) declared "war" against indigenous people in Cauca, resulting in confrontations, detentions, bombings, land mines, massacres and killings led by paramilitary forces in alliance with state security forces[5] (Villa & Houghton, 2005; Arbelaez-Ruiz, 2022). Counterinsurgent and agrarian violence targeted Nasa people and their organizations, resulting in community leaders being detained and tortured by the army for allegedly collaborating with insurgent groups. This political violence has important racial dimensions, since it is directed at human bodies that have been racialized as not fully human by the coloniality of power.

The current violence in Cauca is also linked to its geopolitical position – a strategic corridor connecting northern Colombia (the Caribbean Sea) with the Pacific Ocean in Guapi and Buenaventura. Multiple armed groups have disputed these territories and trafficking routes including paramilitary groups (Águilas Negras, AUC and Clan del Golfo), the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Popular Army of Liberation (EPL), and the FARC-EP.[6]

4. Patterns of violence during peacebuilding in Cauca

While the 2016 Peace Agreement was highly praised by national and international actors, it also faced many detractors and political opposition within Colombia. After signing the agreement with FARC-EP in La Habana, the Santos government called for a plebiscite in October 2016. Conservative sectors led by ex-president Uribe and the Centro Democrático party mobilized a campaign against the agreement, instilling ideologies of fear and dissent. The agreement was rejected by 50.2% of voters, hence had to be renegotiated before being ratified by congress (Rettberg, 2020).

Peacebuilding not only faced oppositional forces politically but was also challenged by direct violence. As the FARC-EP engaged in the process of demobilisation, dissident groups and paramilitary forces started to consolidate and reclaim territories in Cauca in order to control the productive chain of illicit crops and illegal extraction of resources. Some dissident groups continued to reproduce guerrilla structures, due to the lack of guarantees during the peace process for ex-combatants. Paramilitary groups also continued campaigns of fear against the peacebuilding process, enacting threats and exerting violence against peace supporters. The region experienced high levels of militarization[7] after the election of President Duque in 2018, in alignment with stabilization plans (Piccolino & Ruette-Orihuela, 2021). In response, Nasa organizations and indigenous authorities called on the *Guardia Indígena* (Indigenous Guard) to continue patrolling their territories to ensure the survival of their communities. Their aims are to: limit cocaine producing laboratories, expel armed groups, shut down illegal mines, ensure security during mobilizations, protect sacred sites, and guard check points to try to prevent potential attacks (Chaves et al., 2020; Arbelaez-Ruiz, 2022).

Despite the peacebuilding efforts and the actions of local organizations, indigenous social leaders in Cauca have been amongst the actors who have been most affected by violence in Colombia,[8] representing almost 40 percent of assassinations, with half of these being Nasa indigenous peoples (Human Rights Watch, 2021, p. 36). This rate is exceptionally high considering that indigenous peoples are only 4.4 percent of the national population (DANE, 2019). Table 1 shows the number of social/indigenous leaders who have been murdered since 2016 in Colombia and Cauca. The key trends and underlying reasons for these figures are discussed in this section.

Following the signing of the Peace Agreement, a change occurred in the pattern of violence, as those targeted were no longer highly visible national leaders but local leaders from specific rural communities (Defensores, 2017). Most of these killings were conducted by unknown or unrecognizable armed forces, FARC dissident groups and state armed forces (Defensores, 2017). Aggression against social leaders increased following Duque's election as President, despite the demobilisation of more than 12,000 FARC-EP combatants in territories that had been

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[4] The Nasa or Nasa Paéz indigenous people are the largest ethno-racial indigenous population in the region, mainly inhabiting the Central Cordillera (ONIC, 2020). They are the third most numerous indigenous people in Colombia, with approximately 250,000 members (DANE, 2019).

[5] Security forces in Colombia are the Military Forces and National Police.

[6] https://informesderechoshumanos.com/i-paz-crisis-humanitaria/el-conflicto-en-el-cauca-una-historia-sin-tregua/).

[7] https://informesderechoshumanos.com/i-paz-crisis-humanitaria/el-conflicto-en-el-cauca-una-historia-sin-tregua/.

[8] This assertion does not deny that Afro-Colombian, peasant, and demobilized populations are also victims of racialized violence.

Table 1
Number of social leaders murdered 2016–2021.

Year	Colombia		Cauca	
	All social leaders	Indigenous leaders	All social leaders	Indigenous leaders
2016	80	15	22	5
2017	106	12	18	6
2018	155	24	24	9
2019	124	32	34	24
2020	199	41	52	13
2021	139	33	22	7

Sources: Defensores, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.

occupied for decades. The Duque administration launched a new plan 'Paz con Legalidad' ('Peace with Legality'), which shifted away from a transformative peacebuilding approach to stabilization strategies and militarization (Piccolino & Ruette-Orihuela, 2021). In 2018, the murder of indigenous leaders doubled from the previous year; three of the nine victims in Cauca were Nasa leaders and the other six were Indigenous Guards (Defensores, 2019). Most of these killings took place where there were disputes over the control of illicit crops and mining.

In 2019, the Duque administration launched a Security and Defence Policy (Política de Defensa y Seguridad, PDS), a militaristic intervention aimed at controlling new illegal groups that had emerged in the territories previously occupied by FARC-EP. The spatial and racial dimensions of violence became more evident, as out of the 32 indigenous leaders killed nationally, 78% occurred in municipalities prioritized for the implementation of peacebuilding programmes (PDET), including 24 in Cauca. During 2019, a clear spatial distribution of racialized violence emerged as the four municipalities with the highest rates of murder - Toribío, Caloto, Corinto and Suárez (all located in northern Cauca) - had a high proportion of indigenous populations, and had been prioritized for peacebuilding (Defensores, 2020). There was also a significant increase in the number of Indigenous Guard victims – eight in 2019 up from two in 2018 – demonstrating how racialized violence was directed at leaders trying to protect their territories.

Although national homicide rates fell in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of social leaders murdered increased to almost 200. Of these, 41 were indigenous leaders including 13 in Cauca, five of whom were indigenous healers who play a key role in protecting territories and guiding Indigenous Guards (Defensores, 2021). The other indigenous leaders targeted were teachers, journalists, youth and health coordinators, or were leading projects linked to implementing PDETs. This shows how necropolitics and territorialized violence target not only indigenous authorities and their communities but also those in charge of knowledge production and communication. This racialized violence remained concentrated in northern Cauca but expanded to include the municipalities of Santander de Quilichao, Totoró, Corinto, Suárez, Péaz and Argelia. The following year (2021) saw deep social unrest and protests against the Duque administration, culminating in the intersectoral national strike. Cauca continued to be the region with the highest rates of killings of social leaders, including seven indigenous leaders. The violence expanded to include attempts to secure the control of production sites and corridors of illicit crops.

The necropolitical patterns of post-war violence in Cauca thus coincide with: 1) Spaces historically racialized by the coloniality of power as indigenous, i.e., *resguardos,* and municipalities recognized as indigenous territories; 2) Municipalities prioritized for the implementation of peacebuilding programmes due to their history of armed conflict and cultivation of illicit crops; 3) Areas where indigenous organizations claim political autonomy and oppose the presence of armed groups, illegal crop production and trafficking. Consequently, space, race, coloniality, indigeneity and politics clearly shape the ways in which necropower is distributed during contemporary peacebuilding processes in Cauca.

5. Threats targeted at indigenous leaders and communities

Since the signing of the Peace Agreement, there has been an increase in the number of reported threats to social leaders in Colombia, more than doubling from 317 in 2016 to 665 in 2021; similarly, in Cauca the number of threats increased from 98 in 2017 to 184 in 2021 (Defensores, 2018; 2022). One of the key ways in which these threats are manifested is through pamphlets (*panfleteo*), which have been widely used since the 1970s by illegal armed groups as a way of intimidating social leaders, generating fear, encouraging displacement, and attempting to gain territorial control. These pamphlets are associated with 'social cleansing' that has become part of everyday life (Fernández & Otero, 2009; Taussig, 2005). Many of the pamphlets evoke racialized discourses by specifying the ethno-racial identity of the threatened men and women, highlighting their specific positions within organizations and their communities.

In March 2018, a dissident armed group[9] declared the governor and authorities of an indigenous *resguardo*[10] a military target for allegedly having seized war material from them. The pamphlet states that these acts have "affected our advance against the security forces [state army and police] and for that reason we declare them a military objective." Three months later after the election of President Ivan Duque, the same dissident group circulated another pamphlet stating,

> We call on the community members of northern Cauca to reflect because some indigenous leaders are doing the work of the police, the army and other Colombian government agencies … They use the Indigenous Guard for these actions with an alleged policy of territorial control, something that cannot happen … Once again, we reiterate our position to engage in dialogue with the leaders of the indigenous councils of the different *resguardos* in northern Cauca so that as organizations we respect each other.

Analysed discursively, this pamphlet questions the political autonomy of indigenous authorities to exercise tactical and spatial control over their territories. The dissident group not only disputes the political orientation of some indigenous community members but overlooks the power granted by the state to Cabildos[11] and indigenous authorities to decide who can transit their territory. Although this threat opens up the possibility of dialogue with indigenous authorities, the disparity in terms of who exercises violence remains.

After the government launched the "Plan with Legality" (2018–2022), pamphlets issued by paramilitary groups continued to circulate. Employing distressing language, a pamphlet addressed to "All the indigenous councils of northern Cauca" stated:

> The cleansing time began with that herd of motherfucking toads [*sapos*][12] who don't want to let us work. We have a lot of information about you and who is making agreements with government officials. If they want war, they will have it and they will continue to pay

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[9] We do not mention the specific authors of these pamphlets to ensure anonymity for the communities and victims.

[10] The Colombian state recognizes *resguardos* as a form of collective property, which are inalienable, imprescriptible and unattachable, in accordance with articles 63 and 329, Political Constitution 1991. These spaces are governed by indigenous autonomous organizations protected by indigenous jurisdiction and its regulatory system (Article 21, Decree 2164, 1995, Ministerio del Interior, 2013).

[11] Contemporary Cabildos are socio-political organizations for the self-determination of indigenous communities recognized in the 1991 constitution. While indigenous Cabildos are the product of colonial forms of organization, they have been re-signified by local community actors as spaces for exercising political autonomy, creating life-projects and mobilizing against the state and illegal armed actors (Troyan, 2015).

[12] The word "sapos" in this context metaphorically suggests that the targets are collaborators or snitches.

dearly. Everyone who is a *cabildante* [member of the indigenous Cabildo] will have a price on their head: Governor $5,000,000, Captain $3,000,000, Guard $2,000,000, Marshal [*alguaciles*] and Collaborator $1,000,000 [Colombian pesos].[13]

This text is clearly linked to ideologies of racial white-mestizo supremacy and elimination, as well as paramilitary social cleansing practices. Indigenous bodies are denoted as being below the line of human (Grosfoguel, 2016), as paramilitary groups seek to destroy the historical articulation between the political and spatial autonomy of the *cabildantes* and their indigeneity. Putting a price on part of the body (the head) of indigenous authorities evokes images associated with colonial genocide, slavery, indigenous exploitation and the multiple massacres that indigenous populations have experienced. Genocidal ideologies thus become spatialized in the convergence of ethnic, racial and political dimensions addressing all indigenous *cabildantes* of northern Cauca.

Other pamphlets are more specific, naming the Indigenous Guard directly. A case in point is a pamphlet signed and circulated in August 2019 by a dissident armed group, which named 12 people by their first and last names, stating that:

Our guerrilla organization considers that in order to achieve our desired dream, leaders of organizations who are complying with government demands and government politicians must be removed from our path. This applies to the Indigenous Guard and in particular the commanders of this anti-subversive organization. Our guerrilla organization is not against the Cabildos, nor the CRIC or ACIN,[14] only those people who call themselves leaders. Only against them do we take action.

The Indigenous Guard was targeted because they have the explicit mandate to exercise territorial control and protect life in their communities, including modifying the movement of armed actors, illicit drugs and weapons. Threats of violence are thus specifically addressed to racialized subjects who protect their land from outsiders or are perceived as allies of the government, in this case the Duque administration. The threats directly challenge indigenous peoples' constitutional rights to implement their customary laws and decide who can move and live in their ancestral lands. The explicit message that the guards "must get out of the way" evokes the logic of displacement and elimination intended to both physically and metaphorically enable armed groups to freely mobilize people and commodities across indigenous territories. Above all, the pamphlets are being used by paramilitary and dissident groups to reproduce a necrogeography of fear among the population, as they attempt to decide who will live or die in these spaces.

In June 2020, in the midst of the public health crisis and confinement caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a dissident armed group circulated another statement addressed to all the Cabildos of northern Cauca threatening to start social cleansing and accusing the leaders of "making a commitment to support government officials." The pamphlet states:

They want war. They are going to have it and start paying dearly. Therefore, we declare the indigenous leaders of the organizations CRIC, ONIC, ORIVAC[15] and peasants (*campesinos*) of Florida, Pradera, Jamundi, Miranda, Caloto, Corinto … [specific names are mentioned] … to be military objectives. Everyone who is a *cabildante* will have their price – for each head there is a price: Governor 6,000,000, Human Rights Defender 4,000,000, Guards 2,000,000 [Colombian pesos].[16]

These threats are spatialized, located particularly in municipalities that have indigenous territories, which are targeted for peacebuilding programmes. The text refers to specific spaces where *resguardos* are located that have been racialized by the coloniality of power as indigenous. The threats are directed at the strategic alliance indigenous councils have woven with peasant organizations, which seek to recognize and strengthen the Peasant Reserve Zones.[17] Notably, the amounts offered for the lives of social leaders have increased compared with earlier pamphlets.[18] Changes in the price put on indigenous bodies shows how the assassination of indigenous leaders is not only marketable within the logic of elimination and the necropolitics of drug trafficking and social exclusion, but that those who survive continue to be subjected to the status of 'living dead' (Mbembe, 2003). Indigenous bodies have thus become exchange products that interfere with the logic of capital production (Valencia, 2014).

Many of the pamphlets circulate in regions targeted for implementing the Peace Agreement, as some illegal groups consider the presence of state peacebuilding programmes a threat to their territorial control and illicit economies. As Marin Llanes (2020) claims, the implementation of the illicit crop substitution programmes has increased the number of social leader assassinations. In this context, the ongoing violence is connected to neoliberal peacebuilding, the lack of transformative state policies, and the continuity of structural violence, i.e, limited access to land, infrastructure, services, education and health. The selective implementation of the Peace Agreement and the incipient participation of social organizations (Vélez-Torres et al., 2022) is feeding long-term disputes over the control of indigenous territories in northern Cauca. These spaces continue to be shaped by multiple interests resulting in exploitation by mining and agribusiness, land dispossession, state development plans, and deep structural inequalities (Campo Palacios, 2018; Hirstov, 2005; Vélez-Torres, 2018).

6. Indigenous understandings and response of necropolitics

For indigenous organizations, deaths associated with the armed conflict are recognized as '*mala muerte*' (bad deaths) and considered a continuity of colonial genocide and racism. *Mala muerte* not only implies the cessation of vital functions but also the interruption of the lifecycle in the territory. These ruptures "generate imbalances, disharmony, and abrupt and disproportionate breakdown in the spiritual, social, cultural and political aspects of the vital network [of indigenous peoples]" (National Centre for Historical Memory, 2019, p. 33). Indigenous leaders at the national level interpret these threats and attacks as retaliation for actions taken by the Nasa Indigenous Guard to exercise their autonomy and disrupt the economies of exploitation and extraction in their territories. The senator of the special constituency of indigenous peoples for the MAIS party,[19] Feliciano Valencia, explained weeks before a massacre in Tacueyó, Toribío:

Strengthening autonomy collides with everyone: with the security forces [army and police], with illegal armed groups, with drug trafficking, with mining and with the monocultures that have taken over the region. To defend the earth is to defend it from the whole world, which has resulted in retaliation and enemies everywhere … This is what has resulted in threats: pamphlets circulating everywhere (…) We are saying "the territories are ours and we don't want any more violence" while others are saying "this is our economy and we are going to stay (…) when they don't kill us, they persecute us. It

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[13] The exchange rate was 4000 COP per 1 GBP in December 2018 (https://www.x-rates.com/average/?from=GBP&to=COP&amount=1&year=2018).

[14] Asociación de Cabildos Indígena del Norte del Cauca (ACIN).

[15] Organización Regional Indígena del Valle del Cauca (ORIVAC).

[16] The exchange rate was 4637 COP to 1 GBP in June 2020 (https://www.x-rates.com/average/?from=GBP&to=COP&amount=1&year=2020).

[17] Peasant Reserve Zones (*Zonas de Reserva Campesina* - ZRC) were created in 1994 as a legal tool to guarantee peasants land access and stop agribusiness land concentration.

[18] An increase of 1,000,000 COP is noted from 2018 to 2020 for each leader.

[19] The Indigenous and Social Alternative Movement (*Movimiento Alternativo Indígena y Social* MAIS) is a party established to represent indigenous and social processes.

is a calculated strategy. For me it constitutes genocide and is systematic, which is something the government has refused to recognize. It is systematic because it has been happening since 2000, with the entry of the paramilitaries, and has not stopped. And it is always about the same population. For me it is extermination.[20]

An indigenous leader from a Cabildo in northern Cauca confirmed that threats against the Indigenous Guard have grown because of their attempts to assert territorial control in drug trafficking areas (Cauca, July 2019). Other indigenous leaders reiterated this position stating that problems start if they tell farmers, "Do not plant so much coca. Please reduce the marijuana [crops] and do not grow so many illegal crops" (Cauca, August 2019).

After the Peace Agreement, both the 'war machines' and the state have continued to locate Indigenous Guards as objects of violence who are considered dispensable. Indigenous leaders are thus simultaneously 'included and excluded' from the Colombian neoliberal peacebuilding framework. On the one hand, all indigenous communities have been granted specific rights in the Peace Agreement, especially the ethnic chapter (Cárdenas, 2022, pp. 1–20; Koopman, 2020), to participate in land distribution programmes, rural development plans, political processes, and finding solutions to illegal drug economies. On the other hand, the state does not respect indigenous customary legislations and traditions, and continues to ignore indigenous rights to prior consultation, the need to expand their ancestral territories and assert their political autonomy.

Indigenous organizations have also denounced the genocide against their leaders and communities. Senator Feliciano Valencia pointed out on social media the systemic nature of this violence, creating several hashtags including: *#NosSiguenMatando* (They continue killing us), *#GenocidioIndigenaEnColombia* (Indigenous genocide in Colombia) and *#QuePareElGenocidioIndigena* (Stop indigenous genocide). In these social media spaces, indigenous authorities and activists reject and denounce the murders as genocidal violence. Regional indigenous organizations also share this interpretation of a 'logic of elimination' that selectively targets actors who seek to protect life in their territories. In December 2019, CRIC explicitly denounced the genocide affecting the indigenous peoples of Cauca claiming, "We are being made a military objective by groups that want to cause disharmony in the territories. For this reason, we call the community to continue with this exercise [of defence]".[21]

In this context of peacebuilding, indigenous leaders become expendable as they are devalued, discarded, and eliminated by the necropolitics of war machines and the state (Mbembe, 2003). This process involves projecting a lack of humanity on subjected and racialized bodies, barring them from the category of human (Grosfoguel, 2016). The territorial disputes of indigenous people in northern Cauca, however, not only involve confrontation with illegal economies but also state-led dispossession and extractive economies, including large-scale mining and the agro-industrial sugar monoculture (Troyan, 2015; Campo Palacios, 2018; Vargas Reyes & Ariza Santamaría, 2019). This political contestation generates threats and violence by armed actors protecting the continuity of their corporate interests within these spaces.

Since the signing of the Peace Agreement and the official departure of FARC-EP from the territories, new illegal groups have arrived that are difficult to identify. A social leader who has been threatened on several occasions for being part of the Indigenous Guard, told us how:

When I saw the Peace Agreement I was worried about one thing: They were going to sign a Peace Accord but who was going to control the whole issue of drug trafficking if the army did not? … I have had

great doubt and let's not tell ourselves lies because a whole group of new delinquents has arrived. … I had already become a social leader in the community … but it got worse. It was time to face this situation because they [delinquent groups] wanted to control the community. They wanted to hold meetings and occupy our spaces as if they were theirs. (Cauca, September 2019)

As this indigenous leader indicates, the escalating situation is related to a vacuum in territorial control. Attempts to dominate the drug trade and illicit commodities are closely linked to struggles over the control of space and land[22] (Aranda, 2012; Dest, 2021; Yashar, 2018). Drug trafficking is thus linked to structures of coloniality, which facilitate the production, extraction, and flow of commodities at the edges of state control, ensuring that spaces become governable for extraction (Acosta García & Fold, 2022; Dest, 2021). Northern Cauca can be seen as a frontier space with "coca enclosures" tied to markets, armed actors, militarization and state bureaucracies, aiming to eliminate and displace indigenous and Black communities, *resguardos*, and peasant reserves. This demonstrates how illicit economies tend to undermine peacebuilding processes, instrumentalising disorder, diverting resources, criminalising politics, and creating war-peace continuities (Goodhand, 2008; Jonsson et al., 2016; Wennmann, 2005).

Violence during peacebuilding, however, is not the result of a single factor. Post-agreement conflict may be promoted by underfunded peacebuilding policies, their lack of implementation, and co-opted neoliberal participation (Vélez-Torres et al., 2022). Limited peacebuilding allows, and may even strengthen, the continuity of violence (Cockburn, 2004) and convergence of interlocked conflict issues involving agrarian injustice, the drug economy (Rettberg, 2020), and militarization. As Meger and Sachseder (2020), p. 954) argue, "the interests of elite classes, of paramilitary actors, and of the Colombian state have converged in such a way as to enable the outsourcing of the violence of authoritarian neoliberalism to non-state actors". Unstable and ineffective peacebuilding policies have allowed the presence, reconfiguration, and realignment of multiple actors who continue to dispute the monopoly of violence and its necropolitics within indigenous and rural territories. In the context of coca crop substitution programmes, which have failed to support alternative livelihoods, some communities produce drugs as their primary means of subsistence (Parada-Hernández & Marín-Jaramillo, 2021; Vélez-Torres & Lugo-Vivas, 2021). The complexity of actors and disputed interests creates ambiguous geographies where legal and illegal economies are interconnected, including mining, agrobusiness, water and timber extractive companies, and commercial global arrangements. Consequently, post-agreement violence cannot be reduced to bi-lateral tensions and confrontations between communities and illegal groups engaged in drug dealing.

Social leaders struggle to understand which armed groups are operating in their territories and who is leading them. As one indigenous leader explained:

The problem that exists right now is that one group appears, then one more appears, then another appears with a different name, so nobody knows. Before we could ask to talk with a commander [of FARC-EP] but not now. Not now. The commander is not there. Therein lies the problem. There is danger for both the people and the community. (Cauca, July 2019)

Similarly, another indigenous authority indicated how the situation

[20] http://hacemosmemoria.org/2019/09/08/esto-no-se-soluciona-a-punta-de-tiros-feliciano-valencia/.
[21] https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/asesinatos-de-lideres-indigenas-en-el-norte-del-cauca/626669.

[22] Dest (2021) and Acosta García and Fold (2022) indicate that drug trafficking is linked to structures of coloniality facilitating the production, extraction, and flow of commodities at the edges of state control, ensuring that spaces become governable for extraction. Northern Cauca can be seen as a frontier space with "coca enclosures" tied to markets, armed actors, militarization and state bureaucracies, aiming to eliminate and displace indigenous and Black communities, *resguardos*, and peasant reserves.

had become more dangerous because, "Before we could talk to the middle management … and it [a problem] was resolved. But not now" (August 2019). The opacity of dissident and paramilitary groups following the Peace Agreement has created confusion and uncertainty among threatened indigenous leaders and the families of those who have been murdered. Despite many of the threats being signed and the armed groups identifiable in the pamphlets, those directly responsible for the killings remain unknown (Indepaz, 2018).

There are numerous interpretations of who the perpetrators of violence are and why the situation in northern Cauca has deteriorated. Some indigenous authorities believe the key reason is their poor relationship with members of state security forces following the Peace Agreement. An indigenous authority explained how:

> The situation became more tense after the Agreement because they [armed groups] believe that the [indigenous] authorities are in favour of the state. Because before, the police were not there, the army was not there but now the police are in the field and the army is in the field. Since then, it has become more tense and there are more threats because they [army] have already been seen going up and down the mountains (*pa'rriba y pa'bajo)*. Then the young people began to talk with them [members of the army], the girls started to talk with them, and then it became a bad atmosphere. There is a lot of tension. (Cauca, September 2019)

The increased presence of the police and armed forces in territories previously controlled by FARC-EP has been interpreted by new armed groups as being the result of complicity between local inhabitants and the state. Consequently, locals are accused of being informers and subsequently threatened. In May 2020, an illegal armed group sent a written communication to the inhabitants of one area (*vereda*) in Miranda giving them one month to halt all relations with state institutions and former combatants who were in the process of reincorporation, otherwise they would be considered a military target. After the demobilisation of FARC-EP's Sixth Front, a military base was established in the *vereda*, which has been targeted by both paramilitary and dissident groups. This illustrates how the turn to stabilization and military securitization advanced by Duque's government and regulated through Strategic Zones of Integrated Intervention (ZEIIs) are perceived as a risk by communities.

7. Indigenous organizations' responses to threats and violence

Indigenous organizations in Cauca have long claimed their right to territorial autonomy, both in the context of armed conflict and attempts to build peace. Faced with recent increases in threats and homicides, the regional indigenous organizations are maintaining a firm stance, rejecting the presence of armed groups in their territories. Social leaders counter the logic of elimination with one of harmonization and collective resistance that advocates a commitment to defend life. In August 2019, CRIC drew up a Declaration of a State of Emergency in Defence of Life and Territory which states:

> We will not be intimidated by the voices of death and we will defend life to the end at all costs with our batons (*bastones*) of authority held high and the colours that symbolize the spirit of our process … Count on us for peace, never war.[23]

This categorical stance of resistance was accompanied by a series of directives regarding the continuity of the struggle for life, territory, unity, autonomy and culture. ACIN rejects "… the policies of extermination of peoples, organizations and social leaders by neoliberal

governments"[24] and the presence of armed groups in their territories. The organizations and their leaders identify both the state with its neoliberal policies and armed groups as key factors shaping their experiences of 'elimination'.

ACIN has developed an autonomous plan to guarantee the protection of their territories pointing out:

> All armed groups must leave our territories immediately. Their presence damages our harmony and violates our law of origin. We have oriented our Kiwe Thegnas[25] and all community members to deepen territorial control and prevent them [armed groups] from settling in our villages. Armed aggressions, assassinations, attacks, threats against any member of the community by these groups will be responded to in a unified manner by all the indigenous and Kiwe Thegna authorities of northern Cauca.[26]

Despite the threats, and perhaps as a bastion of resistance that symbolizes the Nasa people, the Indigenous Guard is identified as an autonomous actor separate from the state and armed groups. Indigenous Guards are guided by the collective decisions and directives of community assemblies and indigenous authorities. ACIN mandates that, "All Nasa are Kiwe Thegna [Indigenous Guards] who defend life and territory from birth until their return to mother earth."[27] All Nasa should thus be Indigenous Guards for life, oppose the presence of armed groups, and reject their practices of extermination. This position of collective defence of their territories seeks to address the anti-indigenous discourses and actions of armed groups and the neoliberal state itself. As stated by Zaragocin (2018: 375), indigenous organizations tend to use "place" as a way of challenging coloniality and the state and for refusing to be eliminated.

Most local indigenous leaders and authorities ratify ACIN's position. As one social leader claimed:

> What we had once said was ratified. No more armed groups within our territories, neither legal nor illegal. Why? Because it does not guarantee a healthy coexistence or harmony for any of us. It was ratified by the 39 villages that were present there. (Cauca, October 2019)

Beyond the public and collective statements of the indigenous organizations, individual and everyday responses to threats and violence vary greatly. Some of those threatened leave immediately without filing complaints with the relevant state entities. Even some of those who remain refrain from formally reporting violent threats/incidents due to fear of retaliation. An indigenous leader who has been threatened many times told us:

> There are many people who are not going to report a threat because if you go and report it, it is easier for them to kill you. If you go to the prosecutor's office, the prosecution already knows who you are … Regardless, I would not go to a prosecutor's office or to a police station to file a complaint knowing that I am going to be exposed or judged there. Because you still don't know who the people in there are, in the police, they change them all the time, in the prosecution too. So you don't know who is who. (Cauca, August 2019)

Indigenous social leaders have a long history of mistrust towards state institutions, as these entities have been unable, or reluctant, to protect them. Seeking support from state institutions is thus often the

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[23] https://www.cric-colombia.org/portal/declaratoria-estado-de-emergencia-en-defensa-de-la-vida-y-el-territorio/.

[24] https://nasaacin.org/por-el-buen-vivir-y-frente-al-autodenominado-movimiento-renacer-quintin-lame/.

[25] Term for indigenous guard in Nasa Yuwe, which means "caretakers of the land".

[26] https://nasaacin.org/por-el-buen-vivir-y-frente-al-autodenominado-movimiento-renacer-quintin-lame/.

[27] https://nasaacin.org/por-el-buen-vivir-y-frente-al-autodenominado-movimiento-renacer-quintin-lame/.

last resort for social leaders who experience threats and violence. This illustrates their complex relationship with the Colombian multicultural state, which exerts and distributes necropower under the guise of liberal peacebuilding agendas co-constructed with armed groups and illegal war machines (Dest, 2020; Grajales, 2017; Troyan, 2015).

8. Conclusion

This article reveals how indigenous leaders in Colombia are still facing violence despite the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2016, the demobilisation of armed groups and the implementation of state peacebuilding policies. The proposed concept of the 'necropolitics of peacebuilding', proves a useful tool for examining the racial, spatial and coloniality dimensions of this violence and how indigenous organizations responding.

Our empirical findings demonstrate that there is a spatialized "continuum of racialized violence" running through indigenous territories. Statistical data indicate that there has been an increase in the number of indigenous leaders murdered, especially in the territories and municipalities of northern Cauca that have been prioritized for the implementation of peace programmes, including PDETs and illegal crop substitution plans. Between 2016 and 2019, this violence turned to focus on indigenous Cabildo authorities and Indigenous Guards, since they are the main actors involved in territorial control and protection. During the Covid-19 pandemic, however, there was a rise in cases targeting traditional healers, indigenous journalists, ethno-educational teachers and youth leaders located across Cauca. Ideologies of elimination and genocide have been circulated in pamphlets showing how indigenous bodies have become marketable and disposable.

Indigenous leaders, communities and organizations, however, are not passive victims of racialized violence; they continue to adopt a position that condemns and combats the necropolitics of armed conflict, the topography of cruelty and its logic of elimination. As such, indigenous leaders and communities have been mobilizing and participating in regional and national protests, demanding a truly transformative peacebuilding process that not only seeks to end the war but also eliminates structural violence, social inequalities, the coloniality of racialized oppression, and spaces of social death. With the change of government that saw Gustavo Petro become President in August 2022 on a platform of "Total Peace", indigenous organizations and communities are hoping for meaningful and participatory peace. Despite an ambitious approach that aims to implement the Peace Agreement through negotiating with the remaining armed groups and pursuing national unity, the killing of indigenous leaders and community members has continued. During the first six months of Petro's presidency, 21 indigenous victims were assassinated,[28] five of them indigenous leaders in Cauca. The main challenge the government faces is the construction of a progressive policy, which based on the democratisation of power and distribution of wealth, can reverse inequality gaps and the inherent social and environmental violence.

Various factors explain this pattern of post-war violence that targets indigenous leaders and their communities since the signing of the agreement. First, the colonial racialization of indigenous people in Cauca has stigmatised this population as disposable, not fully human and subject to the logic of elimination (Grosfoguel, 2016; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Rappaport, 1998; Zaragocin, 2018). Second, the juxtaposition of indigenous territories with modern-colonial frontier spaces desired by illicit economies and neoliberal extractivist enterprises (Dest, 2021; Grajales, 2017; Hirstov, 2014) makes indigenous families and communities targets for land dispossession, which usually entails the use of violence. Third, alternative political projects that aim to defend,

recover and expand indigenous lands increase violence against indigenous guards and authorities who oppose the expansion of neoliberal agribusinesses (Troyan, 2015; Vargas Reyes & Ariza Santamaría, 2019). Fourth, when all these factors intersect, participation in peacebuilding programmes may increase violence against indigenous leaders, as their actions tend to interfere with the production of illicit crops, the economies of mining and timber commodities, the distribution of weapons, the availability of cheap labour and money laundering. Consequently, necropower continues to be distributed unevenly across space, depending on how these factors intersect.

Our empirical findings and novel conceptual approach have ramifications for peacebuilding beyond Colombia. We propose that attention to the 'necropolitics of peacebuilding' can help highlight the dynamics between race and space within post-colonial settings globally. It is important to recognize that peacebuilding shapes the ways in which programmes, plans and actions are unevenly distributed, implemented, and experienced depending on how space is racialized and race is spatialized. Spaces deeply affected by conflict tend to be inhabited by communities with long-term colonial histories of racialization, othering, marginalization, and dehumanization. Prioritization within peacebuilding schemes reproduces state necropolitics, as who will live and who will die, who will be protected and who will remain under the threat of violence is determined. Yet peacebuilding policies and plans need to prioritize not only areas directly affected by war but also spaces historically racialized as non-White European, and communities that are trying to assert political autonomy to challenge genocide, dispossession, and the logic of elimination. Peacebuilding policy makers need to take into account the effects of coloniality and the logic of elimination to enable the embedding of robust place-based, anti-racist strategies in legal instruments, plans, programmes and actions. Structural dimensions of racialized violence, caused by historical articulations of space, race and the coloniality of power, continue long after war has supposedly ended.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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