

The Peasant Agroalimentary Territories – Echoing Post-development?

ABSTRACT

Inequality in access to land in Latin America, has led several rural communities to design and implement alternative forms of territorial management. In this article the identification and analysis of the characteristics of the Peasant Agroalimentary Territories (TCA for its Spanish acronym), which is the most recent territorial planning proposal in Colombia is offered; it rapidly has spread throughout this country and seems to be putting into practice some of the principles of post-development.

Confronting the current “development” dynamics (massive extraction, production, consumption, and disposal), post-development is a current of thought, gaining strength in Latin America that proposes to recover economic and environmental principles for achieving a more inclusive and equitable world. Hence, and based mainly on primary information collected (between 2019 and 2022) through interviews with social leaders and TCA inhabitants, minutes from meetings, and private documentation of other events related to their promotion and implementation, their main features and the progress in their establishment are explained.

The comparison between the theoretical principles of post-development and the TCA practices offers enough evidence to conclude that the peasant communities involved with the TCA are close enough to questioning hegemonic discourses and practices of development, understood mainly as economic growth. Another conclusion is TCA have not been created as a one-size-fits-all recipe, but rather seek to be as flexible and diverse as necessary. This characteristic is particularly important since it makes them easily reproducible in other rural contexts, and they do not depend on the rural location of a country or global region, on the geographic or ecosystem context, or on the social group that wants to organize it; instead, TCA provide the opportunity to recover a series of values and actions that are an integral part of a global trend in search of a transition towards a balance between the rights of human societies and those of Nature.

Keywords

Agroalimentary Peasant Territories; Alternative territorial management; Post-development principles; Post-development practice

1. INTRODUCTION

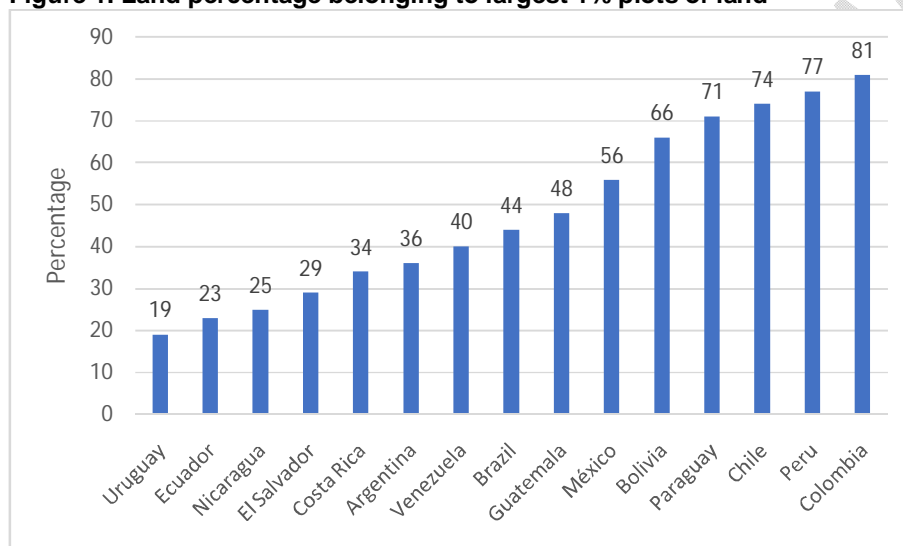
The inequality in access to land is a common characteristic in Latin American countries; at the global level, the Gini index¹ of land concentration by regions indicates that Africa is the continent with the lowest concentration of land, with 0.53, and is followed in order by Asia (0.56), Europe (0.58), North America (0.69), Oceania (0.70) and Latin America and the Caribbean which reaches 0.79 [1: 36].

¹Gini Index values are between 0 and 1, and the higher the value, the higher the concentration.

While it is asserted that, Latin America is not the poorest region in the world, but it is the most unequal[2], it is also stated that Colombia and Brazil dispute the first place in being the most unequal country in the region. In fact, this historical inequality in access to land was one of the main reasons for the origins of the armed conflict in Colombia, which began in the middle of the last century, and to which a solution was agreed in the very first point of the Peace Agreements, signed in 2016, though compliance has been minimal.

The Census carried out in 2014 registered a total occupied area of 69,1 million ha; of these, 9,500 farms with more than 500 ha control 47,2 million ha (68.2% of the occupied area), while 368 thousand farms of less than 5 ha, occupy an area of 2,1 million ha (4.2% of the occupied area) [3] (Figure No 1).

Figure 1. Land percentage belonging to largest 1% plots of land



Source: Based on [1]

And although the Gini index of land concentration has its inaccuracies (e.g., land quality and land use are not included), the figures in Latin America in general are alarming, such as those shown in the following table (No. 1).

Table 1. Land concentration figures in some Latin American countries

	Owners %		% over the country's agricultural land
Argentina	0.9	of the owners of the very large land plots control	34
Brazil	1	of the owners of the very large land plots control	50
Costa Rica	4.8	of owners with more than 100 ha plots control	60
Guatemala	8	are owners of	80
México	1	of the owners of the very large land plots control	56
Paraguay	1.6	are owners of	80
Uruguay	90	forestry companies own 5,700,000 ha, that is,	41(*)

Sources: Argentina [4]; Brazil[5]; Costa Rica [6]; Guatemala y Paraguay [1]; México [7]; and Uruguay [8](*) excluding mining companies

Additionally, and according to these same sources, in the case of Argentina the owners of large agricultural holdings have on average more than 2.000 hectares, and the average farms in the top 1% of the largest ones have more than 22.000 hectares; in Brazil, properties with areas smaller than 10 hectares represent half of rural properties, but they control only 2% of the total area; in Costa Rica, 61.4% of farms smaller than 10 hectares cover barely 7.5% of the land, and in Nicaragua the inequality in the distribution of land at the national level shows an increase in the Gini coefficient of land that reached 0.78 in 2011[9]. In the case of Guatemala, it is estimated that half a million rural families do not own land[1].

Despite the enormous difficulties that small-scale farmers face on a daily basis, their importance is undeniable, since not only do they represent more than 80% of the total agricultural production units in Latin America and the Caribbean, but also 27-67% of food production comes from this sector and also generates between 57 and 77% of agricultural employment[10].

Although throughout Latin America the State declares itself as the entity with exclusive competence to define the forms of territorial planning in its lands, as a consequence of the unequal access to land, several rural communities have exerted pressure to put into practice various forms of territorial management; among them, the Original Indigenous Peasant Territories and the Original Community Land in Bolivia; the Extractive Reserves in Brazil; the Rural Areas of Integrated Development and the Zones of Agricultural Utilisation in Venezuela; the Ecological State Territorial Plans and the Communal Ecological State Territorial Plans in Mexico; the Ecological Economic Zones in Peru; and the Ancestral Territories, the Afro descendant Collective Territories, the Peasant Reserve Zones and, recently, the Agroalimentary Peasant Territories (TCA) in Colombia.

Therefore, in this article the identification and analysis of main characteristics of the Agroalimentary Peasant Territories (TCA), is offered: it is the most recent territorial planning proposal promoted by some Southern Colombian peasantry communities which, besides putting into practice some of the principles of post-development, rapidly is spreading on different regions of this country.

2. METHODS

Based mainly on primary information collected through interviews with social leaders and TCA inhabitants, minutes from meetings, and private documentation of other events related to their promotion and implementation, in the next section TCA main features and the progress of their establishment are explained.

Then, the main subjects on which post-development focuses its critique of the development paradigm is briefly presented in order to compare the most important TCA characteristics and the principles of post-development and to determine how related they are, and if TCA could be understood as a post-development experience; the last section presents our main conclusions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Agroalimentary Peasant Territories (TCA)

According to the data from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), slightly less than a quarter of the Colombian population identified themselves as peasants, that is just over eleven million people (Revista Semana, 2019, 8); they produce 83.5% of the food that Colombians consume [11: 2]; and "this is the fifth consecutive quarter in which agriculture is the branch that most generates new employment, in comparison with the other branches of activity" [12:1].

Even so, the long struggle to obtain State recognition of their rights continues, unlike the rights of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, which were included in the 1991 National Constitution. This struggle received a boost when the very first issue in the 2016 Peace Agreements was devoted to a Comprehensive Rural Reform with the purpose of addressing inequalities, both social and concerning access to land for rural inhabitants, as well as the massive impact that the armed conflict had in rural Colombia. Although peasants' rights recognition has also been slow in the international context, the most recent endorsements came, first in 2018 when the UN formally adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People who Work in Rural Areas; then, in 2019, the Colombian General Procuracy of the Nation issued Directive 007, presented the 'Guidelines for the Recognition, Prevention, Promotion, and Defense of the Rights of the Peasantry'. Its first article states: "To recognize the Colombian peasantry as a subject of integral rights and a subject of special protection by the Constitution, in the contexts determined by the Constitutional Court, which contributes to the economy of our country, builds alliances and linkages with other sectors, and preserves biodiversity and the local ecosystems of the country" [13: 1].

In Colombia, agriculture production is multimodal, meaning that agribusiness with vast areas of private land where mining is established, and sugar cane, soya beans, or palm oil can be found in the same areas as Afro-descendant figures of territorial management, indigenous reservations, and peasant communities, all of them laboring as small-scale farmers; each of these modes of production have their particular economic logic, and therefore, different power relations that determine, among others, the access to resources as land, soil of good quality, and water, and ultimately distribution of income. In the contradiction between the economic rationality of small farmers and the rationality of large agribusiness corporations, the mediation of the State has undoubtedly favored the latter. A single example of this bias was the distribution of subsidies from the controversial agricultural support program 'AgroIngreso Seguro': in the Montes de María region (between 2007 and 2008) medium and large farmers received donations for COP\$ 2948 million and the small-scale ones received COP\$ 258 million [14]; and public policies have contributed to the decomposition of peasant economies to the extent that they have led to the expansion of the already mentioned agribusiness rather than agricultural and food production.

This tension between the Colombian State and rural communities has led the latter to organize a series of resistance processes and collective actions, the TCA being the one that most recently originated among peasantries. Led by the *Coordinadora Nacional Agraria* (CAN – National Agrarian Coordination), which is a large organization that brings together several smaller peasant organizations, the TCA design phase began in 2011 in Cauca, southwestern Colombia. To the extent that their aim is to integrate into its food production system, autonomy, coexistence, participation, and respect for nature, the TCA design involved a process of questioning and debate over:

- Which type of production system could be the most adequate to transition from one focused on the major possible economic profitable, the accumulation of goods and capital and economic growth, to another one which prioritizes instead life in all its dimensions? Their answers indicated that agroecology production was the way to address these changes to achieve ecological, economic, and social sustainability;
- Which territorial management could be better to implement agroecology production systems? Their answers led to a new figure of territorial planning, based on factors that promote agroecological food production, such as the presence of different ecosystems, hydrological basins, and thermal floors, namely TCA;and
- How to consolidate alternative forms of marketing their production? Their solution involved the establishment of a strong and direct relationship between producers and consumers.

Reflections on opting for agroecological production systems included recognizing that although some views on agroecology have been limited to the relationship between the agronomic elements of food production and the ecological systems in which it takes place [15 - 16], conceptual proposals around it have rapidly expanded towards integrative disciplines and practical approaches: "Through transdisciplinary, participatory, and change-oriented research and action, agroecology links together science, practice, and movements focused on social change" [17: 1]. In fact, in the case of TCAs, agroecology production also involves the regulation of individual and collective access in conditions of equality to natural resources, such as land suitable for production, water required for crops, or energy to boost production; simultaneously, in TCAs, preservation of these resources and protection of the environment, respecting both human life and all biodiversity, including seeds and subsoil, endorses the cross between biodiversity conservation and agroecology production.

Resolutions on territory management, with ecological basis instead of administrative ones, first of all challenge the political-administrative criteria of current national planning, that divides the national territory into 'veredas' (the smallest units) municipalities and departments. In addition, although the TCA planning figure acknowledges several other forms of occupation of the territory, among them private ownership and also individual usufruct of production, it does not mean that it does not question the historic unequal structure of land ownership, which has been a main cause of the Colombian armed conflict; on the contrary, peasants aim to reach a transition through their alternative criteria for planning, use, and permanence on rural spaces where the community might achieve food security and food sovereignty: "In this sense, the priority of the TCAs is not to be a tool to gain access to land, but a tool to remain on it" [18: 78]. That is also why TCAs do not oppose any territorial planning figure recognized for indigenous or Afro-descendant groups, or those promoted by other peasant communities, such as the Peasant Reserve Zones, also in the Colombian case. On the contrary, TCAs seek to overcome the trap, currently present in many countries, of multicultural competition between peasants, indigenous people, and Afro-descendants or different ethnic communities. In this sense, TCAs can bring a true form of intercultural interrelation, as soon as they are equated with the other figures of

protection and governance, such as the reservations and the collective land registrations [19].

Regarding alternative ways of marketing their products, TCAs peasants have decided to appeal to the mutual solidarity between producers and consumers, in such a way that consumers recognize the effort involved in producing nutritious food, free of agrotoxins, that protects nature and at the same time allows peasant producers to establish prices for their products that allow access to all and not only to high-income groups. One of their practical strategies is to sell their products through “the ‘Peasants Markets’, which have been positioned throughout the country as a win-win alternative: peasants directly sell at fair prices and consumers get fresh food, overcoming the rural-urban barrier in such a way that they do not depend on unfair intermediation organizations, large landowners, monopolies of finance groups, and transnational corporations. “But it is not a secret that organizing Peasant Markets is the product of the resistance of the grassroots organizations that promote them. It is an effort that remains despite logistical problems, costs, lack of information and little institutional support” [20: 1].

To put into practice these principles, and others derived from them, peasant communities outlined what it is known as Plan for a Dignified Life; according to the leading organization, the National Agrarian Coordinator: “The Plan for a Dignified Life expresses the thoughts of the community, our history, our present, and our vision of the future for our territories (...) they are how we, autonomously and via participation, determine what we want for our territory; they are our action plan for our governability, and the enforceability of our rights in front of the State” [21: 13].

In consequence, the TCA can be defined as a figure of transformation of the territory projected for the long-term, in which several peasantry organizations express manners of land planning and food production, both existing and desirable.

On November 25th of 2016, the first TCA was declared, and currently there are two established: the Agroalimentary Peasant Territory in the North of Nariño and South of Cauca, and the Center-East TCA, situated in districts two and six of the Saravena municipality in Arauca. In addition to these, there are other TCA in the process of consolidation in twelve of the thirty-two departments in which Colombia is divided² (Map No. 1).

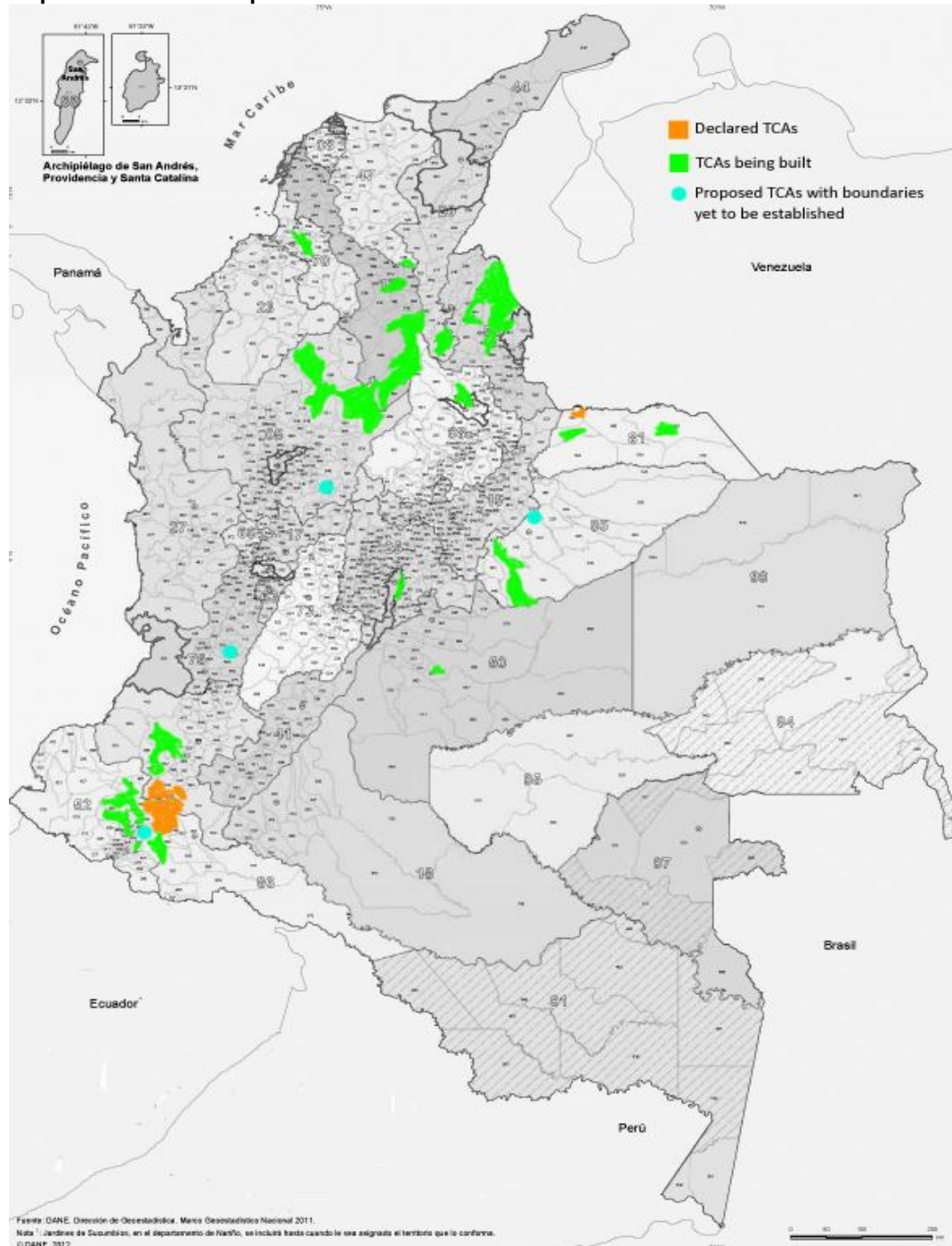
Though they have not yet been recognized by the Colombian government, they have been endorsed by some peasantry organizations at the national level: “The present existing TCA are inhabited by peasants dedicated mostly to agroecological systems of food and livestock production, aimed to satisfy their needs and those of the urban population” [22: 17]. These communities are also characterized as diverse social groups, that have strong community bonds based on the traditional usage of the land and the territory, focus on food safety and sovereignty, care for the local environment and the preservation of their ancestral culture.

Hence, starting from an agroecology food production system characterized by small scale farming, preservation of ecosystems, and respect for all forms of life, TCAs have

² These 12 departments are: Cauca, Caquetá, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, Bolívar, Cesar, Arauca, Casanare, Boyacá and Cundinamarca.

evolved as a collective action movement; they seek to exercise power over their territories, pressuring the State for the recognition of the rights of the peasantry.

Map 1. Current TCA implementation



3.2 Post-development principles, or a path away from “Development”

The post-development approach states that: “Development (...) must be seen as a regime of representation, as an ‘invention’ resulted from the postwar history and that, from its

beginnings, inevitably shaped any possible conception of reality and social action of the countries that, since then, have been known as underdeveloped” [23: 14].

Therefore, in this section main principles of the ‘development’ paradigm that post-development has deconstructed are explained “to imagining alternatives, changes of path, other ways of representing and designing our multiple realities without reducing them to a single pattern or a hegemonic cultural model” [23: 14].

- Infinite economic growth, being a pillar of the development paradigm, is among the critical issues examined by the post-development approach. From the economic point of view, two main alternative dynamics to infinite growth are the steady-state economy [24 - 26] or, more radically, economic degrowth [27 - 30]: “Growth is presented (...) as the miraculous remedy of inequalities (...) The general idea is that rather than disputing the shares in a small cake it would be better to agree on making the cake bigger so that everyone has more and all have enough. It is a very attractive proposition, but, at the same time, economists are unanimous in agreeing that accumulation cannot be achieved without a large inequality in incomes. Here again, we have a new dialectic. To solve the inequality of conditions, you must start by increasing the inequality” [31: 140].
- Nature as a sphere separated from human societies, as a principle of development paradigm related to infinite economic growth, is a very problematic position. To conceive nature as an externality of human societies has led to considering it as merely a repository of resources available at will [32 - 34]. When humans naively believe that Nature could be dominated for our benefit, and act in consequence, the sole source that provides us with all elements for life is destroyed. In other words, we self-destruct, because in practice this separation is not doable: Dávalos [35], among other analysts, states that the current economic theory, subscribed to the Cartesian paradigm, understands Nature as an external sphere to human history, a concept that even is underlying to Marxism. However other currents of thought propose the incorporation of nature within human history, not as a productive factor or force, but as a part inherent to the social being: “This means that the individualized being of modernity must recognize the ontological existence of other beings that have a right to exist and continue to exist in their otherness. This is a basic issue because in the development theories there is not the least epistemological possibility of understanding the otherness” [35: 4]. It is essential, then, to establish a harmonic relationship with Nature, because “nature is our home, and without a deal with it, we cannot reproduce our life” [36: 230].
- To establish a harmonious deal with the rest of Nature, it is imperative to remove economic growth as the main objective of humanity. Economic growth has to be more modestly placed, allowing comprehensive participation of other elements fundamental to the wellbeing of human societies; this shift implies different approaches to the economy: amongst others, human-scale economy, new economy, collaborative economy, bio-economy, social and solidarity economy, and circular economy: “By circular, an economy is envisaged as having no net effect on the environment; rather it restores any damage done in resource acquisition while ensuring little waste is generated throughout the production process and in the life history of the product. The word circular has a second, inferred, descriptive meaning, which relates to the concept of the cycle” [37: 371].

Also related to economic growth dynamics, there are also those analyses that are focused on cultural transformations, consumerism among them, and their negative impacts on the living conditions of large populations [38 - 40]. Hence, removing economic growth from the focus, “is not just about shifting the control or the decisions from one hegemonic group to another, not even just to ‘de-privatize’ these decisions, but about-facing substantial transformations that lead us from an economy based on accumulation and the tyranny of the markets to one focused on the sustainability of life, justice, and democracy. This means changes in the productive matrix, in the visions and politics about who, and how, make the economy, what and how to produce, what and how to consume, and how, at the end of the day, to reproduce life” [41: 354].

- Promoting values of solidarity and reciprocity instead of fostering competitiveness between human beings, in opposition to the development approach; this is another element that the new economic proposals have in common [42 - 44]: “The forms of production based on reciprocity would emerge as forms of resistance to the market, resulting from collective actions that, unlike the charities, would be able to promote democratic solidarity, the democratization of the economy” [43: 8]. “The importance of the practice of reciprocity is understood as a full way of acting economically. Social economy has the specificity to combine the dynamics of private initiatives focused not on profit, but the collective interest. The economic rationale is accompanied by a social purpose that is to produce social and solidary bonds, based on a solidarity of proximity; mutual aid and reciprocity would be, thus, at the heart of the economic action” [45: 80] and it also, includes ethical transformations [46 - 47].
- To ‘*thinkfeel*’, to intuit, to acknowledge, and to recover other ways of grasping and understanding the world is another element post-development highlights. The need of new narratives are suggested by some post-development scholars that focus their critical analysis on the persuasive discourses that have established ‘development’ as the quintessential aim of global modernity [23] [48 - 50]. These analyses, among others, have identified the mistakes, polysemy, gaps, and inconsistencies of the meaning of ‘development’ as a global objective that promotes the expectation of infinite economic growth based on finite resources. Instead “post-development makes visible possibilities for reconceiving and reconstructing the word from the perspective of the place-based cultural and economic practices” [51:194]. Knowledge and decolonization discourses go further than patriarchalism and racism, confronting even epistemology when it comes to recognizing and trying to recover other ways of understanding the world [52 - 54]: “Speaking in ontological terms, we could say that this crisis is a crisis of a specific world, or of a series of practices to make a world; the world we generally refer to is the dominant form of the euro modernity (capitalist, rationalist, liberal, secular, patriarchal, and white, or however each one of us calls it). I adopt the compact formulation of John Law (2011) to refer to this world as the *One-World World* (OWW), that is, a world that supposedly holds one world, and that has taken over the right to be «the» World, subduing all other worlds to its own terms, or even worse, relegating them to non-existence; it is a world in which there is only space for one World” [53:15].

- The purpose of post-development is not to find a different development model to replace the current one. Development discourse analysis has shown that *the development (model, scheme, program, project, and so on)* is mentioned, it is always in the singular, referring to *that one*, and whichever it is, it is *the one* that will show underdeveloped countries, societies and/or communities *the way*, the one that will give us the answer [55 - 56]. However, one of the most usual criticisms of post-development is that, even though it finds solid enough arguments to dismantle the concept of ‘development’, it does not offer in its place *a* different way for continuing. This apparent great failure can be understood, instead, as one of its great strengths (and also as one of its greatest temptations); post-development cannot offer another specific way (*the way*) of doing things, since it would fall in the trap of deconstructing one way only to offer another, drifting into the presumption of becoming *the* model that replaces the previous one. That would lead again to the logic of the concept of ‘development’ as it is known it today, and to the logic of hegemonizing it, to spread it, promote it, or impose it, undermining post-development principles. To keep to its principles, post-development can only promote the idea of respect for the multiple wellbeing objectives that very diverse cultures have tried to maintain and/or recover, and to try to also promote the respect for those paths that are creatively established to achieve these objectives. “By promoting respect for diverse objectives and varied paths, post-development shields itself against the need to find a unique way, becoming then by definition encompassing, manifold and heterogenous, and moving further away from ‘development’ as it is now” [57: 67].

At this point, it is important to note that, for the sake of clarity, post-development principles are presented here separately, but all of them are tightly intertwined, because the “critical voices said that the way out of underdevelopment was not development (...) That which must be changed, and radically, is not underdevelopment but all the discourse and practice of development as a whole (...) What needs to be assumed and transformed, then, is the whole civilizing project in which the [global] ‘North’ believes in” [35: 3].

Hence, the aim of post-development is not identifying and bringing into practice alternative methods of development; on the contrary, the main purpose of post-development is to move as far away as possible from the ‘development’ rationale, creating and/or recovering instead new meanings and practices focused on the respect of all ways of life. It promotes not alternative development actions, but alternative actions to development.

3.3 A comparison between TCA practices and Post-development principles

To the extent that post-development comprises a set of social, economic, political, and ethical proposals to confront the development paradigm and its production and social reproduction of human societies (as it was exposed in the previous section) a comparison between these proposals and practical experiences in the TCA is offered below to establish how close they are.

Regarding the setting up of a more harmonious relationship with nature, a TCA characteristic is that their boundaries do not follow conventional political or administrative criteria, but instead are naturally defined bioregions. This particular criterion implies that the organization of the food production systems is based on

preserving the native ecosystems under the agroecological terms, and also setting the timing of production to follow the timing of the ecosystems in which they are established. This principle has brought some advantages, and some difficulties: among the advantages, it already has contributed to stopping the expansion of the agricultural frontier via the recovery of forested areas and the use of native species; one of the difficulties is related to the expectations of urban consumers of a year-round offer of a wide variety of products. To solve this difficulty, TCAs are proving different strategies: one is bartering and making exchange with those communities that have the necessary ecological conditions to grow different crops; however, another strategy is educating consumers by offering only those foods produced in nearby ecosystems, guaranteeing in exchange that they are free of agro-toxins.

To consider that human beings are part of Nature is also accomplished when TCA peasants express that the processes of territorial government must be guided “by a concept of environmental justice that implies the defense of water, of river basins, of high-mountain moorlands and forests, and also of the zones of environmental protection, but under a dynamic of social responsibility that will not imply the expulsion of peasants, but their permanence under sustainability criteria (...) We have to defend nature because we are part of nature. In the *mojoneos*³ we give thanks for everything the land has given us and apologize for the damages we have caused, and also, we ask her to give us strength”[58:10]. These practices have a very deep spiritual meaning and seek the balance and harmony between human beings and Nature.

Concerning a new set of ethical values, including solidarity and reciprocity, TCA peasants assert: “individual private property and individual use are still the cornerstones of territory. TCAs are not a figure of collective property of the land, but instead are aiming towards the collective regulation by the peasantry to establish a private property regime that goes hand-in-hand with a regime of a common use of natural resources”[18: 44].

Even so, the principles that characterize the TCA decision-making processes, and their general system of values are driven to act in favor of the collective benefit, including Nature: “Environmental justice implies the fair treatment when it comes to the application of environmental laws, regulations and policies. It also implies significant participation of all people, regardless of their race, skin color, nationality, culture, education, or income. Fair treatment means that no group of people, including the peasant, ethnic or socioeconomic groups, should shoulder a disproportionate part of the burden of negative environmental consequences as a result of industrial, municipal, or commercial operations, or the execution of environmental programs and policies at national, departmental, municipal level”[59: 3]. “Where could we not declare Peasant Agri-food Territories? There are some territorial or ordering figures, which are already occupied by other communities such as the indigenous (Resguardos) and the Afro-Colombians (Community Councils) that already have their own regulations and that according to our same principles of coexistence with neighbors must be respected. There are also other territories that due to their environmental importance, such as National Natural Parks, should receive special treatment according to sustainability plans and special care with environmental authorities” [60: 2].

³The ‘*mojoneo*’ is an indigenous-peasant practice that involves ritual routes to re-discover and thank the land, all this immersed in a spirituality intertwined with nature.

In defining the TCA boundaries based on bioregions and respecting already occupied territories, this land-use figure has the social and political effect of uniting instead of separating, leaving aside those apparent differences, such as between the mestizo peasants, the indigenous communities, or the Afro-descendant inhabitants.

In regards to the decolonization of knowledge, and recognizing and recovering other ways of apprehending and understanding the world, the practices of the TCA also include the spiritual dimension; this is a constant part of their framework of thought and of the daily activities of the peasant communities. Some of the elements that make up this spiritual world are elements of nature (for example, in the case of the TCA located in the *Macizo Colombiano*, the spiritual element on which all activities are centered is water). A leader of this TCA says: “that is harmonization: everyone in tune with some of the central and vital elements of the territory (...) so that all people achieve the same purpose. Spirituality gives us that same purpose because it is for everyone. (...) A spirituality that is for everyone: water” [61: 3].

About the post-development principle of not aiming to find one model to replace another, TCA authorities state, in the same vein: “At the assembly, organizations eager to join the CNA have arrived, some with the hope that, in doing so, the CNA would tell them how to establish their own TCA. Even though we do provide orientation, the work of designing and creating a TCA is the responsibility of each community, its social organizations, and its capacity to carry it out in its territory. Without established rules to follow, these organizations have faced the challenge of creating their own TCA and learning how to do so as they go. That is why it is so important to keep in mind the sociopolitical, cultural, and geographical contexts of each TCA, because the particular shape it takes will be dictated by the resources and needs of each context, and the history of the social organization that leads the process” [18: 42].

And finally, when addressing the issue of a new economic logic away from infinite economic growth, the facts seem to show that while it is a matter of the utmost importance for TCAs, it has also been their greatest challenge, given that results in this regard are yet to be seen. However, their efforts in this regard are evident, because during the proclamation of the first TCA, the gathered peasants affirmed: “We declare ourselves in *minga*⁴ for the construction of territory for peasant life, where agriculture is what guarantees the means for the well-being of our family and community. We are committed to doing *minga* to care for, protect and guarantee water, land and territory for the people and not for the economic interests of transnational companies, especially mining companies” [62: 1].

In fact, in addition to the historical tension between peasant communities and the State already mentioned, the aggressiveness of mining extractivism in peasant territories has been one of the phenomena that pushed these communities to exercise greater autonomy over their territories.

That is why the TCAs work hard on one of their lines of action called 'Own Economy', defined as: “economic dynamics that are linked to the experiences of building the territory, to the different relationships between people –and between people and Nature– which do not necessarily seek to accumulate, dominate or hegemonize part or all. The

⁴ The *minga* or *minka* is a pre-Colombian tradition of communal or collective voluntary work for social purpose aims or reciprocal ends, and it is currently in force in several Latin American countries.

economic pathways that we are designing are aimed at protecting, strengthening and guaranteeing the permanence of peasants, indigenous people and Afro-descendants, that is why it has been called Economy for Life”[22: 1]. In TCA narratives, not only the need to create other forms of economy is clearly identified, but also the firm decision to oppose the agro-industrial food production system that the current Colombian government promotes: “As the current economic model in agriculture imposes monoculture as the only productive option in the Colombian rural areas, we say no to this model and we bet on productive diversification as a sustainable family farming strategy that guarantees the feeding of the communities ”[22: 3].

However and despite the clarity of their wishes, in practice the design of establishing or practicing their own economy or ‘Economy for life’ still requires a clear and viable design.

A great difficulty in this regard is the fact that Latin American governments, not only Colombian, have aimed for decades for the 'modernization' of peasant communities, turning them into entrepreneurs and/or business owners, which implies the strengthening of the usual dynamics pursuing economic growth. In fact, "the interpretation of the peasant today is that of a static being that was frozen in time and needs to be changed, modernized (...) the theoretical framework built on this type of argument aims to turn the peasant into a 'small producer' or in 'rural entrepreneur', but not in a social or political subject”[63: 172].

4. CONCLUSIONS

The comparison between the theoretical principles of post-development and the TCA practices offers enough evidence to conclude that the peasant communities involved with the TCA are close enough to questioning hegemonic discourses and practices of development, understood mainly as economic growth: “Our Life Plans emerge as a source of knowledge and action, to coordinate different paths found in their own time, unlike State policies and National Development Plans, which destroy everything in their path. Our Life Plans are an alternative to development and government Development Plans, which have historically served those who have the most; these have been oriented towards exclusive economic growth at the expense of our common goods, our rights and even our lives. Furthermore, they ignore the demands of the peasants and the Colombian people for a decent life, and threaten the territories with their extractive and agro-industrial megaprojects”[21: 13].

Our analysis also allows us to affirm that the TCA are in a transition process to move away from some development practices: “What at first were requests for 'development' to the central government, which is understood as economic investment and the control of municipal budgets, have been transformed over time, and as the organizational process matured, into environmental work practices, organic agriculture, food security, peasant economy, all involving women and youth, interests and activities, human rights and construction of peace”[64: 21].

It is also important to highlight that this process has matured amid an adverse Colombian rural setting, with many difficulties and with few elements in favor; amongst the more serious issues the constant harassment of different illegal armed groups or

corporate legal ones seeking to occupy their territories and obtain their resources⁵ can be mentioned; besides this, there are other forms of daily violence, such as lack of food security, lack of job opportunities, and poor living conditions.

Through this analysis, proposals and practices of the TCA that exceed the principles of post-development were identified, such as the creation of local and autonomous forms of government; the Peasant Governing Boards have become the agency with which the territory is ruled, and Life Plans serve as a tool of territorial projection for future generations.

An additional and important characteristic of TCA is that they have not been created as a one-size-fits-all recipe, but rather seek to be as flexible and diverse as necessary. This characteristic is particularly important since it makes them easily reproducible in other rural contexts, and they do not depend on the rural location of a country or global region, on the geographic or ecosystem context, or on the social group that wants to organize it; instead, TCA provide the opportunity to recover a series of values and actions that are an integral part of a global trend in search of a transition towards a balance between the rights of human societies and those of Nature.

At this point, it is also very important to point out that peasant communities have had doubts, setbacks, and contradictions as they advance in the TCA establishment, as usually happens with these kinds of processes.

An issue in which TCA seem to lag behind post-development proposals, such as the new economies has also been identified. Although it is significant for TCA, and they have decided to design 'their own economy' or an 'Economy for Life', progress is still minimal and practical ways of putting them into practice have not been established. Hence, it is possible to conclude that the experiences of the TCA are aligned with the principles of post-development, although there are still important elements that require further progress, such as new economic dynamics.

Summarizing, the comparison between the theoretical principles of post-development and the Peasant Agroalimentary Territories practices, offers enough evidence to conclude that the rural communities involved with them are questioning hegemonic discourses and practices of 'development' paradigm, understood mainly as economic growth. Our findings let us to conclude that the TCA are moving away from understand 'development' merely as economic investment and the governmental control of municipal budgets to an organizational process which includes environmental work practices, organic agriculture, food security, respect for the human rights and construction of peace. Additional proposals and practices of the TCA that exceed the principles of post-development also were identified, such as more autonomous forms of local government. Another important characteristic of TCA is that they seek to be as flexible and diverse as necessary to facilitate its implementation in any other rural contexts.

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⁵Although the Peace Agreements were signed during 2016, their implementation is still underway and there are currently areas with violent presence of other armed groups.

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