

**PEACE IN OTHER TERMS: MUTUAL CARE
PRACTICES BETWEEN SOLDIERS AND
FRAILEJONES AT THE PÁRAMO DE SUMAPAZ**

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that the definition of peace from the international agendas on transitional justice and peacebuilding falls short because it ignores non-humans. Consequently, in the discussions on the environment for peace, non-humans are simply called “environment”, regardless of non-humans’ relationships that also make peace. Based on an ethnographic case, I explore the relationship between the military from the High Mountain Battalion N.º 1 and the *frailejones* (*espeletia*) in the Sumapaz páramo in Colombia to demonstrate how their practices of mutual care become other ways of making and understanding peace.

Keywords: care, Colombia Bio, environment for peace, frailejones, militaries, non-humans, peace, peace building, techno-scientific knowledge.

PAZ EN OTROS TÉRMINOS: PRÁCTICAS DE CUIDADO MUTUO ENTRE SOLDADOS Y FRAILEJONES EN EL PÁRAMO DE SUMAPAZ

RESUMEN

Este artículo argumenta que la definición de paz de las agendas internacionales sobre justicia transicional y construcción de paz se queda corta al no contemplar a los no-humanos. Por tanto, en las discusiones sobre medio ambiente para la paz, los no-humanos simplemente reciben el nombre de “ambiente”, sin tener en cuenta las relaciones más que humanas que también construyen la paz. Para sustentar mi argumento, en este texto me baso en un ejemplo etnográfico sobre la relación entre militares y frailejones en el Batallón de Alta Montaña n.º 1, en el páramo de Sumapaz, para mostrar de qué manera las prácticas de mutuo cuidado conforman otras maneras de hacer y entender la paz.

Palabras clave: ambiente para la paz, Colombia Bio, conocimiento tecno-científico, construcción de paz, cuidado, frailejones, militares, no-humanos, paz.

PAZ EM OUTROS TERMOS: PRÁTICAS DE CUIDADO MÚTUO ENTRE SOLDADOS E FRAILEJONES NO PARAMO DE SUMAPAZ

RESUMO

Este artigo argumenta que a definição de paz das agendas internacionais sobre justiça de transição e construção de paz não é suficiente ao não contemplar os não humanos. Portanto, nas discussões sobre meio ambiente para a paz, os não humanos simplesmente recebem o nome de “ambiente”, sem serem consideradas as relações mais que humanas que também constroem a paz. Para justificar esse argumento, neste texto, baseio-me em um exemplo etnográfico sobre a relação entre militares e frailejones (espécie endêmica da vegetação de páramo) no Batalhão de Alta Montanha n.º 1, no páramo de Sumapaz, Colômbia, para mostrar de que maneira as práticas de cuidado mútuo conformam outras formas de fazer e entender a paz.

Palavras-chave: ambiente para a paz, Colombia Bio, conhecimento técnico-científico, construção da paz, cuidado, frailejones, militares, não humanos, paz.

INTRODUCTION

Peace for the environment, environment for peace, environmental peace and any number of combinations have been heard over the past years in Colombia, especially during the peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – the FARC (2012-2016). The question about environment and resources has become increasingly relevant now, a period when war is supposedly over, and still nobody seems to be clear on how to connect it with the environment. War and environment have had a close and enduring relationship. In fact, back in 2013, the UN International Law Commission included a specific section that contemplated this relationship on its research agenda: “Protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts. This section recognizes a “civilian condition” as a measure to protect the environment from war attacks (Jacobsson 2015, 1). However, academic studies have analyzed armed conflict in Colombia as a social matter, mostly ignoring its links to environmental conflicts (Andrade 2004).

The relationship between conflict and the environment or environment for peace is generally viewed from two perspectives: On one hand, regarding the war for natural resources; and, on the other hand, associated to the exploitation of natural resources in peacebuilding. The idea – as stated by the United Nations – is to incorporate the nature into the understanding of conflict, taking into account its potential to start, fund or be at the core of conflict generation, and turn it into a plausible cornerstone to build dialogue and establish cooperation between historically divided groups (United Nations Environment Program – UNEP 2009; United Nations Colombia 2014). Meanwhile, in 2017, Dejusticia, a Colombian research and advocacy organization, released a document containing two further approaches – the environment as a victim of conflict and as a paradoxical beneficiary of conflict (Rodríguez, Rodríguez, and Durán, 2017). I include a further approach – one in which peace is shared and produced along with non-humans.

In this paper, I explore an episode of the transitional justice process in Colombia that allows me to focus on the participation of non-humans in peacebuilding. I was given the opportunity to participate in the Colombia Bio expeditions, a program launched by Colciencias, the then science and technology national institution in Colombia. The idea of the expeditions that began in 2016 was to create biological inventories

in areas previously occupied by the FARC. During my ethnographic work, conducted in 2018, I was able to witness how soldiers and *espeletia* in a high mountain battalion shared the experiences of war and peace. I use this experience to discuss peace in other terms.

As stated in the Colombia Bio project in 2016, “Peace will allow exploration and improved knowledge of biodiversity, setting our sights on rural areas, the site of the armed conflict for over half a century” (Colciencias 2016, 2). The idea of peace referenced above, reduces it to the signed peace agreement with the FARC, without considering, for example, other armed groups that operate in Colombia. However, it opens up the stage for a dialogue between peacebuilding ideas and the scientific study of nature. This idea of peace ascribes other meanings to signing a peace treaty or the absence of conflict – which is the meaning used in international law. Peace, as a driver of scientific expeditions, connects non-humans and science, and provokes questions as how do non-humans take part in transitional processes and peacebuilding after the signing of the peace agreement with the FARC? This is what I mean by peace in other terms: peace arising not only from human relationships, but from relationships with non-humans. The purpose of this article, in consequence, is to show, based on an ethnographic case, how relationships with other beings allow for different conceptualizations of peace, in which non-humans participate too. My ultimate purpose is proposing that non-humans are partners in peacebuilding and transitional justice, not just participants as “environment” or context only.

This article is divided in three sections. First, I introduce the concept of peace as it has been used by international agendas for peacebuilding and transitional justice. Then, I debate the idea of peace as resulting from a peace agreement. Second, I use the literature on care to explore the relationship between soldiers, *frailejones*, and peace. And third, I show how mutual-care relationships between soldiers and *frailejones* produce other definitions of peace, wherein peace is not only a human creation.

What definition of peace are we using?

We are at a point in which the words peace and conflict are used concurrently to indicate different periods, but they are both used in the present tense in Colombia. Peace – as understood by the Colombia Bio Project – is part of the transitional justice framework, validated

by the Peace Agreement with the FARC. Undoubtedly, the agreement is at a political moment that comes to life in the legal sphere that, in turn, provides an opportunity to talk about peace, and not only about war; although the latter still marks the daily lives of many people in Colombia (Castillejo-Cuéllar 2015; Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP) 2018; Reyes Le Paliscot 2016; Vera Lugo 2015).

Studies on peacebuilding and transitional justice define a set of actions intended to maintain peace in a post-conflict environment (Galtung 1998; Lederach 2007), but leave no space for discussion about non-human participation. Likewise, the anthropology of transitional justice has argued for the necessity of a “bottom-up” approach (Castillejo-Cuéllar 2014; Gómez 2013; Lundy and McGovern 2008; McEvoy and McGregor 2008). This approach has placed the human victims at the heart of the discussion but has ignored the non-human condition of other victims (Aldana 2006; Robins 2011, 2017). Thus, these approaches have also overlooked the role of non-humans in peace processes. This contrasts starkly to what other anthropological studies have proposed inspired by the social studies of science, technology, and posthuman perspectives: non-humans are key actors of war and peace (Lederach 2019; Lyons 2014, 2016, 2018a, 2018b; Pinto 2019; Ruiz Serna 2017).

Even though peace may seem to be a natural condition of social life, it is not. Rather, peace derives from a specific and technical language about societies at war. Since stopping war or preventing confrontation has been the main purpose of international law, peacebuilding and transitional justice agendas have followed and adopted their definitions. For example, the United Nations came into being in 1945 with the purpose of maintaining global order and peace among nations, which is today one of the main functions of the Security Council. In fact, Article One on the purposes and principles states that:

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace. (United Nations 1946, art. 1)

After the Cold War ended, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992), stated in his report “An Agenda for Peace” that in spite of the change in the global agenda, peacekeeping operations should continue to identify and support structures intending to consolidate peace. Boutros-Ghali was inspired by the concept of peacebuilding, which was coined by Johan Galtung (1976). Galtung posited that peace should be built into the structure of society to remove the root causes of war.

The concept of peace has seen various developments (Galtung 1998; Lederach 2007), but the meaning of peace that results from signing an agreement fully coincides with stopping confrontation. This allows labeling the period that follows the signing of the Agreement as either peace or post-conflict, even if the idea of post-Agreement rather than post-conflict has been more pervasive in Colombia.

Although legal and social-science discussions about peace differ greatly from biology, Colombia Bio highlights peace as a concept that is not confined to lawyers or politicians. During the first Colombia Bio expedition to Santander, researchers from the Humboldt Institute herbarium – a research center on biodiversity in Colombia – discovered a new plant for science, named “the tree of rising peace” or *Elaeagia pacisnascis* (Mendoza-Cifuentes and Aguilar-Cano 2018, 6). The white flower, a species of the coffee family – the emblematic Colombian crop – was named in resonance with the peace process with the FARC. The discovery of this new species – referred to in the news as “the flower discovered thanks to the agreement with the FARC” (Semana 2018) – is a scientific practice that ties biology to the peace process. In this regard, as in other parts of the world, a peace process is expected to become the scene for plundering natural resources (Blundell and Harwell 2016; Nichols 2014), but Colombia Bio proposed another way of understanding the relationship between nature and peace.

In 2017, I interviewed Hernando García (Interview 1), then Director of the Humboldt Institute. He explained that doing research in biology during the Colombia Bio expeditions was similar to what biologists in Colombia had done before, during the long-lasting armed conflict that raged the country. He explained that what was different this time was the surge in national interest on learning the true reaches of the Colombian biodiversity as new spaces opened for scientific exploration;

there was an opportunity to identify new resources or “assets”, to put it in the terms used by Colciencias (2016).

To me, the true difference is that plants speak of peace. Separated from specialized peacebuilding literature, references to conflict and overcoming conflict are found in a science article containing the description of a new species. The practice of describing species started around the 18TH century and all researchers have followed a similar practice ever since. However, the space reserved for etymology –i.e. the explanation of the origin of the name given to any species– raises intriguing considerations about what scientists had in mind when picking up a name. This plant in particular *Elaeagia pacisnascis*, speaks of the possibility of conducting research in biology in Colombia in times of hope, when the promise of a different future flourished after signing the peace agreement (Reyes Le Paliscot 2016).

Things have changed very quickly much to our regret; the number of social leaders homicides has increased since 2018, with a devastating figure of one per day in 2020 (Semana 2020). Meanwhile, Fundación Ideas para la Paz claims that violence has been reactivated, rising an “incomplete peace” (FIP 2018, 6). However, feelings were different by the time the expedition was completed two years earlier, in August 2016. This is what the expedition researchers said about the plant’s name at that time:

Etymology: the specific epithet means “new peace” and refers to the recent peace process in Colombia. The area of origin of this type was until recently an area of internal armed conflict [,] which lasted several decades. Thanks to the peace process, accessing this area of huge biological value was finally possible. (Mendoza-Cifuentes and Aguilar-Cano 2018, 6)

In this way, the scientific practice of naming a new species as “rising peace” is a political act that takes place by attributing the discovery of the plant to the peace process. This goes in hand with claims about new spaces for scientific research that opened up after signing the Agreement. The name of this species also talks about the relationship between peace and science research in biology in Colombia.

But what definition of peace are we talking about? Who takes part in that peace and how? This last question invites us to consider non-

humans in scientific and political life, not only as biological key players, but also as key players for peace. Therefore, my invitation is to see *Elaeagia pacisnascis* as part of a network of relationships showing that this plant is not only the result of the Peace Agreement, or of scientific practices, but as a scenario of local interactions between humans and non-humans, laws, academicians, scientists, taxonomists, instruments, among others. As the *pacisnascis* species, other plants and non-humans end up being not only part of scientific encounters, but also part of Colombia's political life. In the next section I analyze the participation of plants in the creation of different definitions of peace through the lens of care, in dialogue with my field research about the relationships between soldiers and *frailejones*.

A question of care

The question about how non-humans take part in peace is not new. Several authors have contributed to this topic from different positions (Lederach 2019; Lyons 2014, 2016, 2018a, 2018b; Pinto 2019; Ruiz-Serna 2017; Tobón 2010). I want to add to this perspective by including care theory to think about relationships between humans and non-humans. I explore how these relationships produce conceptualizations of peace that transcend the definitions coined by international law and peacebuilding. I purport that another form of peace arises from the relationship between *frailejones* and soldiers, who care for each other. I also move toward a different understanding of care – which does not happen through caregivers, women or bodies, as has been addressed by mainstream literature of this field.

For instance, Carol Gilligan (2013) – one of the first feminists to explore care-related work – asks: who is responsible for the ethics of care? She states that:

Within a patriarchal framework, care is a feminine ethic. Caring is what good women do, and the people who care are doing women's work. They are devoted to others, responsive to their desires and needs, attentive to their concerns. They are selfless. Within a democratic framework, care is a human ethic. (Gilligan 2013, 50)

This perspective of care – a feminine and invisible practice – is addressed by Pascale Molinier in her work focused on understanding the moral dimensions of care, asking who cares and what the effect is on the one

who is cared for, but also on the person who takes care to support others' lives (Arango and Molinier 2011; Wlosko and Ros 2015). In the High Mountain Battalion, these positions are revalued. The caring party may be a plant, and its moral dimensions are also related to a peacebuilding policy. As my work is about men trained for war who take care of plants, and about plants that take care of them, it does not fall into any of these categories.

This idea of care is alien to law too, particularly to its perspective on conflict and peace. However, recent legal discussion has started focusing on the category of nature as a victim (Decreto 4633 2011, Art. 45) and even more recently, on nature as a holder of rights (Corte Constitucional 2016; Corte Suprema de Justicia 2018; Juzgado Primero Penal del Circuito 2019). The discussion about nature as a victim from a transitional justice perspective seeks to provide remedy and assurances of non-repetition for nature specifically (Eslava 2019). Yet, thinking in terms of care provides another way of connecting with holders of rights. So, in this article I highlight how the relationship between soldiers and *frailejones* brings new lights into care, and also discuss how law addresses the relationship between the environment and conflict.

Located at the intersection of conflict and environment, my purpose is to visualize the effects of war on the environment (Rodríguez et al. 2017). However, as Ruiz-Serna (2017) states, this question needs to take into account not only the environment but all living beings within a territory. Drawing from his fieldwork with communities of the Atrato in Chocó, Ruiz-Serna found that one of their major losses was the disappearance of feelings built together with other human and nonhuman beings that give meaning not only to ways of understanding war, but also to the world and life itself.

Along this line, Tobón (2010) explains that reaffirming themselves as humans and animalizing others is a strategy pursued by four indigenous communities along the Caquetá River in Colombia. This strategy allows them to stand apart from insurgent and State armed actors. Similarly, Guerra Curvelo (2017) notes how some Wayuu practices deal with war. The idea of “living in agreement” is built on respecting the already established relationship codes, but also on understanding that conflict is part of life itself (Guerra Curvelo 2017, 421). Together, these works point to a common idea referred to by Lederach (2019) as “mutual care

relationships”. In turn, a multispecies lens helps to see through mutual care relationships, the multiple forms of life, and how they are affected by violence.

Undeniably, violence changes the life of all beings in undesirable and paradoxical ways. For example, the war in Colombia brought benefits by leaving large areas of land separated from human activity (Rodríguez et al. 2017). However, this apparent paradox does not recognize what these authors try to show: both in war and in peace, practices of destruction and care build relationships. Thus, during war forests were protected but the relationships with those forests were destroyed (Latimer and Lopez 2019; Ruiz-Serna 2017). Currently and unsurprisingly, there are high levels of deforestation in forests that have no one to tackle the waves of development seen after the Peace Agreement was signed.

Mutual care between *frailejones* and soldiers

In May 2018, I joined a team of researchers from the Humboldt Institute on an expedition to the High Mountain Battalion Number 1 at the *Páramo de Sumapaz*, where I had the chance to trek with them and military personnel through one of the world’s largest moorlands. This was the third of five expeditions I participated in as part of my PhD fieldwork. It was an eight-day expedition during which we carried out biological inventories and supported a Colombian Army project on *frailejón* (an emblematic plant in *páramo* ecosystems) reproduction and cultivation. It was striking to be on an expedition that did not involve community research but, rather, a military facility. Nonetheless that made it even more interesting for someone like me, who studies the intersections of science and peace. Walking around with biologists and the military has helped me see peace not much as a target or a state society should reach, instead, as an analytical opportunity. Although this kind of peace is a human construction and is also closely related to armed conflict policies, it serves as well as a vehicle to observe multispecies landscapes (Tsing 2012). This scenario facilitates new understandings of peace that includes relationships with non-humans.

The High Mountain Battalion no. 1 is a special battalion, not only because it is the exact opposite of what I used to believe military facilities would be, but because of what *espeletia* mean for this place (Field notes 1). Without going to war, at least not in this area of the country,

this battalion does not currently have any military functions; yet, as a matter of routine, they patrol the surrounding areas. Formerly occupied by the FARC – a strategic location during the long years of conflict – this place is today a military facility and, after the Agreement was signed, is no longer set up to fight guerrilla groups. The Army arrived there in 2001 after taking control from alias Romaña, one of the commanders of the FARC, this is a privileged location due to its proximity to Bogotá, situated at the crossroads of the Departments of Meta, Cundinamarca, Huila and Tolima. The routes built by the FARC to move around the *páramo*, which covers 178,000 hectares, are still used today by this battalion. But now it has a different mission: to reforest the *páramo* with *frailejones* that have learned to grow in *in-vitro* conditions. “This saved the battalion from being shut down”, claimed Osorio¹, one of the soldiers serving the expedition (Field notes 1). On a trial and error basis, one of the military officers, Mejía, who has a technical diploma, was able to create a *frailejón* reproduction procedure. His *frailejón* nursery is next to his office where taking pictures is not permitted “because of patents and intellectual property matters”, he confided (Field notes 1). The nursery is full of small trays covered with cotton, identified by the name of the species and the germination period. They have *killipi* and *grandiflora*. The opposite lateral walls in the room have shelves crammed with Petri dishes, and right in the middle there is a sack full of a lot of dried *frailejón* flowers. “They are kept here up to a maximum of 50 days. Then, we must take them out, whether all seeds have germinated or not because if they are left longer in here, the ones that have already germinated will be damaged”, said Osorio (Field notes 1). I discussed this issue with a researcher. She explained that this is the beautiful side of the scientific method which, on a trial and error basis, has standardized the *frailejón* germination, crop, and cultivation (Field notes 1).

Germinating *frailejones* is something very few people have done in Colombia (Bohórquez Araque-Barrera and Pacheco, 2016). Indeed, Juliana, a Humboldt Institute researcher, said that:

1 Names have been modified to protect the identity of people mentioned herein. Last names are used to refer to the military way of calling law enforcement officers.

At UPTC [acronym in Spanish for Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia], where I studied for many years, they have tried to reproduce frailejones from the Boyacá páramos in the lab achieving no results. What they have achieved here is amazing. (Field notes 1)

For instance, in Boyacá, only after 2018 when funds were provided, it was possible to recover the *Espeletia paipana*, an endemic species in that region, with only 17 living specimens left in their natural habitat (Caracol 2018). Colombia's National Parks office has also tried to reproduce *frailejones* in a recent project launched in Los Nevados National Park in 2018 (Wildlife Conservation Society -wcs- 2018). The National Army has shown a keen interest in this issue as well; it created the first páramo and high mountain plant research and production center in association with the CVC or Corporación Autónoma del Valle (Autonomous Corporation of Valle del Cauca) (CVC 2019; *El Tiempo* 2019) in Barragán, Valle del Cauca. It is “a unique high-tech lab in Colombia, with 14,000 growing *frailejón* plantlets” (Quintero 2019). In a report by David Quintero for *El Espectador*, Corporal Julio Cesar Cubillos, who oversees this new center, talked about the work done in the lab:

There are páramos only in six countries. Colombia has 60% of them, 30% of which are in Valle del Cauca. Moreover, Colombia is the only country with a high-tech nursery, where the *frailejón* cultivation process takes place. It is a lengthy process. Every morning, soldiers graduated from SENA [Colombia's National Learning Service] in environmental management collect *frailejón* seeds and carry out an analysis to see which seeds are fit for the germination process at the research center.

These seeds take a long time to germinate and they need to go through a lot of processes, including watering, temperature measurement, and the traditional bean-in-cotton experiment”, says Cubillo, an environmental manager, who is now getting ready for a *frailejón* sowing day in the páramo with the Army high command, the community and CVC members. (Quintero 2019)

While learning how to classify seeds, setting rhythms, observing, and conducting trials, I met Mejía during my stay at the páramo

de Sumapaz. While he was explaining the project to me, I could not stop thinking about its artisanal nature (Field notes 1). Learning how to reproduce *frailejones* means learning about their rhythms, temperature and their light and water requirements. “Many people are wrong because they use distilled water from a bottle, but water from the *páramo* is the best”, said Mejía, who is responsible for seed germination (Field notes 1). Mejía told me that they also need to grow at +3,000 meters above sea level (field notes 1). No technologies were used, except for watching how seeds develop.

This approach to *frailejones* is what María Puig de la Bellacasa (2011) calls matters of care. Caring – as explained by the author – “is both a doing and ethical-political commitment that affects the way we produce knowledge about things” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011, 100). Caring, therefore, is “a way of relating to them, of inevitably becoming affected by them, and of modifying their potential to affect others” (99). Put it this way, it is not a one-sided relationship in which, as in this case, a soldier takes care of a *frailejón* nursery. The soldier also allows its relationship with the *frailejón* to have an impact on the battalion, on the Army plans for that place, and even on the *páramo*.

This ethnographic case poses several challenges to the literature on care. Firstly, because it is about a group of men, especially military officers, performing care activities. Secondly, because the subjects and objects involved in care practices are not humans only. Finally, because this is not only about men taking care of plants, but also plants taking care of men. On this last issue, literature on posthuman studies or the non-human turn brings light into military-*frailejón* relationships. The boundaries between these approaches are porous, so rather than creating new categories, it is necessary to clarify how I use the concepts of posthuman and non-human.

A posthuman approach is associated with identifying what makes us humans. It emphasizes the human-technology relationship, although Cary Wolfe (2010) states that beyond decentering humans, it requires researching and thinking in a way so as not to start with the human as the research core, but with relationships and collaborative constructions with non-humans. This article pursues that aspiration.

Along the same line, the non-human turn (Grusin 2015) –coming from the classical text by Bruno Latour (1993) suggests that what makes

us humans is exactly the indivisible nature of our relationship with non-humans. This speaks of coexistence, coevolution, and collaboration, terms whose purpose is to emphasize weaved relationships, that cannot be simply separated because they are part of nature and culture at the same time, or of *natureculture*, as Donna Haraway has suggested (2008).

This moves us away from the care studies that underscores the novelty of Puig de la Bellacasa's work (2017). Studies on care have focused on work done by caregivers, defining care as work (Pettersen 2012). Federici's (2015) and Joan Tronto's (1993) contribution as well as Colombian Arango's and Molinier's (2011) work, are important because they highlight the political dimensions of care; particularly, inequality and power structures where care relationships are founded. In consequence, Tronto and Fisher (1990), and Engster (2005), who follows these authors' definition of care, focus on care practices not only as a moral obligation but as a political practice that takes into account theories of justice. In turn, Puig de la Bellacasa's work (2017) adopts this idea from a posthuman approach that distributes the agencies of doing between humans and non-humans.

Thus, this article emphasizes a way of doing that is not only human, that is not part of the more traditional care structures, distinct from them, because of its location within a military compound. It is two-sided care from non-humans to humans and vice versa. But there is an additional element: the role of peace in this context. Beyond a peace agreement and its legal definitions, in this particular case, peace operates in a space where relationships that have kept military and *frailejones* together for years are flourishing in a new context.

Kristina Lyons's work on soils (2014; 2016; 2018a) has explored further these ideas about mutual care relationships, documenting the political and economic dimensions of relationships between humans and non-humans. Instead of focusing on the infinite number of breakups and deaths that result from glyphosate aspersion in Putumayo, she finds in the land practices followed by small peasant farmers multiple possibilities of life that paradoxically go through processes of natural decomposition and death (Lyons 2016).

These ethnographic cases might be an island in an ocean of policies that militarize nature (Lyons 2018a; 2018b). This is something the former Colombian Minister of Defense, Aníbal Fernández de Soto (2018) – in an address to a military audience from various units at the International

Environmental Fair (FIMA, acronym in Spanish) – referred to as the new function of the military forces in post-conflict: the protection of the country's natural resources. Simultaneously, the Colombia Bio results were presented too, and former president Juan Manuel Santos spoke of militarization and environment in terms of stopping the expansion of the agricultural boundary:

Why are land titles so important? Because people who already own the land become the best custodians, avoiding being bypassed and preventing a virtuous circle (Sic).

So, that is how we will ensure boundaries are respected, that is to say, so there is no more deforestation, particularly in the Amazon, but also in the Pacific region.

(..) but we also need to fight the mafias, land thieves, and drug dealers who fund deforestation.

So, today we have 15 battalions in our Army, which are jungle and high mountain battalions. I have already instructed the General Commander of the Military Forces, General Mejia, to order all such battalions to protect our agricultural boundaries as their core mission. (Santos 2018, own translation)

What *frailejones*, the military in the Sumapaz high mountain battalion, and scientists lead us to acknowledge was the different ways of seeing militarization, not portrayed simply as the use of force. Initiatives like agricultural boundary protection or natural resource protection, as referred to by the Minister of Defense, are based on the same rationale of nature as property. Similarly, “peace” from this perspective can only make us think about non-confrontation rather than as an analytical category that enables analyzing socio-material relationships that build peace across multispecies landscapes.

Therefore, as stated by Kipnis (2015, 45) when referring to relationships developed with non-humans, the argument does not come down to state that things have agency but to “how processes are developed and the role of non-humans in the process”. Removing *frailejones* from the history of conflict in the Sumapaz *páramo* as if they were only part of the landscape means disregarding how they too have something to tell about that history.

While we walked around up to 4,000 meters above sea level, Andrés Acosta, the Humboldt Institute herpetologist suddenly stopped and looked inside every dried *frailejón* that laid dead on the ground. Then he opened them to look inside and kept going. I repeated this exercise looking for frogs. I asked him if not finding anything inside the *frailejones* was a bad sign. He explained that there was nothing wrong, however, it showed a lot of human activity at the *páramo*, perhaps it was a residential or passing area. “Although we see this *páramo* in very good conditions, in a well preserved *páramo* there are frogs leaping and jumping”, he stressed while looking around (Field notes 1).

This initiative to restore the *páramo* comes precisely from the story told by frogs and *frailejones*. It is impossible to be over there and not think about conflict. So, as soon as I had the chance I asked the professional soldier accompanying the ornithologists: “Is it true that you used to put *frailejones* in your clothes to keep yourselves warm?” He turned around and looked at me skeptically, he smiled faintly and said: “We used to make some sort of mattress” while pretending that he was arranging *frailejón* leaves on the ground, “and that kept us warm” (Field notes 1).

How would nights have been for soldiers camping outside in the *páramo* without thick hairy *frailejón* leaves? What would it be like for this battalion today without their *frailejón* nursery? What would it be like for the *páramo* without war? The interesting thing is that both conflict and peace enable a relationship between soldiers and *frailejones*. Being a soldier in that specific place must be thought in terms of their relationship with *frailejones*, as well as with the weather. The inclement cold weather and light but constant showers have given these plants thermal characteristics that turned them into soldiers’ prey. However, nowadays they are also partnering in peacemaking. It is not the plant itself or the military alone; it is their relationship that now makes peace. A relationship built on mutual care.

Caring is a way of building worlds (Latimer and Lopez 2019; Puig de la Bellacasa 2011, 2017). Instead of turning into “Other” the object of care (Latimer and Lopez 2019, 16), care highlights the established relationship. Hence, peace emerges here in their interactions. It is not only about non-confrontation, but about reparation as well. It is about repairing the “multispecies landscapes as protagonists for histories of the world” (Tsing 2012, 141). In this case, as protagonists of stories about

conflict and peace. In a battalion with no future, at least for war, making peace is learning the steps and mechanisms for *espeletia* reproduction and then being able to plant them and not letting them die. Anyone who likes gardening is aware that not all plants can be transplanted; that plants choose their place to grow and reproduce, regardless of the gardener's good intentions. In this *páramo*, *espeletia* and the Army have become a team in many ways, and telling the story of transitional justice and its programs without considering these multispecies landscapes disregards the subtle but significant layers of the history of peace, reparation, and conflict in Colombia where non-humans also participate.

Human peace is built together with other non-humans

The victim-centered approach must be reconsidered by peacebuilding and transitional justice and replaced by a broader understanding of peace, one that opens up to other players as peacemakers. Hence the invitation to see peace in other terms is to understand it in relation to non-humans as well. Importantly, this perspective pushes the boundary of the human too because it is tied to a specific way of seeing human relationships. Achieving *frailejón* reproduction has led this battalion to consider other targets. This has not only led the Army to file a patent application process but it has also attracted the media, researchers, and a Colombia Bio expedition. Indeed, the expedition coordinator told me that it was the Army's interest in *frailejones* that had brought us to Sumapaz. "Supporting this initiative and providing them with more tools" was one of the purposes, other than the species inventory (Field notes 1). There was also a PhD student supporting this process, who was admitted through Colciencias call in 2018. National Parks has been an ally especially because they have identified places to plant around 10,000 *espeletia* (Field notes 1). These are all alliances with unarmed players far from war and that contrast with it. However, the role of *espeletia* should not be limited to the result obtained by one or more people eager to find how to reproduce it, this is where posthuman studies gain relevance because they enable us to see social and cultural life in relation to objects, plants, and peace. In a special edition of *HAU*, a journal of ethnographic theory, Chris Gregory (2014) presents a critique of posthuman studies, which I will use to illustrate the relationship between peace and non-humans.

According to Gregory, posthuman studies focus on ascribing agency and intentionality to things, which is the same as transferring human characteristics to them. And in terms of scientific research, emphasizing the agency of things would move us away from one of the main objectives of anthropology and ethnography: Understanding social relationships between people (Gregory 2014). Thus, this author warns that the posthuman theory has limits and to guarantee the future of anthropological research these studies must be challenged as they call the meaning of being human into question. That is what is at risk (Gregory 2014, 64). This warning is important, but the main purpose of posthuman studies is missing in Gregory's approach: destabilizing the stark separation between human and non-human.

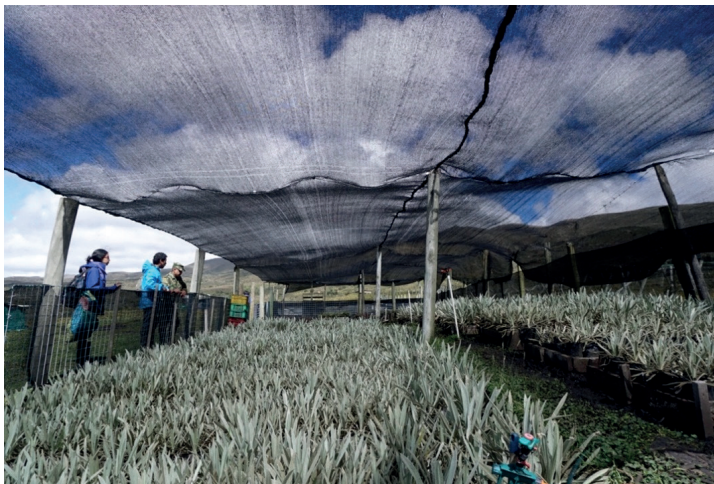
Scientists that have attributed human traits to plants have received the same criticism in biology. For instance, Stefano Mancuso (2018), a professor of Plant Neurobiology at University of Florence recounts how in 1905 Austrian botanist Gottlieb Haberland suggested the “crazy” idea that plants had a visual ability. Silence was the only answer. Silence endured for a century because nobody took the time to reject or supplement this theory as a visual ability in plants was without a doubt an eccentricity. But much later, in 2016, researchers started to propose that plants might be capable of vision, as they have micro lenses that enable them to look for a source of light (Schuergers et ál. 2016). A similar course of events occurred with the explanation of plants' mimetic abilities, i.e., how they are able to transform to resemble another plant (Mancuso and Baluška 2017). In short, not only anthropologists have felt uncomfortable ascribing human characteristics to things, but biologists have had the same doubts as well. So, why say that peace is not only human? If peace is a way of understanding social relations and a mechanism for thinking and approaching conflict and post-conflict societies, nothing about non-humans resonates against this approach.

For Andrew B. Kipnis (2015), the discussion about the difference between humans and non-humans has not been correctly termed. First, because posthumanists have not abandoned the question about the human. Second, because there is not one single agency but many types of agency. In particular, “agencies emerge through entanglements and attachments, no agency exists in isolation” (Kipnis 2015, 50). I approach peace from

Kipnis' perspective. Peace can be meaningful for humans but it can be shared too with other non-human entities.

So, at the battalion, peace emerged from a mutual care relationship. The end of armed confrontation in the *páramo* opened the possibility of transforming the relationship with *frailejones*. During the armed conflict with the guerillas *frailejones* were heat suppliers for the military, now these men are reproducing, planting, and taking care of a nursery with over 10,000 plants and other thousands already planted in the *páramo*. This can be looked at from the usual perspective, to document the end of confrontation. This perspective falls short because it fails to address the military's relationship with non-humans, the *frailejones*. Hence, curiosity and proper knowledge (Puig de la Bellacasa 2011) of the plant reproduction goes beyond merely the end of confrontation. Caring – that relationship established between soldiers and *frailejones* – is a way of understanding how the unthinkable happened: *frailejones* have permitted their reproduction and cultivation. As shown in Figure 1, there is a nursery with hundreds of plants ready to be sowed by soldiers in areas designated by National Parks officers. A poly-shade cloth protects them from intense sunlight. The picture shows Mejía and two Humboldt Institute botanists to whom Mejía is introducing *frailejones*.

Figure 1. Frailejón nursery at the High Mountain Battalion Number 1.



Source: Author; Sumapaz, June 3, 2018.

Let us go back to the High Mountain Battalion and think again about *espeletia*. Three things come to mind when thinking about their participation in peacebuilding: first, agencies are interrelated and to understand this it is not necessary to turn to an anthropologist, as Kipnis would say (2015, 55). Perhaps Newton's laws of motion can explain it: For every action, there is a reaction, and the laws of moving objects might apply to people. Here, as Kipnis advises, it is important to understand that "this fallacy is not one of ascribing agency to things but one of attributing a human form of agency to things" (Kipnis 2015, 49). This leads to the second idea: peace is also made with non-humans. In this sense, peace is not only a legal matter but the aperture of spaces for building different relations. The *espeletia* have taken different roles during the conflict and now in peace. Today, *frailejones* emerge in a different way in their relationship with soldiers. Osorio and Mejía admitted their debt to *frailejones*; during the conflict, lots of them ended up as a makeshift mattress or as thermal insulation. Now, in peace, it is possible to reconcile the past and let the new story be told, one of reproduction and cultivation.

This leads to the third idea: multispecies landscapes tell new stories. This may not be so new as the history of conflict and peace in Colombia has documented. But this particular one is a different story about soldiers and *frailejones* together in a common transformation. Before, in the midst of conflict as a source of heat, and now, without conflict building together a different landscape and even helping the High Mountain Battalion to continue in operation, even though they are no longer in the service for war purposes in the area. Conflicts at 3,500 meters above sea level are still found, particularly in the Catatumbo area and in the Almorzadero *páramo* where *frailejones* face their relationship with conflict in vastly different ways.

CONCLUSION

This article sets the stage to talk about peace in different terms, even if the origin of this concept is tied to war, to international agendas for armed conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and transitional justice. Peace in other terms allows us to uncover multispecies landscapes (Tsing 2012). Thus, we can tell a conflict story where plants are not only a context where conflict takes place or a scientific discovery, but beings

that are also able to take part in the human ideas of peace. This is not only about *Elaeagia pacisnascis* and its ability to speak on behalf of the peace process in Colombia through its very own existence (as a new discovery for science made after signing the peace agreement). But, just like *Elaeagia pacisnascis*, there is also the *espeletia* species in the Sumapaz which have forged long-term relationships with the military during many years of wars and now during a recent peace. These relationships were once part of practices of destruction, however, those also built ties that allow us to see unions that coexist with ruptures. And in the case I examined, they are currently moving an entire Army battalion for *frailejón* cultivation, sowing, and mutual care relationships. So *espeletia* and *Elaeagia pacisnascis* are not actually far-removed from peacebuilding agendas; instead, they are the key to acknowledge how peace and environment are weaved together materially during a transitional justice process.

Some social scientists have taken crucial steps in observing how non-humans take part in both war and peace. Now, the challenge posed to legal and judicial agendas is to find ways to incorporate ideas of mutual care relationships (Lederach 2019). These ideas not only allow nature to be a subject of rights, but to demand a better political understanding as the one suggested by Lyons (2014, 2016, 2018a), for instance.

Likewise, the *espeletia* species together with the Battalion military officers offer alternative ways of examining the relationship between the military and the environment. In a speech delivered by Juan Manuel Santos (2018) at FIMA, he also referenced this specific battalion, without forgetting about *espeletia*:

When I joined the Ministry of Defense in 2006, we were in the middle of the war with the FARC and the main corridors used by the FARC to come to Cundinamarca from their command center in Llanos Orientales was the Sumapaz corridor; one that was used a lot.

And I went over there, and part of the strategy against the FARC was the establishment of high mountain battalions. And I went over there myself to establish the high mountain battalion and they effectively blocked the FARC and made them stop using that corridor; the Sumapaz corridor. Today, Sumapaz is an important *páramo* that has been already demarcated, where it is also very cold [Sic], the High Mountain Battalion is stationed at 3,200 meters.

When we went over there to delimit it 3 months ago, the commander of the High Mountain Battalion approached me and said: Mr. President, I'm the commander of the Sumapaz High Mountain Battalion and I'd like to tell you about my soldiers. And he said: already [Sic] because we are at peace and we do not have to contain the FARC, we no longer have to kill the guerrillas, we're now reforesting the páramo with *frailejones*, we're cultivating *frailejones*.

Just imagine what this means, an Army, a battalion, which was previously in the middle of the war, is now restoring the environment. This is what we will make our Army do in an especially important manner, and our police officers too.

Today, there are very few officers that are environmental experts. There are nearly 500 officers. That is not much. I have already told General Nieto and the Minister of Defense: I need a plan to increase that number almost exponentially. For now, we will go beyond the double, we will have 1,200 officers, but they will be officers with specific missions. (Santos 2018, own translation)

Although this relationship with the environment may still be mediated by ideas more in line with the use of force and war, *espeletia* species play a different role here. Mutual care relationships surpass the exclusivity of environmental education. Although environmental education may have an impact it is more important to tell and reveal stories of mutual constructions as the one between the military and the *espeletia* that I have told here.

The story of the military innovating in *frailejón* cultivation – even if it appears as one of the many scientific breakthrough stories – cannot be understood only as a human act of knowing the world. It is also an ongoing process of building possibilities and mutual care relationships, and in this case, it is about building possibilities at a period when peace and conflict are taking different forms. Peace as a concept, for High Mountain Battalion Number 1, reverberates in ways that greatly differ from how it would in any other military facility. In their case, this concept of peace sets in motion an ethical and political position that directly impacts how they relate with non-humans through care practices aimed at transforming multispecies landscapes. Therefore, peace as part of the transitional justice plans

and peacebuilding processes – must start by including non-humans, key partners in this process.

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Diarios de campo

Field notes 1: (September 2017–September 2019), Humboldt Institute, 5 Colombia Bio expeditions, fora, and documentaries. Handwritten notes on computer, some audio recordings, and pictures.

Entrevistas

Interview 1: Hernando Garcia, Director of Humboldt Institute. Humboldt Institute (Bogota), Calle 72 office, February 7, 2017, 1 hour. Handwritten notes.