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Exclusion Despite Nominal Inclusion: A Critical Analysis of Participatory Development Programmes in Post-War Colombia

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Citizen participation takes centre stage in Colombia's 2016 peace agreement. Its practical implementation, however, has proven difficult. This case study examines targets and tactics of exclusion in participatory development programmes established under the peace accords. Drawing on qualitative data generated between 2021 and 2022 in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, this article argues that exclusion affects societal (sub-)groups, organisations and communities as a whole and involves a large array of implicit-elusive, direct-explicit and coercive mechanisms. This matters for implementing inclusive peacebuilding more generally.

Keywords: Colombia, exclusion, inclusive peacebuilding, participation, tactics.

Citizen participation takes centre stage in Colombia's 2016 peace agreement with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia–Ejército del Pueblo (FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army). While this reflects the global trend towards greater inclusion of civil society and community actors in peace processes (Çuhadar, 2020), its practical implementation has proven difficult. The latest monitoring report of the Colombian think tanks Foro Nacional para Colombia and Viva la Ciudadanía (2020: 89) sustains that 'la mayoría de las tareas participativas no ha avanzado de manera significativa y se ha puesto en riesgo el potencial transformador y de apertura democrática del Acuerdo' (most of the participatory tasks have not advanced significantly, putting the transformative potential and the democratic opening of the agreement at risk). In doing so, it aligns with the concerns of social organisations, the communities affected, and critical participation scholars who have long highlighted implementation deficiencies and the persistence of exclusion under the banner of inclusive governance worldwide (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Choudhury, Haque and Habib, 2018).

Nevertheless, participation continues to enjoy 'buzzword' status among scholars, practitioners and policymakers (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). It is therefore necessary to deconstruct the rhetoric and practices of supposedly inclusive policies. In this article, I respond to this imperative by examining targets and tactics of exclusion in the context of participatory Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (PDETs, Development

Programmed with a Territorial Focus) established under the Colombian 2016 peace accords. Here, exclusion is understood as any constraint on citizens' access to and influence and decision-making power over PDET policies (cf. Cornwall, 2003). These constraints are analysed in accordance with the methodology proposed by the Colombian Fundación Ideas para la Paz (FIP) (2017: 12) to judge 'the quality and efficiency of participation bodies and exercises of participatory planning in which public institutions and citizenry encounter'. The indicators included therein comprise the process design, stakeholders involved, resources, independence, transparency, effectiveness, legitimacy, sustainability and implementation.

Aimed at the promotion of structural transformation and citizen trust in the state in Colombia's most war-affected, overwhelmingly rural, regions, the PDETs promise to promote new forms of development that are sensitive to the peculiarities of each locality and the varying needs of its inhabitants. The state institutions involved merely act on behalf of the communities which, according to the peace accords, propose, select, prioritise and monitor the implementation of PDET initiatives in their territories (Colombia, 2016: 23). These initiatives are based on a mass consultation process during which, for the first time in Colombian history, state employees went to the PDET communities to discuss core problems and potential remedies with their inhabitants and to develop a vision of the future of the territory according to the communities' wishes.

Colombia's 2016 peace agreement is the first in the world to include a bottom-up development programme. In relation to inclusion, the PDETs occupy a particularly privileged position, incorporating roughly one-quarter of all 114 participatory provisions included in the entire agreement (FIP, 2017: 6). In this sense, the PDETs not only constitute an innovative exercise in citizen participation but also yield unique data which scholars and policymakers interested in inclusive peacebuilding can contemplate and learn from. Nevertheless, and despite mounting critiques regarding the participatory methodology (Vélez-Torres et al., 2022) and the overall lack of implementation progress (MAPS Survey and UNDP/PRIO, 2020), this is not reflected in substantial academic output so far. Analyses by Colombian scholars have looked at the implementation progress as well as the main challenges facing the PDET, particularly in administrative, financial and security terms (Trejos et al., 2019; García Giraldo, 2020; Mora Cortés, 2020; Rodríguez Iglesias and Rosen, 2021). Recently, an important contribution by Vélez-Torres et al. (2022) has analysed participation in the PDETs and the Illicit Drug Substitution Programme in the broader context of 'neoliberal peacebuilding' in Colombia. A thorough deconstruction of concrete targets and mechanisms of exclusion is, however, still lacking. This matters not only in the context of the current peace process but also in relation to broader issues of social justice, inequality and marginalisation relating to Colombian modern history more generally (Oficina Regional Pares-Pacífico, 2021).

This article contributes to addressing the gaps in question in the context of the Caribbean Sierra Nevada-Serranía del Perijá-Zona Bananera (SNP) PDET region. It argues that state, societal and armed actors (re)produce exclusion through a wide range of implicit-elusive, direct-explicit and coercive mechanisms, targeting specific (sub-)groups and organisations, as well as communities as a whole. Methodologically, these claims are based on 42 in-depth interviews with Colombian PDET residents, representatives of social and ethnic organisations operating in the Colombian Caribbean, academics and staff members of relevant state institutions. These were conducted online and on site between 2020 and 2022 in the course of an ongoing research project, and they are analysed in conjunction with written PDET documentation.

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In the light of the global mainstreaming of participation as policy-making principle, I first introduce key academic debates in the critical participation literature, underscoring their relevance to the rather disconnected literature on inclusive peacebuilding. Embedded in Colombia's broader peacebuilding context, the empirical analysis shows how societal (sub-) groups, organisations and communities are constrained in their PDET participation. Finally, I discuss the implications of these findings for the implementation of inclusive peacebuilding more generally. I call for increased awareness among citizens, scholars and policymakers of the downsides and potentially even harm of nominal inclusion that falls short of structural revisions.

Inclusive Peacebuilding: A New Tyranny?

Participation has long been associated with social movements' struggle for citizenship rights and a voice for everybody (Cornwall, 2003). Heavily influenced by Robert Chambers's work on Participatory Rural Assessments, participatory discourses were rapidly accepted and adopted by governments and international organisations alike. The peacebuilding realm is no exception to this trend. Paffenholz and Zartman (2019: 2) even refer to an 'inclusion hype', asserting that '[t]here has never been a more conducive set of normative international frameworks that together highlight the importance of inclusion'. The proponents of inclusion argue for diverse normative, strategic and practical reasons that peacebuilding efforts cannot remain exclusively in the policy-maker realm but need civil society engagement to be truly sustainable (Donais and McCandless, 2016).

Different studies, however, have revealed profound challenges, a lack of political will and resistance to implementing inclusive peacebuilding. For instance, Mac Ginty (2012: 171) argues that citizen 'participation in peacebuilding often means conformity to rigid technocracy, the acceptance of Western bureaucratic norms, and local compliance in projects that are conceived, designed, funded, and evaluated by external actors'. This is also true of Colombia. Aligning themselves with the criticisms of social organisations and affected communities (cf. Oficina Regional Pares-Pacífico, 2021), scholars are increasingly highlighting such obstacles in the implementation of the Colombian peace agreement in general and in its rural reform in particular. For example, Vélez-Torres et al. (2022: 586) find 'that the government's peacebuilding rationale and mechanisms sought to reinforce the neoliberal state through a constrained participation model, which marginalised the progressive struggles of local communities'. Likewise, Velásquez et al. (2021: 314) identify structural policy-making obstacles to current rural reform attempts in which limited 'local participation remains highly conditioned by the logics of the war: scepticism, fear, suspicion and grief affect both who participates, and what is said'.

The desirability of inclusion as such is, nevertheless, rarely contested nowadays. This is surprising considering the longstanding problematisation of the participatory turn by disappointed communities, social organisations and critical participation scholars. In the academic realm, the scholar-diplomat Majid Ranehma highlighted as early as 1997 its strategic deployment by donors in order to legitimise a particular vision of development. Similarly, Hickey and Mohan (2004) emphasise that participation can easily be reduced to neoliberal market terms. Deconstructing participation as mainstream buzzword, Cornwall and Brock (2005: 1043) conclude that 'words that once spoke of politics and power have come to be reconfigured in the service of today's one size-fits-all development recipes, spun into an a-politicised form that everyone can agree with'.

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A highly influential volume edited by Cooke and Kothari (2001) is provocatively entitled *Participation: The New Tyranny?*

Despite their great potential for unpacking systems and episodes of ‘participatory exclusion’ (Choudhury, Haque and Habib, 2018), these contributions have not attracted much attention among peacebuilding scholars to date. One potential explanation for this is the lack of (continuous) exchange between critical participation and inclusive peacebuilding scholars. This article seeks to bridge this gap by drawing on both strands of literature in the following analysis of exclusion from the Colombian PDETs. It builds on Çuhadar’s (2020) analysis of the origins, targets and strategies of resistance to inclusive peace processes by analysing the resulting exclusion as an expression of different modes of power, the ubiquity of which has been highlighted by critical participation scholars. Gaventa defines these modes of power as follows:

Visible power: Observable decision-making. This level includes the visible and definable aspects of political power – the formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions, and procedures of decision-making [...]

Invisible power: Shaping meaning and what is acceptable. [...] Significant problems and issues are not only kept away from the decision-making table, but also from the minds and consciousness of the different players involved [...]

Hidden power: Setting the political agenda. Certain powerful people and institutions maintain their influence by controlling who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda. (Gaventa, 2005: 15).

In doing so, I seek not only to show in this article that participation and inclusive peacebuilding literatures can fruitfully inspire each other but also to offer a comprehensive analysis of the practical (re)production of exclusion in the context of the PDETs.

Contextualising the PDETs

To this end, it is necessary to introduce the PDETs as part of the broader inclusivity discourse revolving around the Colombian 2016 peace accords. The significance of this agreement resides not only in the length and the devastating effects of more than five decades of internal armed conflict but also in its attempt to set a new milestone in terms of comprehensiveness and inclusiveness, for example, through an entire chapter dedicated to political participation, a novel gender lens and a separate Ethnic Chapter.

Several differential approaches thereby feed into broader commitments to citizen participation and territorial peace that take centre stage in the peace agreement. The notion of territorial peace is driven by a focus on Colombia’s most war-affected regions. It aspires to close the gap between the centre and the most violent, predominantly rural peripheries in which the state has historically failed to guarantee security and to provide basic services. This involves new forms of territorial development, considering the needs and peculiarities of each locality (Cairo et al., 2018). In this spirit, Chapter 1 spells out the details of a comprehensive rural reform which includes the establishment of the PDETs as bottom-up development programmes.

In a nutshell, the PDETs represent a novel mechanism for territorial ordering policies which aim to promote the ‘structural transformation of rural Colombia’

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(Colombia, 2016: 22). The Agencia de Renovación del Territorio (ART, Territorial Renovation Agency) coordinates the PDETs in 170 municipalities across Colombia. These municipalities are part of sixteen prioritised sub-regions that are those worst affected by violence, poverty, institutional weakness and illicit economies.

The peace accords stipulate that the 'active participation of the community [...] constitute[s] the foundation of the PDETs' (Colombia, 2016: 22). Community participation is therefore to be promoted 'through the generation of participatory and democratic institutional forums where said communities have the capacity for change' (Colombia, 2016: 11). While all PDET residents were invited to give input in the initial phase held in the communities themselves, decisions in the subsequent municipal and regional phases are taken by elected delegates from each municipality who comprise the so-called coordinating groups (*grupos motor*).

Negotiated towards the end of the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos, the implementation of the PDETs to date has mainly been the responsibility of his successor and opponent of the peace agreement, Iván Duque. In the context of the narrow rejection of the original peace agreement in a popular referendum, Duque had also pressed for an amendment which explicitly curtails the decision-making power of newly created spaces of citizen participation vis-à-vis existing authorities (Colombia, 2016: 18). While internal and external obstacles (García Trujillo, 2018: iv) had already constrained the space Santos enjoyed for manoeuvre, the change in government thus further complicated the implementation of the PDETs' participatory promises.

Research Context, Data and Methodology

This article focuses on the first PDET phase in setting out to analyse how and by whom exclusion is produced. Including the consultation and idea-generation stage lasting until the adoption of municipal and regional action plans in December 2018, the analysis serves to demonstrate that exclusion was an inherent part of the PDETs' implementation from the very beginning, foreshadowing the lack of progress and popular disenchantment with the current prioritisation and implementation phase.

The SNP PDET sub-region includes fifteen geographically very large municipalities in the departments of Cesar, La Guajira and Magdalena. Inhabitants of rural territories spend up to fifteen hours to reach the urban centres and the state offices concentrated there. In the 1980s, the region became actively embroiled in the armed conflict with the consolidation of the guerrilla presence. Around the turn of the century, these were militarily defeated and replaced by the paramilitary Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC, United Self-Defences of Colombia), giving rise to the most violent phase of the war. Since the signing of the peace accords, there has been a surge in armed violence in the region (Trejos and Badillo, 2021). While its intensity is moderate compared to that in other PDET regions, an ongoing competition between two criminal-paramilitary groups affects civilians on a massive scale and threatens to undermine the entire peace process.

There is immense variation across Colombia in how citizens were affected by the armed conflict. The territorial peace concept postulates that the same applies to the post-agreement phase. For scholars, this place-contingency renders familiarity with territorial dynamics on the ground indispensable. This article therefore opts for an in-depth engagement with the politics of citizen participation in the SNP. While this does not provide for further generalisation, initial evidence from other PDETs (Vélez-Torres

et al., 2022), as well as the uniform application of the participatory methodology across all PDETs, suggest that the findings presented here may speak to developments in other regions as well.

The motivation behind the selection of the SNP as research site is threefold: First, considering that it has attracted more resources than any other PDET but does not show greater levels of citizen satisfaction with the peace agreement implementation (MAPS Survey and UNDP/PRIO, 2020: 27), it presents an intriguing case to identify patterns of exclusion as one potential cause of frustration. Second, the PDET regions with the highest levels of physical violence at present were ruled out for safety and ethical reasons. Finally, and despite having been an epicentre of the armed conflict, the SNP region is notably absent from scholarly and policy-making debates on peacebuilding in Colombia. Despite excellent academic analyses (Trejos, Badillo and Irreño, 2019) and up-to-date monitoring of the peace process in the Colombian Caribbean at the Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla, the author of this article is not aware of any publication that analyses the implementation of the SNP PDET. In the light of the Colombian territorial peace debate, scholars should thereby strive to incorporate more evenly sub-national voices from all regions, a goal to which this article actively seeks to contribute.

Methodologically, the empirical analysis is primarily based on 42 semi-structured interviews with PDET residents, including inter alia ethnic authorities, PDET delegates, members of community associations and collectives, victims' representatives, students, health workers, coffee farmers, representatives of local and regional social organisations, academics, staff members of local administrations as well as regional and national Territorial Renovation Agency offices. Twenty-four of them were conducted online (May–December, 2021) and eighteen on site (October–December, 2021) as part of an ongoing research. These lasted from 35 to 128 minutes. The interview mode was primarily determined by the availability and place of residence of interview partners, as well as security and Covid-19–related considerations. For instance, in-person interviews were preferred for Santa Marta-based agency staff compared to more difficult arrangements for interviews with residents of PDET communities with limited accessibility and a growing paramilitary presence. Interview partners were purposely sampled via a snowball system. Academic staff at the Universidad del Norte and the Universidad del Magdalena facilitated initial access to three PDET communities and Territorial Renovation Agency staff. With interviewees' informed consent, the interviews were either recorded or notes were taken. Names, positions and localities are omitted throughout this article for data protection and security reasons. All quotes have been translated from Spanish to English by the author. While some interview items vary according to the role of the interview partner within the PDETs, the interviews always included general questions on citizen participation and its relevance for the peace process. These were followed by more detailed questions about the successes and problems of the PDETs in general and with regards to citizen participation in particular. Recordings were fully transcribed and shared with each research participant. The transcripts were coded with NVivo. Actor-based codes emerged from the text and include amongst others regional and national Territorial Renovation Agency offices, municipality, Communal Action Boards, representatives of the LGBTQI community, etc. Instances of exclusion were identified as such in a first coding round and subsequently grouped according to Çuhadar's (2020) behavioural modes of resistance to inclusivity (implicit-elusive, direct-explicit and coercive).

In addition, the analysis draws on publicly available PDET documentation, such as municipal and regional action plans. Ahead of the interviews, the documents were

primarily consulted to identify the target groups of proposed initiatives, by extension spotting clues to omitted (sub-)groups and organisations. As part of the interview data analysis, written PDET documentation was also adhered to for triangulation purposes.

Who Ought to Participate? Targets of Exclusion in the SNP PDET

The terms inclusion and citizen participation refer by definition to ‘everybody’ in a given context. Universalistic notions of citizen participation appear almost ubiquitously in the SNP PDET action plans. As such, most of them call ‘for the inclusion of all inhabitants’ (cf. Municipio de Fonseca and ART, 2018: 13) in the social, cultural and political life of their communities. State officials particularly emphasise the value of working collaboratively with the communities. Emblematically, one Santa Marta-based staff member of the Territorial Renovation Agency argues: ‘The PDETs were an amazing and participatory process, unique in history. [...] it was done in a very inclusive way, with all the affected. Both the victims and the communities in general participated’ (interview with ART staff member, 2021f). Nevertheless, exclusion persists and affects specific sub-groups and organisations in particular. Focusing on the questions of who is formally and in practice included in the PDET process as one key indicator of the quality of citizen participation (FIP 2017: 12), this section considers four examples (ex-combatants, LGBTQI community, youth and Communal Action Boards).

Most visibly, the absence of any mention of ex-FARC combatants looms high over the PDETs. While demobilised ex-combatants are technically allowed to participate as individual citizens, they do not seem to have participated in the SNP on a significant scale. This may be interpreted as an important instance of exclusion, considering the intended peacebuilding effect of the PDETs. Given historically very low levels of popular support for the FARC, as well as their withdrawal from almost the entire SNP PDET region since the 1990s, however, this erasure is actually unsurprising. In this vein, a resident of a SNP PDET community argues: ‘The guerrilla has imposed their will far too long on us. They have no right to decide about our future’ (conversation with SNP PDET resident, 2021). Feelings of anger are informally reported by other residents as well who relate a possible place for the FARC in the PDETs to controversies around their post-agreement political participation more generally. For instance, another SNP PDET resident criticises: ‘The FARC have homes, they have land, they can study, they are in Congress. And on top of that, they are allowed to determine the future of our territory? The PDETs are ours. What about us, the victims?’ (Conversation with SNP PDET resident, 2021). Given that the substantial domestic opposition to the peace agreement is crucially shaped by the belief that it is too favourable for the FARC (Tellez, 2019), a more explicit role for ex-combatants in the PDETs most likely would have nurtured already existing resentments among PDET residents. Their factual exclusion may thus represent a desirable act to many. Meanwhile, citizens’ postures on this issue are also influenced by local peculiarities. For instance, the PDET transformation plan of Manaure – the only SNP PDET municipality with a reincorporation and reintegration camp for ex-FARC combatants – stands out for its action plan has not only been drawn up with input from ex-combatants (interview with regional scholar, 2021) but is also the only one in the SNP region to call for spaces of reconciliation which include ‘all actors involved in the armed conflict’ (Municipio de Manaure and ART, 2018: 12). Although experiences with reincorporation and reintegration camps varies across Colombia (Romero Vial, 2021: 112), the comparatively successful example of Manaure shows that its presence may

also affect how residents interpret the inclusion of ex-combatants in the PDETs, both in the SNP and in other PDET regions.

Another sub-group that is specifically targeted by exclusion is the LGBTQI community. Neither the regional nor the municipal PDET action plans in the SNP include any initiatives from which sexually diverse populations are specifically expected to benefit. Likewise, the LGBTQI community is not represented in the coordinating groups (*grupos motor*). In the absence of an organisational representation or invitation, some individual LGBTQI members have provided input to the PDETs' initial idea generation stage. According to LGBTQI representatives (interview with head of LGBTQI advocacy organisation, 2021) and several coordinating group members involved in the process (interview with *grupo motor* member, 2021b, 2021c), their proposals were not included in the final action plans. Their clustering in urban rather than rural PDET settlements, as well as the broader context of the role of sexual diversity in the peace process, may have contributed to this finding: The peace agreement promotes gender sensitivity as one of its guiding principles (Colombia, 2016: 6). However, discrimination and routine exclusion of sexually diverse populations is highly prevalent among both policymakers and the wider Colombian society. It thus may appear paradoxical that 'Colombia is implementing a very inclusive peace agreement at a time when hate discourses increase and establish a collective imaginary that the rights of LGBTI people are an ideological issue' (interview with head of LGBTQI advocacy organisation, 2021). In the SNP, LGBTQI advocacy organisations such as Caribe Afirmativo and Caribe Diversa have long engaged in peacebuilding, though primarily in the urban context. However, selective killings and intimidation, discrimination and abuse, and repeated attacks on physical structures run by the LGBTQI community (cf. *El Espectador*, 2019) show that hatred and intolerance are prevalent in the SNP, too. Although LGBTQI issues do not pass unnoticed in socially much more conservative and religious PDET communities, a regional anthropologist argues that they are irrelevant to most PDET residents: 'A coffee farmer who has probably never met or talked to a LGBTI person simply doesn't care about whether they are included in the PDETs. It's just completely alien to them [es completamente ajeno a su realidad]' (conversation with regional scholar, 2021). Hence, such types of identity-based exclusion may occur unintentionally and are not exclusively – and maybe not even most prominently – associated with state officials but with societal actors (Çuhadar, 2020: 15).

A third, rather hidden, target of exclusion is young people. The vision to be realised in the fifteen years of the PDETs' existence explicitly underscores the need to strengthen their participation 'as essential for the consolidation of the territorial peace' (ART, 2018b: 5). Numerous SNP transformation plans also include initiatives that specifically seek to benefit young people (ART, 2018a: 11; ART, 2018b: 15). Most of these proposals are not, however, likely to have been proposed by young people themselves. This is because their input to the PDETs has been minimal. While there only exists anecdotal evidence from the community consultation phase (and data on participants are not disaggregated), the lack of youth input becomes particularly visible in the coordinating groups: out of nearly 200 members of these groups in the SNP, only three are below the age of 30 (interview with *grupo motor* member, 2021b). The exclusion of young people is even more notable among indigenous groups whose cultural traditions allow only leaders of advanced age to interact with state officials on their behalf, automatically excluding their young people from the PDETs. Among Territorial Renovation Agency staff interviewed, there was consensus that '[w]e can't tell them who should represent them' (interview with ART staff member, 2021e). A young coordinating group member

questions this position: 'The Agency itself says that each coordinating group should have at least two young members. Where are they? Our "community representatives" are, in general terms, old people who think that young people are useless' (interview with *grupo motor* member, 2021b). As with LGBTIQI exclusion, obstacles to young people's inclusion in the PDETs can thus be seen as emanating both from state officials who are perceived as inactive vis-à-vis their stigmatisation and from the wider community itself.

The peace agreement establishes that the PDETs must promote community organisations, 'enabling them to become protagonists in the structural transformation of the countryside' (Colombia, 2016: 22). Community Action Boards (Juntas de Acción Comunal, JAC) play a significant role in this context, representing the oldest and most established community organisations across most of the SNP. Acknowledging the historical absence of security and public services in the countryside, all interviewees agreed on the Boards' crucial importance for the success of any collective rural transformation (interview with *grupo motor* member, 2021d, 2021f, 2021g, 2021h, 2021i; interview with ART staff member, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f). Their technical capacity strengthening therefore takes centre stage in all PDET action plans. Nevertheless, several Board members interviewed sustained a pervasive feeling of exclusion. According to one Board president:

The Board makes everything happen here. And it was always like this. Who built the cemetery? Who built our communal space? Who started to fix the road? We did. [...] Where was the state? The state is so slow, everything takes so long. [...] With the PDETs, the Board wasn't even allowed to take part in the decisions. (Interview with JAC president, 2021)

This is because the design of the PDETs for peasant communities limits citizen participation to individual citizens. While the parallel process for Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities provides for collective participation, the same possibility does not exist for peasant PDET communities without collective ethnic recognition on behalf of Colombian authorities. Hence, there is no role for community organisations in their PDETs, no matter how significant these may be in practice. According to a Bogotá-based Territorial Renovation Agency staff member, their organisational exclusion is mainly to ensure that the PDETs' operational functioning is not compromised by too many actors at the decision-making table (interview ART staff member, 2021d). The difficulty of defining who can enter a space of citizen participation and the danger of including too many civil society stakeholders with very different interests and goals can seriously undermine the practical viability of participatory policy-making (Paffenholz, 2010). Nevertheless, the example cited above is just one showing how such decisions can further undermine the SNP residents' faith in the PDETs' inclusiveness. As such, many coordinating group members expressed their discomfort about not having Community Action Board members at the PDET decision-making table (interview *grupo motor* member, 2021d, 2021f, 2021h). Similar tensions between individualised and collective approaches have also been registered with regards to other dimensions of the Colombian peace agreement, such as the reparation programme (Dixon and Firchow, 2022). The failure to include a collective participation approach for *all* PDET communities may thus also be interpreted as a weakness of '[neo-]liberal peacebuilding in Colombia' (Vélez-Torres et al., 2022). It is a weakness which also shaped the Santos administration's view of peace (Burnyeat, 2022: 293).

Mechanisms of Exclusion

By identifying which sub-groups and organisations are particularly targeted by exclusion, the previous section has already hinted at some behavioural modes of exclusion. This section engages more systematically with this task, providing examples of visible, invisible and hidden exclusion along a continuum from implicit-elusive to direct-explicit and coercive tactics (Çuhadar, 2020). These are not necessarily clearly distinguishable and may evolve over time. In addition: although the term ‘tactic’ may seem to imply intentionality at first glance, it also demonstrates that exclusion does not always require conscious agency but can occur rather invisibly as well, even to those who are attributed responsibility for their occurrence.

Implicit-elusive exclusion ‘may activate resistance toward including a specific person or group simply because of the social category they represent’ (Çuhadar, 2020: 18). This definition is particularly useful in making sense of the exclusion of young people. Despite their nominal inclusion in the PDETs and the coordinating groups, younger people are either absent or feel devalued by state officials and fellow community members. As such, their de facto exclusion from the decision-making table demonstrates how hidden power can work (Gaventa, 2005). Young people are nevertheless keenly aware of how they are silenced, as the following testimony reveals:

[Another coordinating group member] told me I couldn’t express my views because I didn’t know enough about the process. This obviously bothered me [...] Just because you’re young, they think you don’t know anything, [...]. I think that this is one of the main reasons why there are so few young people in these kinds of space. Because they don’t respect us. (Interview with *grupo motor* member, 2021c)

Older members of the coordinating groups acknowledged the failure to include young people’s voices – and saw it as a problem but did not reflect on how their own behaviour might contribute to this state of affairs (interview with *grupo motor* member, 2021d, 2021g, 2021h). This lack of reflection makes it particularly hard to identify and challenge generational biases which might be at play here as some stereotypes are ‘automatically activated by semantic cues without the full awareness of the perceiver’ (Çuhadar, 2020: 18). The implications can nonetheless be substantial and may feed into direct-explicit modes of exclusion.

Direct-explicit modes of exclusion enable the exclusion not only of the (sub-) groups and community actors identified above but also of PDET communities and their representatives as a whole. For Çuhadar (2020: 18–25), they involve, amongst other things, sabotage, false compliance, foot dragging and vocal protest. In line with Pellegrino’s (2017) concept of ‘complying incompliantly’, false compliance appears to be the most relevant in the SNP PDET. I therefore go on to examine its visible, invisible and hidden modus operandi in the following paragraphs, pinpointing the roles therein of policy-makers and staff of state institutions who embody what Burnyeat (2020b: 45) characterises as the Colombian ‘state’s contradictory faces’.

The PDETs’ formal-institutional framework already reveals several very visible obstacles preventing citizens from influencing the definition and prioritisation of PDET initiatives. Apart from significantly shaping who can – or in the case of the Community Action Boards, cannot – formally take part in PDET decision-making, Bogotá-based Territorial Renovation Agency leaders and officials also define the methodological rules according to which the PDETs must be implemented in the regions. In practice, this

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highly technocratic approach – which is uniformly applied in all PDETs – does not necessarily meet citizens' needs and demands (interview with *grupo motor* member, 2021b, 2021d, 2021i). As one Santa Marta-based ART staff member involved in the process acknowledged:

There is nothing behind [this territorial approach]. For example, there is something they call a 'routemap' [*boja de ruta*]. It defines how decisions should be taken and investment sectors prioritised, [...]. This is a methodology which was invented in Bogotá but does not relate to the rest of the country. The indigenous and Afro[-Colombian]s have refused to do it. [...] These are formalities, but they have enormous political implications. That's why we have so many difficulties in making anything happen. (Interview with ART staff member, 2021a)

More specifically, PDET initiatives could only be implemented when they fitted into one of eight non-negotiable categories defined by the Colombian government and the FARC (interview with ART staff member, 2021a). This prevents, for example, important environmental conflicts from being addressed by the PDETs. Citizen demands to end mining in many SNP PDET communities were completely excluded from the list of PDET initiatives, since including them would challenge national laws and Colombia's extractivism-based development model (interview with regional scholar, 2021). Such redlining ultimately inhibits an open debate about 'the reason for the existence of the PDETs' which, according to several interviewees, should address (a) the functioning of the state, and (b) the understanding of 'territory' to be pursued (interviews with *grupo motor* members, 2021a, 2021b, 2021f). These limitations on what can be put on the agenda undermine citizens' ability to address core issues, preventing the structural transformation envisioned by the PDETs from becoming a reality.

Citizen participation has also been constrained by local authorities' covert attempts to manipulate the developmental interventions implemented as part of the PDETs. Particularly at the regional stage, where joint visions and plans for the whole SNP were developed and agreed, mayors sought secretly to introduce their own initiatives to action plans which were supposed to be decided exclusively by the coordinating groups (interviews with *grupo motor* members, 2021f, 2021g, 2021i). Clientelist considerations may have prompted this behaviour, as many mayors have attempted to increase their popularity by portraying the PDETs as their own work. Consequently, coordinating group members interviewed saw their longstanding anger with and distrust of 'the state' and 'politicians' reaffirmed, attributing manipulation attempts to mayors' desire to instrumentalise the PDETs for their own personal and political gain (interviews with *grupo motor* members, 2021f, 2021g, 2021i). This suspicion appears well-founded considering that municipalities are normally only assigned federal funds and do not possess own revenues. From this perspective, the PDETs offer a window of opportunity to access unprecedented amounts of funding, raising the stakes for manipulation and misuse.

Staff of municipal administrations and the regional Territorial Renovation Agency offices have limited ability to prevent instances of exclusion such as those described thus far. A growing number of ethnographic studies on Colombian state institutions (Dávila, 2017; Pellegrino, 2017; Burnyeat, 2020a, 2020b) highlight clear awareness of the state's inefficiency, as well as a strong personal commitment to serve citizens' interests among individual officers. Lack of knowledge on the part of these officials can, however, also unintentionally inhibit citizen participation. Due to the educational requirements of

their posts, the staff of state institutions usually come from cities, but they do not need to possess much knowledge about the rural PDET territories. As one Santa Marta-based Agency staff member commented: 'If you talk to staff of the municipality of Santa Marta, they don't have a clue about the Sierra. The same applies in every single one of our fifteen PDET municipalities' (interview with ART staff member, 2021b). The Territorial Renovation Agency itself is not immune to this problem. For instance, in a particularly shocking episode, an active member of a criminal-paramilitary group, which is currently responsible for massive human rights violations in the SNP, dominated early communal PDET meetings, telling state representatives 'what the community needed'. Although an Agency official acknowledged that they had noted that no other citizen had spoken up, their lack of community expertise ultimately prevented them from understanding that fear was the main reason for this silence (interview with ART staff member, 2021g). Far from being merely an administrative obstacle, a lack of familiarity with conditions on the ground can thus facilitate the exclusion of citizen voices as a result of the violent inference of armed groups. Even fear of violence is enough to bring about such a result (Çuhadar, 2020: 25). Elected coordinating group members from this community also reported subsequent intimidation, as the following testimony emphatically underlines:

An armed group called on me four times. Me, alone, surrounded by armed men. [...] The first time, they called me to tell me that some leaders were preventing community development. [...] The next time, at the peak of the pandemic, they gave me the same message. But this time [...] directly mentioning the PDETs. [...] My wife asked me to stop my work for the community. And you really start to think [about withdrawing]. These groups have already killed people and the state doesn't protect us. (Interview with *grupo motor* member, 2021i)

Fearing or experiencing violence influences citizen participation (García, 2009) – and even more so in Colombia, given that community leaders and human rights defenders suffer from one of the highest assassination rates in the world (Global Witness, 2020). As a result, the coordinating group member quoted above questions the ability of the PDETs to fulfil their participatory promises: 'They are killing leaders in Colombia. And the [PDET coordinator of the municipality] says we're just inventing these threats to get attention. How can you believe that the same people want to promote our role in the PDETs?' (Interview with *grupo motor* member, 2021i). Such coercively enforced exclusion also affects the wider citizenry by fostering non-participation caused by safety concerns (cf. Mac Ginty, 2012).

Conclusions

Shortly before leaving office, then-president Iván Duque and his High Commissioner for Stabilisation and Coordination Emilio Archila claimed that the PDETs capture 'los anhelos de sus beneficiarios porque son el resultado del mayor proceso de planeación participativa impulsado por un Gobierno, que se haya realizado en América Latina' [the dreams of their beneficiaries because they are the result of the largest government-led process of participatory planning in Latin America] (Duque and Archila, 2021: 202). The PDETs do indeed represent a novel exercise of citizen participation. This article has shown, however, how exclusion through a diverse set of implicit-elusive, direct-explicit

and coercive mechanisms prevailed even in the widely lauded initial idea generation and prioritisation stage, targeting societal (sub-)groups, organisations and PDET communities as a whole. The findings presented here thus support the criticisms by affected communities, social organisations, monitoring bodies and critical scholars that emphasise the persistence of exclusion under the banner of nominal inclusion. In the SNP, insufficient funding, complicated bureaucratic processes and delays, and a lack of implementation progress have further nurtured frustration and disenchantment among all the citizens I interviewed. The consequences are serious: in addition to failing to reverse deeply entrenched distrust of the state (Burnyeat, 2020a), dramatic urban–rural inequalities remain unaddressed, ultimately threatening Colombia’s prospects of achieving a lasting peace.

Some of the patterns of exclusion mapped in this article could easily be alleviated. The Territorial Renovation Agency and local authorities in particular could familiarise citizens from the very beginning with administrative procedures and terms in order to ensure their ability to exercise their decision-making influence and oversight power effectively. Moreover, greater exchange between coordinating group members and state officials and citizen involvement in the planning and organisation of PDET meetings could also broaden citizens’ ownership of the PDETs. Such steps would, however, inevitably fall short of remedying the massive and structural features of exclusion that are (re)produced in the context of the PDETs. Problematically, challenges associated with discrimination, a technocratic and complex state bureaucracy, clientelism, lack of familiarity with Colombia’s rural territories and the presence of armed groups are not unique to the PDETs but have long affected Colombian policymaking (Trejos, Badillo and Irreño, 2019). As such, they also present significant hurdles to the fulfilment of the agenda of the newly elected administration of Gustavo Petro, despite the aspirations for a long-lasting peace and inclusion of the first leftist Colombian president.

This article therefore urges peacebuilding scholars, practitioners and policymakers to pay greater attention to critical debates on participatory development and their meta-critique of participation as potential tyranny. As the rhetoric of inclusive peacebuilding globally becomes more common (Çuhadar, 2020), so too does the need for greater awareness of how it can be manipulated to reinforce existing power relations, and at worst, actively work to community actors’ disadvantage. Well-implemented inclusive peacebuilding may be desirable for a variety of reasons, but its practical implementation faces many obstacles. In addition, context-specific causes of the pitfalls may represent not only technical-administrative deficiencies but also a lack of political will and (systemic) resistance. Rigorous deconstruction of the functional modus operandi of exclusion therefore remains the indispensable first step to serve those who suffer its effects on the ground. In this global endeavour, Colombia’s PDET process offers valuable insights to citizens, policymakers and peacebuilding and development scholars and practitioners alike.

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