

The Co-optation of the Word

The intellectual author
gives the order;
the material author
brings the message.
Their advisers
say 'Look, so-and-so
is talking too much.'

They caught me off guard.
They said
'A bullet costs 2,000 pesos.'
They send flowers
in the post as sympathy.
It's a hint,
not very subtle.

I am from a *campesino* family,
we have seen many killed.
Accused of links to the left,
collaborating with guerrillas.
It has all been an excuse
to take our land.

Along the Caribbean,
the violence has been
systematic,
generalised
political.

The attacks,
the murders,
violence
without political ends.
Threats
with political purpose.
You ask yourself:
should I denounce this?
How you can report crimes
when there is this sort of corruption?
I can't speak
openly; the co-optation of the word.

I don't work the land any more
but I will always have a *campesino* identity.

Composed by Juliana Mensah from the interview transcript of woman human rights defender from Colombia working on campesino rights from the research project 'Navigating Risk, Managing Security, and Receiving Support', which focuses on the experiences of human rights defenders at risk in Colombia, Mexico, Egypt, Kenya, and Indonesia (securityofdefendersproject.org)