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ANDES UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENT**

**INTER-DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE ON THE STUDY OF VIOLENCE, SUBJECTIVITY AND
CULTURE**

**COMITÉ INTERDISCIPLINARIO DE ESTUDIOS SOBRE LA VIOLENCIA, LA SUBJETIVIDAD Y
LA CULTURA**

**PROGRAM OF CRITICAL STUDIES OF TRANSITIONS, PCST
PROGRAMA DE ESTUDIOS CRÍTICOS DE LAS TRANSICIONES, PECT**

Third Meeting of Critical Studies of Transitions
3er Encuentro de Estudios Críticos de las Transiciones:

September 4-5, 2019

CONTEXT

All transitions to peace imply the promise of a “new nation.” However, in the current context, Colombia is experiencing the dilution of this expectation into what we call “multiple transitionality”: On the one hand, a “post-violence” situation resulting from the Peace and Justice process undertaken with *Autodefensas* groups. Secondly, a “transition process” with the implementation of the debilitated Havana-Cartagena-Colón Theater Accord with the FARC; and finally, a state of armed confrontation with the ELN, without omitting the resurgence of selective assassinations of land restitution, crop substitution and human rights activists that are characteristic of paramilitary groups, the presence of FARC dissidents and the emergence of drug dealers from Mexico operating in their territorial intersection with locals. In other words, “conflict,” “post-conflict,” and “transition” inhabit reality as stratigraphic layers of the present. This in addition to the new “securocracy” headed by presidential power, the re-militarization of daily life, the establishment of historical revisionism as a policy of normalcy and manifest friction between this new-old vision of Colombia and the future expectations created by the Havana process. We are witnessing, in Colombia and clearly in Latin America, true friction between tectonic plates.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Program convenors and its International Advisory Committee are inviting participants to conduct deliberations on the basis of a critical and encouraging conviction: that peace is not just the reproduction of institutions. By shifting the scale of our analysis to focus on daily life, diverse “socialities” become evident as they emerge and attempt to re-inhabit values and worlds fractured by war, in the midst of adverse circumstances. Seen retrospectively, one has only to glance at the country and the continent to find the obvious and possible contradictions of the “transitional promise” coexisting with human creativity and the

elasticity of survival. This meeting therefore seeks to debate these contradictions, elasticities and their social intersections, as well as to prompt dialogue within and among academia and social organizations and build an agenda of critical discussions to accompany communal processes, while simultaneously situating itself in the telluric clash of national visions that Colombia currently embodies.

MAIN THEMATIC AREAS:

You can participate in the Third Meeting “**Peace on a Small Scale: Visions of Nationhood, Unfinished Transitions and Daily Life**” by submitting proposals for **presentations** and **panels** in any of the following general areas:

- I. Securocracy, Reincorporation and New Subjectivities
- II. Social Studies of the Law
- III. Friction between Development and Transition
- IV. The Products of the Past
- V. Mending the Social
- VI. Technological Residues and Waste from the War

1. Securocracy, Reincorporation and New Subjectivities

The Colombian so called processes of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of former combatants can also be seen as part of a series of “technologies of the self” following Michel Foucault, in which “reintegration” processes de-politicize the history of combatants (especially those who have taken up arms against the state). This de-politization, and the state machinery that promotes it, seek the transformation of the self (of one who in any case lives under the aegis of the guilt induced by the “reintegration” process itself). The paradox is that this mutation of one’s self is at odds with a society still operating under the terms of the conflict and which for several reasons does not absorb former combatants, who are required to manifest their repentance.

For a Program of Critical Studies of Political Transitions, DDR processes are devices that produce types of subjects who, in their own process, reproduce the fractures between the past and the present-to-come, between the violence left behind and the present “reinsertion,” political domestication and good citizenship. There is a type of subject that emerges from this process, coupled to the production system like a cog in the machinery, the transitional state that is re-inhabited by global capital, and which reinstates labor by assigning occupations via technical-educational programs. A plethora of questions arise from this process, which need to be considered: In spite of the itinerary of transformations undergone by subjects traversing the machinery of demobilization and reinsertion, it is also worth asking what it is that continues, and this technology hides. What does it mean, in the immediate context, to “be reinserted?” What society do you reinsert into? What are the actual, day-to-day conditions that characterize this process? To what extent is this type of inclusion not reproduced by other forms of exclusion, different from the self-exclusion produced when you take up arms against the state? What is implicit in the term “reinsertion?”

2. Social Studies of the Law

As is known, application of the National Unity and Reconciliation laws (which lie at the core of the transitional scenario in Colombia) calls for a series of procedures involving various entities and requires overall organization: the Justice and Peace context, for example, includes free versions, public hearings, hearings in which formal charges are made, hearings conducted to manage guarantees, reparation incidents, as well as designing innumerable registration forms that the Justice and Peace context requires for its operation. Moreover, aside from these formalities, there are other scenarios in which lawyers, officials or victims meet (among a large variety of participants), sometimes informally in penitentiaries, in order to supplement official proceedings.

In this line of thought, in a renewed anthropology of law the focus is on the logic behind the meaning and actions inherent not only to its formal mechanisms, regarding which there is already a vast body of literature, but also to the series of social spaces and inter-subjective relations taking place on account of even the indirect effects produced by the implementation of these laws. The approach to the law or to its implementation focuses on daily life, and this scenario is generally structured not only by a series of specific roles and framed by regulations and standards that set the boundaries to the “legal” encounter, but also by the contents of the interventions, by the discursive structure, by its mediations of different orders, by its performativities and by the set of practices associated with the use of diverse specialized human teams such as criminal investigators, surveyors, criminal profilers, forensic anthropologists, historians and forensic psychologists.

But where can the daily life that is finally produced or articulated by the law be observed?. This approach can comprehend, for example –based on ethnographic observation– the scope of what those territorialities comprise, and their formal structures (temporal and spatial), in the symbolic nature of the locus where the “procedures” take place, and in the ways in which these spaces are appropriated and exchanges take place between diverse actors, such as “victims” and “perpetrators,” as well as in the negotiation of meanings or the assignment of the social contents of specific concepts such as “truth,” “reparations,” and “justice.” In other words, the legal process “opens” and at the same time “closes” interaction scenarios in which notions of the past, history or truth (historical, judicial, subjective, among other possibilities) are established. It configures “events,” “facts,” “coincidences” and distributes them through various channels using multiple technological mediations.

In other words, an anthropology of the law and its relationship with the transitional scenario is in charge of understanding these notions and processes as social, historical and cultural artefacts. It is to an extent the vortex produced by an anthropology of the state, of its languages and institutions and its public policy; an ethnography of the production of truths, archives and documents, and especially an ethnography of the borders and relationships between its forms, external and internal: not only of what lies within its formal scope but also of that which is parallel and tangential.

3. Friction between Development and Transition

The central element in this analysis, which is also part of the notion of transition as a device, is related to the need to deeply question the articulation of the political economy of transition. As has been observed in various latitudes, since many “transitional” processes are concerned with political matters (constitutional amendments, electoral process regulations, etc.), structural violence components (such as the connections between difference and inequality and the means used to accumulate wealth) are not usually part of political negotiations. The Human Rights discourse prevails, focused on the liberal subject, individual freedoms and a concern for political-state power. The development of a market economy is evident and undisputed. We know that so-called transitions are always a teleological movement towards democracy inserted in the global market, in contemporary capitalism. That is its assumption.

In contexts where the substrate of a war contains this structural imbalance, how can it be explained that this is not part of the debate about the transition itself? In this context, given the absence of structural violence in general discussions about transition in Colombia, the need arises to implement “development policies” to cope with and manage poverty, inequality and inequity: or what technocrats call “the reduction of poverty.” These policies –termed “economic policy” (both local and national), the “creation of wealth” and “job creation”– run parallel to policies more generally understood as transitional, concerned with answering to standards of justice, truth and reparations. It is worth asking about this relationship in “internal post-conflict” contexts such as Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, where the transition has implied a cessation of military conflict and a continuation of extreme poverty.

The “Colombian case” raises many questions. What is the relationship between legislative amendments and draft bills in such diverse areas as agricultural policy, the Victims Act, free trade agreements, educational policy, the so-called “mining engine” and the global economy? What is the political economy of this transition and what is the relationship between “development” and transition? To what extent do development projects, macroeconomic policy (macro projects or large scale production projects) and the exaltation of supposed citizen and national values represent historical continuities more than fractures with the violent past? What is the relationship between the Victims Act, the (commercial) “normalization” of land tenure, the opening of real estate markets and oil or agribusiness policies?

Likewise, but intimately linked with the above, an anthropology of forced displacement and resettlement processes and the violence induced by “development” and its strategic-industrial projects, not just agricultural but also extractive (and the methods of land appropriation), and their historical connections with armed groups, is called for. As has been demonstrated, there is a specific relationship in Colombia between expropriation and large African palm [oil palm] farms, and oil exploitation and paramilitary activity, at least in several parts of the country. Within this rationale for war the need still persists to continue studying the relationships between these social spheres, except in the context of a policy that mobilizes specific economic projects –by way of a development plan– within the framework of laws usually applied to the so-called transitional scenarios.

4. The Productions of the Past

One of the most complex problems societies face following violent conflict involves how to understand or make sense of a past characterized by “damages” or “harm.” In this specific context it becomes necessary, for empirical reasons, to understand the space created by a micro-politics of memories and a macro-policy that seeks to manage the past. Understanding the textures of the past somehow implies understanding not just the causes and consequences of war, nor statistically pointing to the number of fatalities or individuals disappeared or tortured, but also understanding the way in which specific individuals or communities, in specific historical circumstances, attempt to reconstruct the meanings assigned to life in general and to life fractured by violence. Hence the significance of understanding how the experiences of the victims of violence articulate with the conceptual, institutional and aesthetic apparatus that makes this possible, by way of research and clarification processes, the enactment of laws and establishment of research bodies and the gathering of historical information. These laws (National Unity Act, National Reconciliation Act, Historical Clarification Act, Justice and Peace Act, among many other denominations and possibilities) don’t just determine the scope of their own research; they can also be seen as specific ways of understanding the past.

In this sense, following armed conflict situations, societies seek to find ways to address the consequences. Consequences that are difficult to define: the dislocation of communities, the fragmentation of individuals and the ongoing sense of anxiety and turmoil this implies; the destruction of social infrastructure and all the dimensions of social life that are almost invisible to others, but which are fundamental: confiding in others, the solidarity a society requires in order to exist, the identities and differences that are part of what defines a community as such, the way specific individuals imagine the future and the way they plan to achieve it.

The various ways of facing that past, with its complexities, tension, postponements, encounters, absences and unfinished histories, are the substance of social debate, of specific scenarios where notions of truth, reconciliation, guilt and victimization –although limited by broader legal or institutional frameworks– are negotiated (or disassociated), in the search for orders of collective meaning. Naturally what lies behind these words isn’t just speech (“saying,” “speaking” and “enunciating”) as the only means of “remembering,” generically understood, but also silence and forgetfulness, not just in their more negative sense, but as a means of articulating the past, as a horizon with possibilities.

In this sense this past is interpreted by means of a series of languages or ways of speaking that are socially accepted and that a specific conjuncture legitimizes. It is an arena of meanings that also vary from one community to the next, regardless of whether the fundamental facts have been clarified. How the past is experienced and how it still coexists with the present is a complex matter when seen from the perspective of daily life. In a way the collective story about the origins or causes of the violence is created in the present, within the limitations and multiplicity of political agendas in fashion, and with the institutions that somehow administer the story, such as the national and local memory centers. The contexts produced by these ways of addressing the past are complex scenarios

of agreement and dissent, in which multiple interactions are at play. The reconstruction of the past is also a social exercise that does not happen in a void, but in the contexts of daily life.

In short, the social sciences have a very specific challenge: striking a balance between the micro-policies of speech, the political and cultural protocols and scenarios of remembering, and the macro-policies of bearing witness. A balance between the need for historical reconstruction guided by the spoken word, and the larger-scale testimonial compilations, in terms of actual capacity for clarification (regarding the victims), and also in terms of establishing a critical distance from the process itself, to try to understand the way in which the past can paradoxically be a scenario where meanings are configured, as well as a means of power that legitimizes developing hegemonies.

5. Mending the Social

Seen from the perspective of a Program of Critical Studies of Transitions, the social spaces that comprise transitions are in practice a field of power, of expert discourses and application of established notions. In spite of the standardization and application of procedures, in reality a meeting takes place between these concepts and their implementation by bureaucracies organized to that end, and the social experience that adapts, pushes back, questions or assumes that which is delivered by the state as public policy or international aid, etc. Since this is a field of encounters and non-encounters, one way in which the transitional device operates precisely consists of the technical implantation, by way of theories of damages and reparations, of this dialectic between fracture and continuity. Certain forms of violence are recognized and intervened, situated as they are in specific epistemologies where notions such as “damages” (moral, psychological, etc.) and “reparations” are applied. Other forms are not recognized and are, in this sense, neither repairable nor intelligible: historical and chronic damages, for example. Here then, arise a series of central questions in this project for a state, a nation and capital, such as is the transition. What does it mean to exert violence against an individual or a community? Where does the physical begin and the symbolic end, or when do they get confused? And when time passes, after almost unimaginable acts have been committed, what are its markings, its wounds? How do societies learn to recognize these wounds as wounds? Where is the violence, where are the “scars?” In the past, the present, or the future? Or in the community? And where, exactly? In the body of individuals? In the “body” of the community? And what does this body consist of? Where can it be found? What do these communities of pain consist of?

These apparently trivial questions that are difficult to answer are part of the elusive field of what psychologists, in their various theoretical interpretations, have termed the traumatic experience, or what in Colombia is somewhat vaguely called *el daño* or the damages / harm. Then mention is made of collective damages, moral damage, the memory of the damages, among others. That human experience which, in its multiple vital possibilities, fractures life and the order of the world used to navigate daily life. The word trauma, in its Latin roots, means wound. Thus, like in every trauma (in a technical as well as a more general sense) and like in every wound, every cut, damages that affect the integrity of the

body, the mind or the community (for multiple reasons), require some type of reparations. However, the question of how to define wounds and their reparations is a much more diverse matter than what communities of experts often believe.

6. War Residues and Technological Waste from the War

A central element in armed confrontations is concern for the tracks / traces and remains that armed conflict, war, dictatorships and varied forms of violence leave behind in the existential landscape of human beings. I group these tracks into three specific ways of experiencing violence, obviously among several other possibilities: The first is violence lived as “fracture;” the second, as the establishment of “silence,” as a way of “articulating the experience;” and the third, as a form of coexistence with an “absence.” A concern for violence, at least from a perspective that privileges subjectivity in the phenomenological sense, focuses on these interacting elements. As an example, this concern for these separate but intimately related records crystallizes in the form of specific problems and experiences: these would be ethnographies of the fractures –as in the case of forced displacement in Colombia– ethnographies of silence as a way of articulating this experience –as in the case of the memories of selective homicides in Cape Town–, and the ethnographies of present absences, such as for example when disappearances are discussed in Colombia or Mexico. It should be stated, however, that all experiences of violence to some extent imply a juxtaposition of these records of pain, and configure a vital, complex web that is historically situated. For example, directly or indirectly speaking about displacement implies making legible the experiences of communal fracture, silence as survival and absence in the form of abandonment of the field of intimacy.

And although each one of these themes (fracture, silence and absence) is in itself a potential “research area” vis-a-vis specific forms of violence, the study of the remains, residues or technological traces of the war and the new forms of habitation necessarily raise (when seen organically) a comprehensive view. To begin with, a series of ontological questions arise: What constitutes a remain, a residue, a trace, a ruin? And what is the relationship between these objects that are part of the world-of-life? And the most concrete question: What is a “ruin?” Or what is “ruination” or the act of converting something into “residue” or “waste?” (Navaro-Yashin 2009)? On the other hand, the question also arises of what the words “technological” or “technical” constitute, not just in the field of objects, machines and matter (which studies of conflict and peace often highlight), but also in their links with even the conceptual domain.

Based on these ontological questions, two other groups of empirical questions arise: On the one hand, when we speak of “technological residues” we are not just talking about artifacts (human as well as non-human, and the histories of their configuration, circulation and modes of agency) such as anti-personnel or “*quiebrapatas*” [leg-breaking] mines (perhaps the most evident theme in the context of the security and peace debates), IEDs or improvised explosive devices and unexploded (and not improvised) ordinance, but also other types of artifacts that fall by the wayside: bullet shells, mechanical waste, abandoned and burned out vehicles, obsolete armored vehicles, unusable firearms, machetes and even

the international arms trade, etc., and the way in which all of them, in warehouses or in the jungle, are part of the temporary landscape of the war, the conflict, the disappearances and the displacement. These are objects that somehow act as witnesses to the war, even if they can be read in many ways.

On the other hand, we also have the impact and network of relationships these artifacts produce: territorialities, corporality and modes of enunciating that traverse the human experience of inhabiting the world (Heidegger, 1994; Pallasma, 2016; Cassiogoli, 2010). That is, remains and residues speak to us about specific forms of fracture, silence and absence. Here of course the ruined landscape (of displacement or disappearance) is that of the fragmented territory, with technology (as necro-policy and bio-policy) as the sign of power. It is the body of the broken individual or community and what remains of that rupture: the intimacy, integrity, the otherness, as well as its objects as remains: the shirt, the shoes, the photographs, the shreds abandoned in midflight. The question in this context is how do the artifacts, ruins and remains inhabit these territories, these bodies? How is this ruined landscape configured, how is this inhabiting accomplished?

Precisely in connecting residue, landscape and technological remains we are not just speaking of the anti-personnel mine-object (that is due to guerrilla activity, for example) that parcels out territories, nor of debris caused by army bombardment in strategic regions, which litters the countryside (or the ocean) with holes and unexploded ordinance. I am also referring to the objects ruined by these technologies, to the landscapes produced with this (material and conceptual) technology: they are necessarily social remains, ruins and traces (not waste nor garbage nor residues): A body without a leg, a disintegrated body, the shreds of clothes on the road, the intimacy missed in the shape of things, affections and feelings, the emergent communalities, and survivals and elasticities. It is an ecology of all these elements.

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