

**THEORETICAL
APPROACHES
CORRELATING
LAND OWNERSHIP
CONCENTRATION,
INEQUALITY,
EXCLUSION, AND
VIOLENCE IN
COLOMBIA**

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THEORETICAL APPROACHES CORRELATING LAND OWNERSHIP CONCENTRATION, INEQUALITY, EXCLUSION, AND VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

ABSTRACT

The armed conflict in Colombia is one of the oldest in the world. With very deep roots in most of its different stages of state formation and community dynamics, the current situation is a cumulus of phenomena based on historical continuities. This working paper focuses on the introduction and assessment of theoretical approaches considered relevant and explanatory of the elemental components that structure inequality, exclusion, and violence in light of the country's armed conflict. It also adds to the broader research that addresses the question of how current concentration of land ownership in the region of Tolima reproduces colonially inherited structures of sociopolitical power and exclusion that contribute to the perpetuation of armed violence throughout the country.

With this in mind, the document explores several dimensions to cover the extent of the issue in discussion. First, a brief recount of the conception of new wars and conflict in a globalized society; secondly, the geographical elements applicable to the specific dynamics of inequality and exclusion observed in Colombia; third, a review of the Latin-American post colonialist approach and their contributions to understand historical and academic conceptions of exclusion. Furthermore, in-depth explanations of contemporary conflict and the economics of violence will complete the set of theoretical elements to frame the present bibliographical revision.

APROXIMACIONES TEÓRICAS QUE CORRELACIONAN CONCENTRACIÓN EN LA PROPIEDAD DE LA TIERRA, INEQUIDAD, EXCLUSIÓN Y VIOLENCIA EN COLOMBIA

RESUMEN

El conflicto armado en Colombia es uno de los más antiguos del mundo. Con raíces profundas en la mayoría de sus etapas de formación como Estado y en sus dinámicas comunitarias, la situación actual es un cúmulo de fenómenos basado en continuidades históricas. Este documento de trabajo se enfoca en la introducción y evaluación de las aproximaciones teóricas más relevantes para explicar los elementos constituyentes que estructuran la inequidad, la exclusión y la violencia a la luz del conflicto armado en el país. El texto también contribuye a la investigación más amplia sobre cómo la actual concentración en la propiedad de la tierra en el departamento del Tolima reproduce estructuras de poder sociopolítico y exclusión heredadas de la época colonial que perpetúan la violencia armada en el territorio nacional.

Con dicho propósito, el documento explora algunas dimensiones que abarcan todo el alcance del tema en discusión. Primero se hace una breve revisión al concepto de ‘Nuevas Guerras’ y a las nociones de conflicto en el mundo globalizado. Después se examinan algunos instrumentos de la geografía humana aplicables a las dinámicas específicas de inequidad y exclusión observadas en Colombia. En tercera instancia, se hace un recuento de la visión poscolonial latinoamericana y sus contribuciones a la comprensión de las concepciones históricas y académicas alrededor de la exclusión. Finalmente, se exploran los abordajes a profundidad del conflicto contemporáneo y de la economía de la violencia para completar el grupo de elementos teóricos que conforman el presente ejercicio.

ABORDAGENS TEÓRICAS QUE CORRELACIONAM CONCENTRAÇÃO NA PROPRIEDADE DA TERRA, DESIGUALDADE, EXCLUSÃO E VIOLÊNCIA NA COLÔMBIA

RESUMO

O conflito armado na Colômbia é um dos mais antigos do mundo. Com raízes profundas na maioria de suas etapas de formação como Estado e na dinâmica de sua comunidade, a situação atual é um conjunto de fenômenos baseados em continuidades históricas. Este documento de trabalho concentra-se na introdução e avaliação das abordagens teóricas mais relevantes para explicar os elementos constituintes que estruturam a desigualdade, a exclusão e a violência à luz do conflito armado no país. O texto também contribui para a pesquisa mais ampla sobre como a atual concentração fundiária no estado de Tolima reproduz estruturas de poder sociopolítico e de exclusão herdadas da época colonial que perpetuam a violência armada no território nacional.

Com esse propósito, o documento explora algumas dimensões que abrangem todo o alcance do tema em discussão. Inicialmente é feita uma breve revisão do conceito de “Novas Guerras” e das noções de conflito no mundo globalizado. Posteriormente, são examinados alguns instrumentos da geografia humana aplicáveis à dinâmica específica de desigualdade e exclusão observada na Colômbia. Na terceira etapa, é feito um inventário da visão pós-colonial Latino-Americana e suas contribuições para a compreensão das concepções históricas e acadêmicas em torno da exclusão. Finalmente, são exploradas abordagens aprofundadas para o conflito contemporâneo e da economia da violência para completar o grupo de elementos teóricos que compõem este exercício.

1. NATURE, EXPRESSIONS, AND APPROACHES TO CONFLICT IN A GLOBAL VILLAGE

Undoubtedly, the exponential development of communications, infrastructure, and technology during the last three decades have accounted for a myriad of changes in society, and the term globalization has appeared to refer to the fashion in which such changes exert their influence at a global level. That exponential transformation has also permeated the way dynamics of violent conflict are perceived, how they affect the victims, and how the actors involved interact with their environment and with other actors. In this spirit, the beginning of the twenty-first century brought, along with it, different academic perspectives about the causes, nature, and mechanisms of armed conflict, as well as proposals to manage them in the light of the global era.

A groundbreaking work in such regard is that of Mary Kaldor (1999). The author's main argument holds that one central aspect of globalization in the understanding of conflict dynamics is the development of a new type of organized violence during the 1980s and 1990s. For Kaldor, these New Wars are mostly violence of political nature, but at the same time “involve a blurring of the distinctions between war, organized crime, and large scale violations of human rights” (p. 2).

While Kaldor develops her argument, she emphasizes that what she means by globalization is the intensification of global interconnectedness, as well as the changing character of political authority. These factors have led to a revolution in the social relations of warfare that reflect a different nature of armed conflict from that existing up to the Cold War (p. 4).

The consequences of the influence of globalization in Kaldor's New Wars include the erosion of the state's monopoly of violence, the meddling of international agencies, the conflicting dynamics between cosmopolitanism and particular identities, the development of illegal war economies, and the proliferation of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies among the main stakeholders of structural armed violence.

The author concludes that the key to long-term solutions to conflict lies on the restoration of public monopoly of violence through the formation of alliances between local and transnational institutions that configure cosmopolitan law-enforcement systems (p. 10).

Building on Kaldor's argument of public reconstruction in the light of a transnational morale, Francis Fukuyama (2004) argues that building up state capacities must be at the top of the international agenda if international community is ever to solve the sources of severe difficulties stemming from the weaknesses of the developing world, where most violent conflicts take place (p. 17). The responsibility of developing strategies to bring state-building measures to the third world has to be, according to Fukuyama, the duty of the developed countries in order to prevent local decompositions to become global and pose a threat for them. Such strategies, the author concludes, should be based on global Western principles of capital liberalization and democratic procedures.

While Kaldor and Fukuyama appeal to the merits of western liberal principles as the key to prevent the propagation of violence and conflict, other authors see in these homogenizing conceptions of transnationality a big part of the cause of armed conflicts themselves. For instance, Michael Pugh (2004) deems peace support operations carried out in the name of cosmopolitanism as tools that "serve a narrow purpose to doctor the dysfunctions of the global political economy within a framework of liberal imperialism" (p. 39).

Although Pugh also conceives and advocates for the existence of a series of multinational institutions that support –and at the same time counterbalance– states, the role he proposes for these institutions is an alternative to the state-building devices proposed by liberals such as Kaldor and Fukuyama. Pugh's institutions should aim to provide "subtle and flexible teams, similar to disaster relief experts, to supply preventive action, economic aid and civilian protection" (p. 39) rather than imposing alien policies and political mechanisms. In addition, the author calls for the exploitation of a counter-hegemonic transformation in global governance by changing the leading institutions of the global trade system.

Moreover, David Chandler (2006) argues that state-building practices gather a series of extremely invasive mechanisms to impose and enforce the interests of Western actors. At the same time, these practices are “attempts by Western states and international institutions to deny the power which they wield and to evade accountability for its exercise” (p. 1). Thus, while imposing measures through non-governmental institutions behind a mask of benevolent and constructive measures seeking to remediate the havocs of inefficiency and state failure, the flag bearers of a sort of ‘Western empire’ avoid the inconveniencies of local and international accountability for the destruction and subjugation they exert on third world countries.

Liberal approaches to the nature of violence in the post-Cold War era constitute a politically realistic compendium in order to identify some of the features and expressions of contemporary conflict in Colombia, as well as the correspondences with the historical evolution of violence in the country. Kaldor’s notion of New Wars poses a suitable stance to recognize how the evolution and operation of armed actors that frame the context of war in Colombia disentangle upon the precepts of this theory. While Fukuyama’s approach is not explanatory of the insufficient results of state-building policies and international cooperation, it points out the more profound nature of the grassroots of violence in the country, as well as the necessary measures, in his view, to approach them.

Critical approaches such as those of Pugh and Chandler go in accordance with the particular dynamics observed in the contemporary context of the Colombian armed conflict.

2. GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES TO EXCLUSION AND INEQUALITY

Geographic notions and concepts are relevant instruments for typifying the most elemental components of the structuring dynamics of exclusion and hierarchical organization within and among societies. The set of interactions developed by communities in a given space –and in relation to it- respond to personal, cultural, and societal incentives and imaginaries, which provide such communities with very particular features. In a country where the use of land remains on top of the sources of community survival, the analyses stemming from territorial notions are of utmost importance, and shape most aspects of private and public life. This brings the discussion to a series of authors that project notions of human geography to the field of conflict studies as a way to illustrate how confrontation can appear as an effect of discrepancies related to spatial relations of local communities, as well as how differences can be institutionalized and become ingrained in these communities.

In this regard, the view of Marta Herrera Angel (2004) stands as a very relevant link between geography, history, and political science. She claims that in every historical or political study the geographic component is crucial and necessary to develop a comprehensive analysis, as well as in the opposite direction.

2.1 Critical Geopolitics

The development of critical geopolitics interprets pristinely the way spatial dynamics related to matters hinging around politics and power emerge. For Agnew (2013), critical geopolitics is based on the sense that the multiplicity of geographical assumptions and schemas that enter into the making and legitimation of politics are social constructions. These constructions are the consequence of the agency of particular actors in specific historical-geographical circumstances; therefore, they are far from basic reflections of a naturally-determined geopolitical order, a recurrent notion in conventional geopolitics. The qualifier ‘critical’ (first used in 1989 by Ó Tuathail), according to the author, interrupts “the genealogy of the original term with its overtones of naturalism and exceptionalism” (p. 27). Additionally, Agnew concedes critical geopolitics the capacity to offer more accurate analysis based on four attributes:

“A conceptual matrix for a geographical analysis of world politics based on ideas about geographical representations and socio-economic resources; an emphasis on the role of vision (even in the mind’s eye) in how the world is structured and acted on by political agents of various sorts; a vision of the importance of the fusion between territory and identity and their role in dividing up the world. Finally, a stress on the elite-based statecraft that has long lain at the heart of geopolitical reasoning and its necessary denial of the multidimensional qualities of different places in pursuit of an overriding Weltpolitik” (Agnew 2013, 30).

Prior to the appearance of the critical notions of geopolitics, Mackinder (1904) conceived the world as a ‘living organism’ whose life was highly influenced by the history of human interaction with the physical environment, and at the same time, argued that the success of certain civilizations was due to the effective comprehension, use and domination of space. Although Mackinder’s view is far from the main precepts of Critical Geopolitics, and acknowledging that some of the biological metaphors used by this author as self-congratulatory reasons to justify the expansion of the British Empire are clearly invalid and dangerous, his conception of state as a constant dialogical process between space and society can provide a legitimate starting point to understand the unique nature of geopolitical phenomena in every studied area.

2.2 The dynamics of othering

Substantial strands of literature have been published regarding the way in which the process of what geographers -and other social scientists- call ‘othering’ shape social relations and organize spatial interaction. This concept is generally used to refer to the way in which differentiation is conceived as a justifying instrument for bordering and establishing international frontiers based on hierarchical imaginaries. Nevertheless, this conception stands as the initial explanatory cornerstone of violence in certain settings.

The term was first coined in 1985 by Gayatri Spivak (1985). In her essay *The Rani of Simur: an essay in reading the archives*, the author argues that “Europe had consolidated itself as a sovereign subject by defining its colonies as ‘Others’, even as it constituted them (...) into programmed near-images of that very sovereign self” (p. 247). Spivak remarks how European imperialism utilized the resource of ‘othering’

as a symbolic instrument to position the European self above the nature and essence of the colonized subjects. She exemplified the dynamics of othering through a series of letters of British colonists in India during the nineteenth century where they clearly reproduced the vision of locals as the strange, inferior, primitive others. These conceptions allowed the simplification of the subjugated other, and allowed domination and almost dehumanization based on different sociopolitical, economic and territorial abuse.

Although 'othering' as a concept started to be used in the 1980s, Edward Said's famous *Orientalism* (1978) is a clear allusion to this notion that appeared before Spivak's coining. In his work, Said remarks that Orient and Occident are man-made conceptions, and that Orientalism is basically a Western idea of the attributes of Eastern culture. Among the features of Orientalism, the author identifies that it borrows some attributes from concrete reality, that it emerged from the traditional relationship between Occident and Orient as one of power, domination, and hegemony, and that it is "a sign of Euro-Atlantic power over the Orient. The outcome of these notions leads to an idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (Said 1994, 132-134).

Othering, thus, stands as a mechanism that becomes applicable to political and socioeconomic dimensions of control through the formalization of hierarchies. In this regard, Houtum & Naerssen (2002) identify the way bordering is used as a tool for differentiating, and also excluding, in a process that they call 'institutionalization of differences in space' (Houtum & Naerssen 2002, 125).

Nevertheless, the notion and processes of othering are not limited to the field of geography, and this is exactly the way they can serve as theoretical links to understand more sociologically and politically predominant phenomena. The use of bordering as a dialectical process is described by Newman & Paasi (1998) when they assert that "boundaries are equally social, political and discursive constructs, not just static naturalized categories located between states. Boundaries and their meanings are historically contingent, and they are part of the production and institutionalization of territories and territoriality" (p. 187). In this sense, it would also be suitable to understand inequality, class exclusion and political cleavage as a way of political, social, and economic othering even within the borders of a single state.

Leaping a step further in the analysis of othering dynamics, Soja (1996) altered the traditional dichotomy recognized in spatial analyses of differentiation by bringing forward the concept of Thirdspace. In his book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, he builds on Lefebvre's (1991) three concepts of space (perceived space, conceived space, lived space) and defines Thirdspace as "A knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotional events, and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and problematic interplay between centers and peripheries, the abstract and concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in spatial praxis, the transformation of (spatial) knowledge into (spatial) action in the field of unevenly developed (spatial) power" (Soja 1996, 31).

This notion of Thirdspace comes, according to Soja (1996), from the base concept of *thirthing-as-othering*, which is conceived as the final component of a 'trialectical' understanding of space and its derivations. In Soja's words, "it does not derive simply from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different" (p. 61).

Thirthing gives room for an additional type of othering dynamic in which the 'other' comes out of the typical dialectic of 'the powerful and the powerless', 'the discriminator and the discriminated', and starts to constitute an augmented category together with the spatial dimension that it occupies. In this spirit, the territorial dynamics of conflicting spaces involve additional elements of social construction and decomposition.

The careful choice of theoretical approaches from geographic scopes aims to deal with the most elemental components of hierarchical organization, exclusion, and territorial interaction. The conceptions of othering clearly describe the dynamics observed in Colombian society from several points of view. On the one hand, it allows identifying historical continuities of space appropriation grounded on imaginaries of colonist superiority. On the other hand, the societal consequences of the notion of institutionalization of differences explain the logical link between the patterns of exclusion and the emergence of violent expressions of inequality. Furthermore, critical geopolitics and its principles are a very relevant approach to the phenomena of contemporary manifestations of social immobility.

Finally, although Mackinder proved to pose a historical danger of imperial justification through the legitimation of territorial domination, dynamics such as concentration of land ownership, geographical distribution of violence, and regional dynamics of exclusion, among others, deal with this spatial dimension that makes Colombia a 'living organism', different from everyone and similar to many.

3. A LATIN-AMERICAN POSTCOLONIAL SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

Partly within –or parallel to– the framework of critical thought responsible for the questioning of traditional geopolitical models, the postcolonial school of thought emerged as a theoretical discipline that aimed to analyze, explain, and critically respond to sociocultural and historical legacies of colonialism, as well as the paradoxical dichotomies set out by the duality of modernism in the light of colonial mental, cultural, and power structures to which non-European societies are submitted to.

Different authors have studied how these phenomena have manifested along different regions of the so-called third world. Fanon, Said, Spivak, Siva Kumar, Chakrabarty, and Gregory have developed studies of this sort for African, Middle-Eastern, and Indian societies. The development of this discipline in Latin America has resulted in a fruitful and undoubtedly relevant literature that approaches modern sociocultural challenges in the continent from a comprehensive historical perspective of domination.

Walter D. Mignolo (2003) advocates for a paradigm other as the connection of critical forms of emerging thoughts in the societies that were once under the yoke of European colonialism. It is proposed as a critical and utopian thought articulating all regions where imperial and colonial expansion denied their local inhabitants the possibility of reasoning, thinking, and developing own future scenarios, thus expecting it to become a model of diversity as a universal project. Here, Mignolo approaches ‘othering’ from a different perspective, which intends to overcome the negation of the abstract universality that keeps coloniality invisible (p. 20).

The author also develops the concept of border gnosis, which intends to counter the occidentalist tendencies to dominate and limit understanding. Such tendencies are covertly established through geopolitics of knowledge, namely, the languages and cultures of scholarship, and the socioeconomic and political models that come with them. All these features constitute a coloniality of power, a phenomenon that is embedded in the diachronic nature of the historical stages of Latin America.

Building on this term, Quijano (2000) conceives globalization as a new pattern of world power, based on an ethnocentric mind construct stemming from Europe, as an expression of the basic experience of colonial domination. The importance of this expression lies on its capacity to permeate most notions of world power (p. 201).

For Quijano (2000), America was the first identity of modernity, formed through a binary process of racial coding of differences which positioned Europeans as biologically superior, and the articulation of all historical forms of control over labor, resources and products around capital and world trade (p. 22). Those new historical identities were associated to the nature of roles and places in the new global structure of control over labor. The incidence of this development in the colonial and contemporary dynamics of elite formation and land ownership concentration is evident when the evolution of a restrictive mercantilist system (based on a white salaried class and a non-European mass) is examined.

When Europe consolidated its role as the center of world capitalism, it was also able to impose its colonial domination over all the other regions and peoples in the planet, incorporating them to a world system that fit its specific power pattern. This also meant a process of re-identification for relegated regions and peoples, whose geo-cultural identities were attributed from Europe (p. 209). Quijano (2000) argues that such cultural repression doomed the native American cultures to belong to a peasant, illiterate subculture, stripping them of their objectified intellectual heritage (p. 210). Furthermore, the dynamics of cultural repression and land expropriation observed in the American colonies are a clear materialization of this notion.

The author adds that the confluence of these historical-political processes positioned eurocentrism as a hegemonic perspective of knowledge as well as of modernity, which conceives European culture as the summit of development, and understands the European/non-European differences as differences of nature and not of power history (p. 211).

As a complementary and compatible theoretical construction with that of the other Latin American postcolonial authors cited to this moment, Dussel (2007) proposes distancing from the traditional eurocentric conception of history and turning with a decolonizing scope towards a new political philosophy that compensates the methodological and practical disparities, typical in contemporary socioeconomic dynamics.

Dussel (2007) argues that, for instance, references to the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic and Ottoman worlds allow weakening the traditional and exclusivist Occidental view. Thus, the linear Greece-Latin Middle Ages-Modernity sequence is false and stops us from discovering the constitution of a secular political field. In this spirit, the author deems necessary to grasp, understand, and analytically express what Latin Americans are experiencing, and not just read the European classical or famous political philosophers of the center in order to imitate them or comment them. Those authors neither understand nor express the negative effects of the measures imposed by the G7, the normative decomposition of politics due to corruption, the weakening of the state as a consequence of irresponsible elites, or the extreme vulnerability caused by enormous debt to the multilateral organizations (pp. 553-554).

Within the list of representatives of the Latin-American postcolonial school of thought, Castro-Gomez (2005) applies the theoretical approaches of this school to depict and characterize the elitist imposition in Colombia through territorial and economic discriminatory practices. With the purpose of establishing a more profound depiction of the relation between the socio-scientific project of The Enlightenment and the geopolitical nature of its statements, the author examines the existing tension between that discourse's pretention to lack a particular place of enunciation, and the geo-cultural and geopolitical interests that shaped its production (p. 67).

Building on all the authors mentioned in this sub-section (the Latin American postcolonial school of thought), Castro-Gomez recognizes a clear link between such cognitive interests and an imaginary of ethnic superiority at the core of the expression of the ideas of The Enlightenment in Colombia. Thus, imaginaries such as blood purity (a traditional racist ethno-social aspect of Spanish categorization) do not counter modernity (as commonly held by modern social theory) but coexists with it. In this spirit, once again, modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin (p. 67).

Bringing theory into practice, the author proves his point through the presentation of a study case in the light of the paradoxical duality between colonialism and modernity. By carrying out a thorough examination of cultural traditions and practices of the Criollo society, Castro-Gomez reveals that the imaginary of blood purity coincides

with the enunciation place of the Criollo illustrated discourse. Consequently, the discourse of blood purity was the factor on which the subjectivity of social actors in Nueva Granada hinged. Being white did not have much to do with skin color, but rather with a cultural imaginary constituted by religious beliefs, dress codes, nobility certificates, manners, and ways to produce knowledge (Castro-Gomez 2005, 68).

The postcolonial school of thought constitutes a pertinent and necessary instrumental approach to the multiplicity of manifestations converging in the particular context of Colombian society. From the historical validation of the features that led to a hierarchical organization of society, to contemporary dynamics of internal inequality and global distortions, the precepts of this current shape the analysis and conclusions of this exercise.

4. FROM EXCLUSION TO VIOLENCE AND INSTITUTIONAL APPROACHES TO THE CONTEMPORARY PHENOMENOLOGY OF CONFLICT

Another set of theoretical approaches is the one formed by the corpus that frames contemporary manifestations of Colombian sociopolitical and economic life, as well as their link to expressions of armed violence. The following are analyses of how socioeconomic exclusion and its institutional materializations foster the emergence of violence.

Piketty (2014) develops a very detailed study of “the history of wealth, and the political and economic conflicts generated by its unequal distribution” (Piketty 2014, 736). In his work, the author remarks the pivotal role of public and private institutions in the way capital concentration affects society, the different dimensions of capital, power, and inequality, as well as the historical connotations of social classes under the scope of capital accumulation. In the end, the most remarkable conclusion of his work is the confirmation of the evident need to strengthen and reinvent democratic institutions so the traditional dangers of capital concentration do not end up battering societies. This explanation also seems feasible and applicable to the Colombian case, and was confirmed in the lecture given by the author in January 2016, when he visited Colombia to talk about capital accumulation as fuel for conflict (Perdomo 2016).

Historically, concentration of land ownership has relegated most of black and indigenous communities to live in violent, impoverished and isolated (physically and politically) communities (Yashar 2015; Oslender 2007). This relegation is a sign of the undercover excluding dynamics that constantly operate in Colombian society. Yashar (2015) blames the desire of the Criollo elites to convey a message of national unity during the times of independence for the contemporary state of relegation and socioeconomic isolation to which indigenous communities are doomed in Latin American countries. Furthermore, black and indigenous populations had to resign their own cultural identities during the twentieth century in order to be eligible recipients of government subventions to ‘the peasantry’, as a consequence of public corporatist plans, which ignored race and prioritized class.

However, public corporatism influenced the way indigenous, blacks, and other relegated communities identified themselves and mobilized for the recognition of their identity rights. Many of these communities started to make part of the impoverished, illiterate peasantry Quijano (2000) refers to. In addition, exclusion has motivated mobilization not only by ethnic minorities but also by peasants that sometimes identify themselves as second-class citizens due to the conditions of living which the system has led them to (Alvarez & Escobar 1992).

Oslender (2007), in turn, mostly remarks the havocs of black population that has suffered from forced displacement during recent years as a consequence of the late arrival of violent conflict to the Pacific Coast of Colombia. In addition to the traditional abandonment of the region by public institutions, this recent phenomenon arrived to aggravate the situation of socioeconomic exclusion in which the region was immersed long before the emergence of social violence.

It is also pertinent to assess the role of institutions in the tangled mess that the Colombian case represents for academics and policymakers. While Tilly (1985) understands conflict as an essential element of historic state formation, a considerable group of scholars conceive conflict as inter-group preference incompatibilities, which result in violence when collectively elected institutions fail to provide peaceful solutions. These theories correlate complex relations between the distribution of certain features of society (such as sociopolitical rights), the role of institutions, and the emergence and intensity of violent conflict (Galindo, Restrepo & Sanchez 2009). As a group phenomenon, extreme exclusion of individuals and communities may lead to higher tendencies to conflict, since incompatibilities become more intense. Exclusion and group formation may be based on social, religious, ethnic, or political enclaves, or even in income categories, wealth, or a combination of any of these aspects.

Intragroup homogeneity and intergroup heterogeneity are associated to high levels of social unrest. Although conflicts based on group exclusion are common in societies, they only become violent when the institutions in charge of conflict resolution, deterrence, or coercion fail in their purpose to maintain their operability (Esteban & Ray 1999; Stewart 2003; Ostby 2006). The mechanisms through which exclusion and inequality may lead to violent conflict are diverse. Poverty forces individuals and

communities to take more risks, since they perceive more incentives to act violently if social institutions are unable to stop criminal behavior. Under this logic, poverty, horizontal inequalities, polarization and a favorable setting for conflict mobilization increase intragroup cohesion (Esteban & Ray 2009).

In this spirit, poverty provokes institutional failure expressed in the service of these features in favor of minority interests, increasing the chances to violent responses to intergroup discrepancies. Strong institutions are a necessary condition to non-violent conflict resolution.

Empirical studies regarding the relation between inequality and conflict have been undertaken. Theoretical models have found that intergroup exclusion (Esteban & Ray 1999) as well as the lack of opportunities (Hirschleifer 1995) are closely correlated to violent conflict. Empirical findings also support the fact that fragmentation and social polarization (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol 2005) as well as horizontal inequalities (Langer & Stewart 2014; Gates & Murshed 2006) are also fuel for violent confrontation. They have shown how social and economic enclaves are related to the emergence, consolidation, and intensity of violence. Furthermore, institutional weakness explains the mechanisms through which poverty determines the origins and dynamics of violent conflict (Reynal-Querol & Djankov 2007).

These strands of literature emphasize that public institutions, public goods, and regulatory frameworks mediate the causal link between poverty and violence. A society with strong institutions is more capable of managing conflicts over capital and land distribution. Protection of people and communities, the effective implementation of justice, and protection of property rights by public institutions mean less incentives for violent mobilization, private offer of security services and predatory behavior. A key element to prevent and manage conflict is democratic control of such institutions. Problems increase when public institutions act against specific groups or communities. That can be countered through power division and democratic participation (Galindo et al. 2009).

Authors like Fox (1994) argue that electoral competition was “necessary but not sufficient for the consolidation of democratic regimes” (Fox 1994, 151) and that, according to different levels of democratization, it is possible to evidence diverse

combinations of clientelism, patronage, and pluralism that reflect, as well, different electoral outcomes. This approach resembles many of the characteristics of the Colombian political environment and is a clear evidence of the vicious circle that contributes to the perpetuation of violent conflict in the country.

Building on Fox's approach to institutional phenomena, Reynal-Querol (2004) sets out the discussion around whether the establishment of democracy per se is a sufficient tool for pre-empting wars. She argues that political inclusiveness, and not mere freedom, is the real factor observed in successfully established democracies that makes them less prone to war. The structures of exclusion and socioeconomic discrimination in Colombia could make very representative examples of what she perceives as semi-inclusive states, which, according to evidence, are probable scenarios for violent conflict.

The literature briefly described through this section is, in a way, more case-oriented and can be used as a way to characterize some of the relevant issues in the Colombian case that can perpetuate social unrest and violent conflict, as a complement to some of the more structuring approaches discussed in previous sections of this review.

5. THE ECONOMICS OF VIOLENCE

Understanding much of the unrest and territorially excluding dynamics that perpetuate conflict in Colombia need to be linked by economic interpretations of violence. In the end, economic deprivation could be one of the major calamities to which socially excluded communities are exposed in the country. It is precisely the economic element what makes inequality so evident, and the primordial factor for historical mobilization against the unequal social order. If economic conditions were other for most people in the different regions of Colombia, it is very likely that the historic rates of violence were much lower than they have been, even within a society suffering from other havocs.

This section will briefly describe some of the relevant economic approaches to manifestations of violence in Colombia. They will guide the research towards the understanding of how economic inequality throughout time has led to the emergence of violent expressions of social interaction.

Fernando Gaitan (1995) introduced economic analysis of crime to the Colombian case. He analyzed exhaustively, through statistical and econometric methodologies, different types of violence and their relation to the main social phenomena in the country. The author deconstructed recurrent hypotheses around the problem and argues that the main cause of the expressions of generalized violence is the collapse of the judicial system.

The economics of crime holds that criminals are rational agents whose behavior can be understood as the optimum response to existing incentives. They, then, base their decisions on a cost-benefit assessment. Such conduct can explain, for instance, the proliferation of illegal plantations in the areas of influence of the armed groups. According to Gaitan (1995), state inefficiency expressed in the form of a congested judicial system incentives crime by diminishing the cost-benefit assessment, since high earning expectations are perceived in a context where it is unlikely to be arrested and prosecuted.

Subsequently, Alejandro Gaviria (2001) explains the escalation of violent crime in Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s. Through a series of econometric analyses of crime based on the works of Gary Becker (1968), Gaviria concludes that illegality associated to drug trafficking was the main cause of the skyrocketing numbers of violence during the aforementioned decades. This is explained by three factors: the spread of criminal techniques, the distortion of societal values of financial progress, and the congestion in the judicial system (confirming Gaitan's findings). Thus, drug trafficking raised the levels of violence through direct and indirect ways, and the author attributes more expressions of violence to the later (Gaviria 2001, 180).

Another relevant explanation is that of Montenegro et al. (2001) which, apart from confirming Gaitan's and Gaviria's findings, adds the controversial statement that opposite to the common belief, it is not poverty, but wealth and disproportionate economic growth, the variables that are most related to violence in Colombia. This is particularly evident in regions where production booms of legal or illegal natural resources (banana, oil, emeralds, gold, coca leaf, and cocaine, for example) were witnessed. Additionally, the authors illustrated how drug trafficking generated endogenous and accumulative violence processes based on big-scale corruption of the different public institutions, especially the police.

Berry (2014) contributes to the recurrent aspect of an insufficient judicial system as fuel for violent conflict. The author holds that this insufficiency is mostly expressed in rural areas, where extensive landowners have taken advantage of it in order to occupy and plunder the land of local inhabitants. This has caused an economic distortion that deteriorates the whole system. In his words, "according to the theory of evolution, selection favors the organisms that best adapt. In the economy it is the same: when markets function properly, the most efficient prevail. But when neither the markets nor the political system operate properly, the result is this "selection of the worst". As demonstrated in so many countries and societies, such a balance is difficult to offset" (Berry 2014, 27).

Although econometric analysis often lacks –many times deliberately left apart by the discipline- subjective motivations that lead to the emergence of social phenomena, it is important to establish a theoretical link between some economic aspects of

the dynamics of inequality in Colombia and the emergence of violence. Such link will allow an explanation of how historical and exclusivist territorial relations of the elites with the rest of the population in the country are proved, material causes of social mobilization and violence.

CONCLUSIONS

While generally excluded from the core of conflict analysis, various socio-spatial conceptions within the scope of human geography constitute a solid base for understanding the underlying dynamics and the sociological derivations around systematic armed violence in Colombia. From their examination, it is possible not only to understand diverse features that contribute to an effective comprehension of the whole phenomenon, but it also constitutes a key element that should be taken into account at the moment of policymaking.

Especially after the year 2016, when the peace agreement with FARC was signed by the Colombian government, empirical evidence has shown that the understanding and management of conflict must transcend the sociopolitical sphere and should also pinpoint the structural mechanisms that mingle territories with the social occurrences happening on them.

Liberal geopolitical approaches locate the nature of conflict in a globalized world but also warn about the dangers of careless multinational state-building commands.

The conceptions of othering allow identifying historical continuities of space appropriation grounded on imaginaries of colonist superiority, and the notion of institutionalization of differences explain the emergence of violence within socioeconomically unequal communities. In addition, critical geopolitics establish a recognizable nexus between social immobility and conflict.

The postcolonial school of thought connects the historical validation of the features that led to a racially organized hierarchy in Colombian society to contemporary dynamics of internal inequality and global distortions.

Econometric analysis can provide a theoretical link that explains how historical and exclusivist territorial relations of the elites with the rest of the population in the country are proved, material causes of social mobilization and violence.

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