

## Chapter 17

# From the Studies of Violences to Memories: The Construction of Victims and its Articulations with the State

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper presents some of the effects of Colombia's armed conflict in people who were displaced from their territories, and the institutional mechanisms proposed to address this problem. The author studies the cases of El Salado (Bolívar Department) and Nueva Venecia (Department of Magdalena) in a research conducted in these populations after the massacres of the years 2000 by paramilitary groups, and articulates the notions of violence and memories in order to question the current interventions on them in terms of transitional justice.*

### INTRODUCTION

Violence has always been part of Colombia's history and violence studies have occupied a central role in the country. However, only in the last years the subject of memory has gained increasing relevance in public sceneries. The reason why the latter social construct was not a focus of interest until recently is due mainly to a lack of language appropriation of the term.

In order to address the evolution of the interest mentioned above, the author resorts to her PhD project on Memories in the case study of Nueva Venecia and to some of the results of the project

entitled “Familias y Construcción de Memorias”<sup>1</sup> (Families and Memory Building), which focuses on the massacres of El Salado and Nueva Venecia, where more than forty people were murdered in February and November of 2000.

The first part of this chapter tackles the subject of violence. The second part focuses on memories and provides a summary of the theoretical aspects of the work and literature review-mainly Colombian and South American authors. The third part presents some of the results of workshops conducted with victims of the massacres that migrated to the municipalities Barranquilla and Soledad in the department Atlántico in the north

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coast of Colombia, with victims that years later returned to their populations of origin. Lastly, some final reflections and conclusions are drawn.

## **BACKGROUND: VIOLENCE STUDIES IN COLOMBIA**

Referring to cases of violence in Colombia seems to be an imperative for human and social sciences in Latin-America. Questions regarding the violent or not-violent nature of Colombians and the place that the country occupies in international violence rankings have been object of interest of the general population and especially of researchers working on the subject. In fact, there is a lot of literature written, since Colombia's armed conflict<sup>2</sup> has been approached by many disciplines in numerous studies. This chapter presents the summary<sup>3</sup> and context of the country's situation, in order to address more accurately the concept of memories.

Usually studies of Colombia's armed conflict tend to allude to long-term studies, starting from Colombia's independence wars, the battles of governors aiming to appropriate power in the country in the XIXth Century and the subsequent conflicts between members of the most important political parties, Liberals and Conservators, in the middle of the XXth Century. The assassination of the political leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April of 1948, is considered as the event that triggered what is known as the First Period of Violence, which ended in 1953 with the arrival of the Army General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla to the presidency. This event generated a considerable amount of written works. Not only in the academia but also in the literature and media. This event tends to overshadow other important events<sup>4</sup> and it is considered as the foundational incident of contemporary violence in Colombia. At least in the collective imaginary because violence was already present before Gaitán's assassination.

After Rojas Pinilla came to power, the Second Period of Violence initiated in the country, which ended with the fall of the General. This episode led to the creation of the Frente Nacional, which was an agreement between Liberals and Conservators to take turns in the presidency for sixteen years. That is, from 1958 to 1974.

The Third Period of Violence started with the fight against armed groups, which had already been conformed in the sixties in the form of rural guerrillas, and that still exists under the name of FARC (an acronym that translates as Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). After the formation of the FARC, other guerrillas such as the ELN (National Liberation Army) and the M-19 were created.

The appearance of drug trafficking as an actor in violence gives rise to the Fourth Period of Violence. Since the seventies, the departments of the North Coast of Colombia experienced an economic boom with massive production of marihuana. At the end of this decade the traffic of cocaine in the departments of the center of the country and the formation of drug cartels for the production and distribution of this drug generated a war between, towards and against the latter, as well as a unification of some other sectors of the guerrillas.

At the same time, paramilitary forces, the AUC, were being created with the aim of defending the dominant classes from the guerrillas. Since the nineties, paramilitary forces have had an important incidence in politics in the country. Although at first it was mainly in rural areas, by 2002 33% of the Congress was proven to either have active links with paramilitaries or had arrived to that political position with their support.

Generalized Violence is the term coined by Daniel Pécaut to refer to this situation, in which there is an articulation of weapons and politics. In rural areas, this control is wielded through fear, murders, appropriation of land, forced displace-

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