

Ethnic conflicts, neoliberal multiculturalism and pluralistic citizenship: Reflections on two cases from Southwest Colombia¹

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Abstract

The paper seeks to highlight some paradoxical consequences of multicultural policies since Colombia's 1991 constitution. Via the study of two cases of ethnic conflicts presented in southwest Colombia, it argues that state's differentiated treatment of indigenous, afro-descendant and peasants groups has strengthened essentialist forms of ethnic-based identification. This, it is argued, is a byproduct of the way neoliberal multiculturalism and its rationality to govern diversity constitutes these "ethnic subjectivities". In this manner, power relations are redefined in these places, provoking the emergence of conflicts between ethnic actors as a consequence of the reinforcement of differences in terms of territorial organization, differential rights, claim to state resources, and in the end, the conception of the public space they share. Rather than questioning the value of cultural diversity in a democratic regime, the aim is to highlight the need to change our understanding and treatment of ethnic diversity in public policy. This requires, first of all, a transformation of the conception of citizenship beyond a juridical and administrative status, as well as the abandonment of the entrepreneurial ethics of competition insert in current multicultural policies. Similarly, it would call for the articulation of these ethnic identities with a pluralistic ethos that defends diversity not based on ethnic essentialism but through a shared constitution of the public space by these actors.

Introduction

One of the most important changes in the Colombian political regime during the last decades was the promulgation of the pluri-ethnic and multicultural character of the state. The 1991 Constitution gave way –among other initiatives directed to open up the political system– to the recognition of the ethnical diversity that conforms the Colombian nation. In particular, indigenous and afrodescendant communities became the visible face challenging the homogenization pretended by the construction of the nation-state during the nineteenth and twentieth century (Wills, 2000).

The political "treatment" of diversity and difference came to the fore as the most prominent issue to make the constitutional principles of multiculturalism a reality. Matters of positive discrimination, differential rights, self-government, and communitarian organization and participation became central for these groups and for the state.

More than twenty years have gone by since these changes initiated, and although there are still an important amount of questions over their actual reach in terms of fulfilling the demands of these

¹ This paper is part of the research project "(Dis)-encounters in the public sphere. Multicultural Conflicts and Intercultural Convergences in the Cauca-Valle region" supported by the Center of Interdisciplinary Social Studies (CIES) at Icesi University (Cali, Colombia). I thank Carlos Duarte, Ana Cristina Murillo and Karime Rios for the inputs they provided for this paper, both with data for the case studies and feedback of the reflections presented.

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actors, unexpected consequences have also emerged as paradoxical outcomes of these initiatives. This paper focuses on one of them: the apparition of what we could call “inter-ethnic conflicts”. Certainly, the implementation of multicultural policies has met recently with clashes between rural actors that inhabit shared territories. Hence, the recognition of “difference” by the constitution – hitherto denied by the traditional mestizo-only state– has paradoxically seen the proliferation of confrontations among peasants, indigenous and afrodescendant communities regarding issues such as self-government, rights to territorial claims, ethno-education, and the provision of social services such as health.

Via the study of two cases of ethnic conflicts presented in southwest Colombia, my contention is that state’s differentiated treatment of indigenous, afro-descendant and peasants groups has strengthened essentialist forms of ethnic-based identification. This, it is argued, is a byproduct of the way neoliberal multiculturalism and its rationality to govern diversity constitutes “ethnic subjectivities”. In this manner, power relations are redefined in these places, provoking the emergence of conflicts between ethnic actors as a consequence of the reinforcement of differences in terms of territorial organization, differential rights, claim to state resources, and in the end, the conception of the public space they share.

The particular aim of this analysis is to highlight the political character of this problematic in order to understand how they take form and how these tensions might be eased. Thus, I must state at the outset that the anthropological framing of the issue is not the main concern here –notwithstanding its doubtless relevance– but rather, to consider how tools in political theory and analysis might help us to make sense of these issues.

In order to do this, I will develop my analysis through the study of two cases that may be considered as representative of some of the most important factors that converge in these conflicts, namely their ethnic-based framing and the role that multicultural policies play on them. After outlining the case studies, I will argue that the “ethnic” centrality of these conflicts is inseparable of its political framing, and therefore, that it is embedded in the play of power relations. Then, I will turn to analyze the role of neoliberal multicultural policies in these cases in order to show how what I call the “governance of diversity” becomes one of the central features producing these tensions. Finally, I will make some suggestions on how forms of democratic citizenship based on pluralistic ethics may give a possibility to transform these confrontations into forms of intercultural democratic encounters.

Two cases of ethnic conflicts: Land in San Rafael and Education in Inzá³

I shall start by presenting the cases from which most of the following reflections have been drawn. The first case is concerned with a territorial dispute between afrodescendant and indigenous communities in the municipality of Buenos Aires, whereas the second arises as a dispute between peasants and indigenous groups for the provision of education in the municipality of Inzá, both situated in the department of Cauca, southwest Colombia (Map 1). Thus, I will first present some important facts of the context within which the conflicts take place.

³ The research on these case studies has been based on three sources: local and national press, statistical data, and fieldwork through interviews with the actors involved. The input by research monitors Ana Cristina Murillo and Karime Ríos has been crucial in this respect.

The Cauca as scenery of ethnic conflicts

It would be extremely difficult to summarize all the important demographic and physical characteristics of the Department. A few lines would not do justice to everything that could be said about one of the most historical regions in the country. In present time, it is one of the most interesting places in the country, for it is within its frontiers that a great variety of complex phenomena converge. Its strategic position both for the armed conflict and the economy of drugs traffic, the advancement of megaprojects of transnational investment, and perhaps the most important for this analysis, the convergence of ethnic groups from a variety of provenances, make of this department representative of many of the current socio-political and economical dynamics the country experiences.

Map 1
Department of Cauca – location



SOURCE: IGAC 2006

Focusing on this last aspect, it is worth noting that the department is the second highest with population belonging to indigenous communities, as well as the fifth highest in terms of population belonging to afrodescendant communities and of population inhabiting rural zones according to figures from the last cense of 2005 (Table 1). It also contains 83 indigenous “resguardos” (reservations with autonomous forms of government and administrations) and 17 territories entitled collectively to afrodescendant communities. Most of these achievements respond to the historical strength of social movements, and more recently, ethnic movements in the region.

Table 1

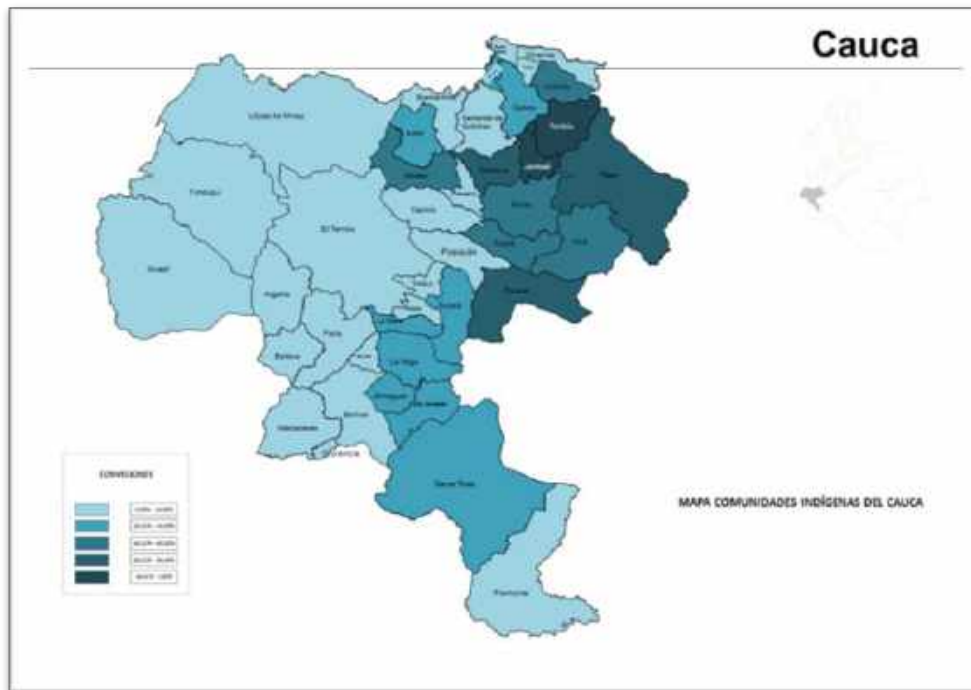
TOTAL DEPARTAMENTO DEL CAUCA

Categorías	Cabecera Municipal		Centro Poblado		Rural Disperso		Total
	Casos	%	Casos	%	Casos	%	
Indígena	17229	3,59	14.574	15,85	21.6729	35,49	248.532
Negro (a), mulato, afrocolombiano	126331	26,35	36.249	39,42	93.259	15,27	255.839

Source: Made by the author with data from DANE, Cense 2005

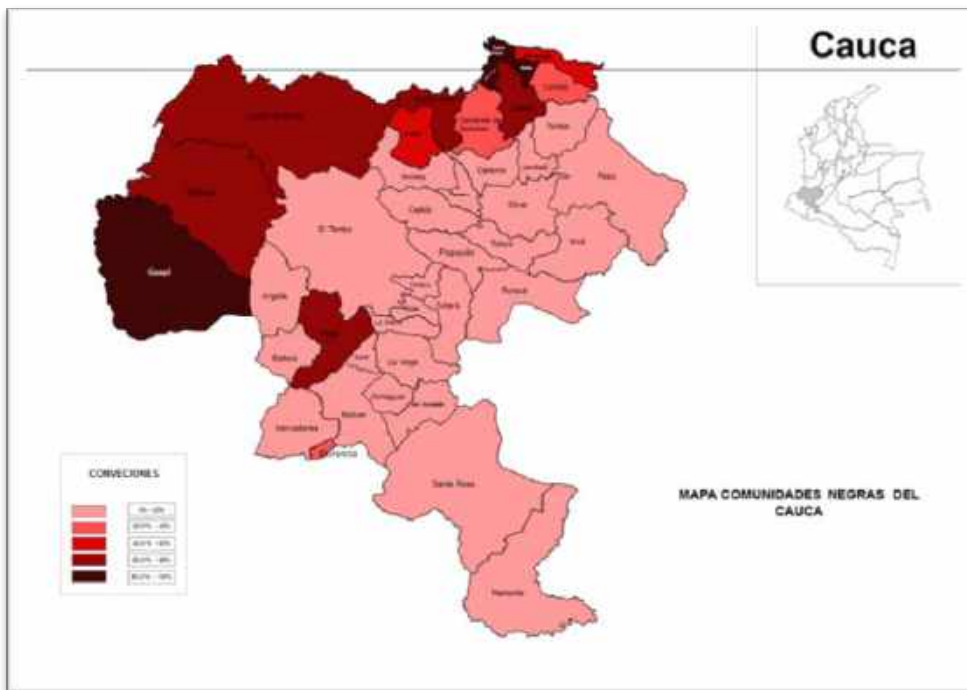
As mentioned above, within the department converge some of the most important ethnic minorities in the country, while we also find a history of organized groups of peasants. It is interesting to note in this respect, how their presence is more or less distributed in specific regions of the department, and at the same time, the fact that they overlap in many territories and regions of frontiers. The maps 2 and 3 display the percentage of people in each municipality that recognized themselves as belonging to an indigenous or afrodescendant groups. Map 4 shows the rural population that did not claim any ethnic background in 2005, and which could be associated, although just as a mere possible tendency, with presence of peasant groups in the department.

Map 2
Presence of indigenous population in Cauca



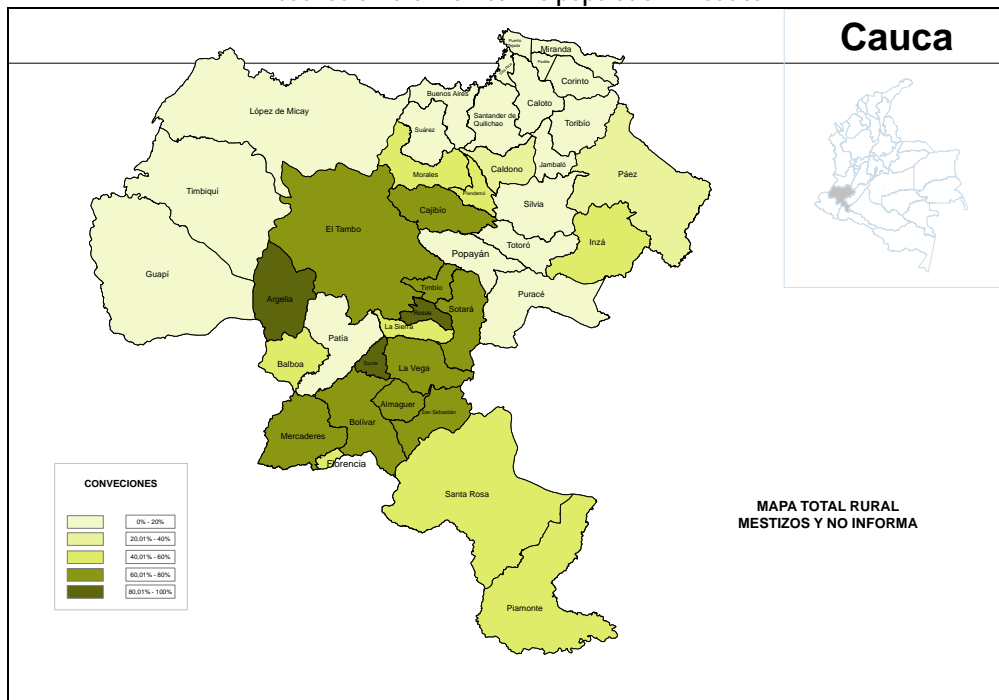
Source: Made by the author with data from DANE, Cense 2005

Map 3
Presence of black, mulato and afrodescendant population in Cauca



Source: Made by the author with data from DANE, Cense 2005

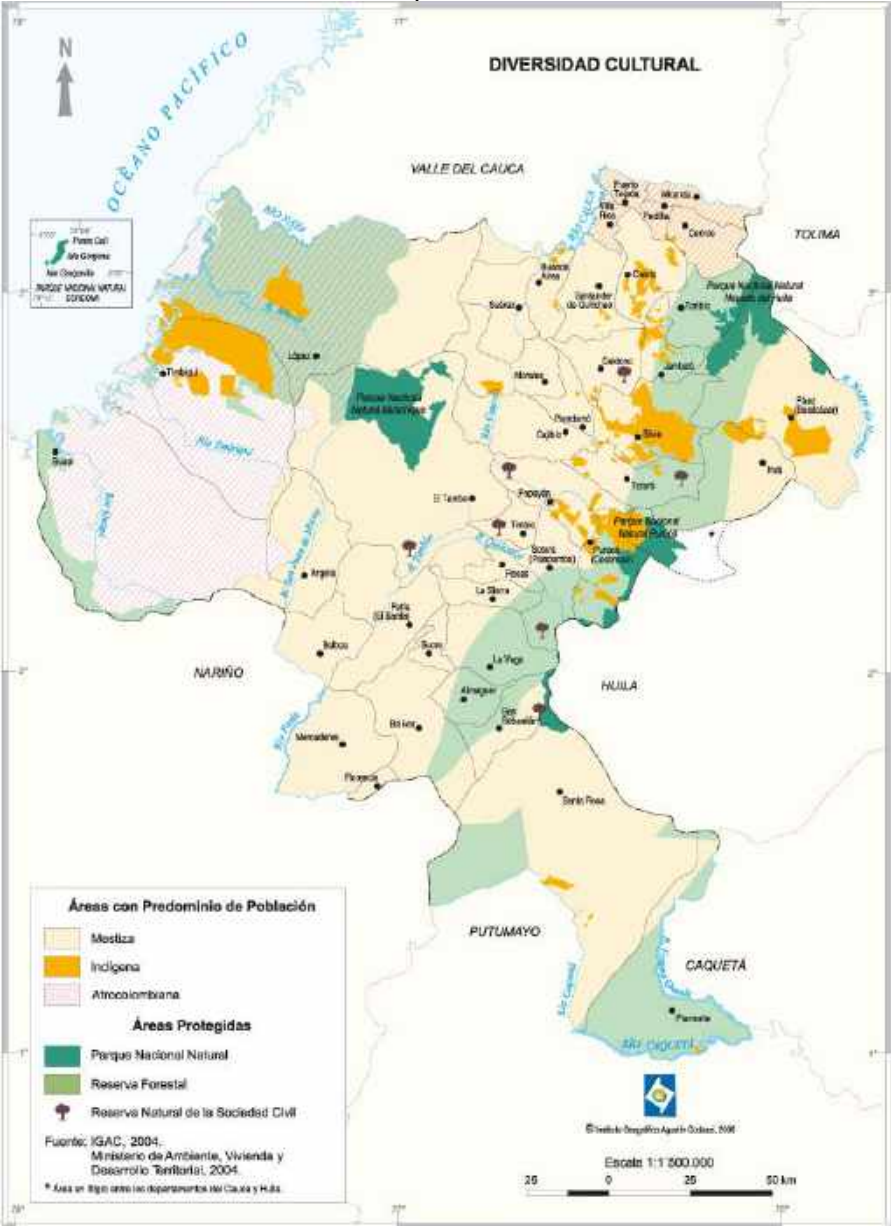
Map 4
Presence of rural non-ethnic population in Cauca



Source: Made by the author with data from DANE, Cense 2005

This feature is not in itself explanatory of the tensions that arise among these actors, and yet it allows registering the fact that each one seems to predominate in different segments of the department. The issue becomes more prominent when differential rights, territorial claims and state entitlements take place where, for instance, a majority belongs to one of the groups and a minority inhabits the zone as well, or when the provision, extension or acquisition of more prerogatives depends upon a movement towards zones where another group is already well established. As map 5 shows, this possibility is very latent as we will see with the cases under analysis.

Map 6
Intercultural presence in Cauca



Source: IGAC 2006

*La Hacienda de San Rafael⁴:
From territorial restitution to ethnic confrontation*

The Hacienda San Rafael is located in the northern-central region of the department between the municipalities of Buenos Aires and Santander de Quilichao (Map 7). These municipalities are predominantly inhabited by afrodescendant communities who have set up *communitarian councils*⁵, but it also has significant presence of Nasa indigenous communities (Table 2).

Map 7
Municipality of Buenos Aires – location



Source: IGAC 2006

In order to understand the factors that lead to the conflict between afrodescendant and indigenous communities in the Hacienda, it is necessary to go back to 1991, year in which 21 members of the

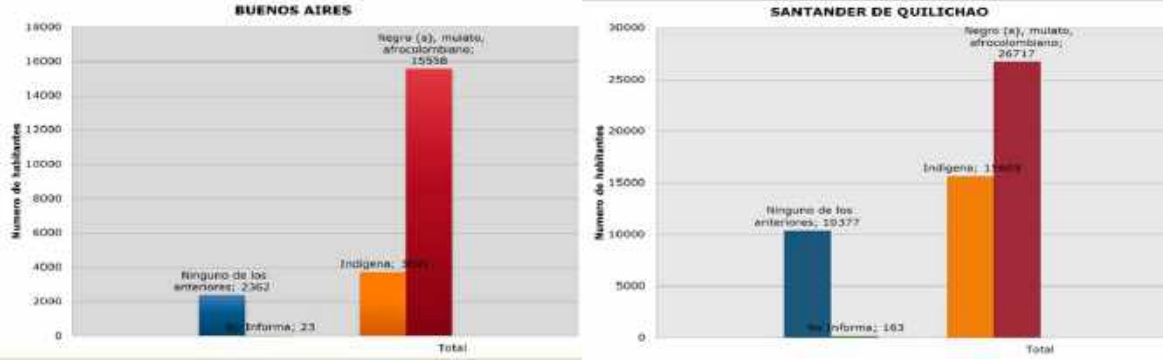
⁴ Although Hacienda refers to a very specific form of agricultural production, as well as forms of traditional labor and social relations, here is only the name that the extension of land that used to be such place took in the past. It remained unused for a long time and was *de facto* utilized by afro communities that inhabited its surroundings.

⁵ Community Councils are the legal form that afro-colombian organized communities take in order to exercise their political autonomy and reinforcement of differential rights and claim of demands.

indigenous communities of Toribio were murdered by the cooperation of state forces and paramilitary groups. This was the result of the attempt to occupy ancestral territories by the community (this tragic episode is known as “La Masacre de El Nilo”). Years later the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (ICHR) condemned the Colombian State to compensate the community with 15.663 hectares of land.

With the purpose of repairing the victims, the state bought the terrains of La Hacienda San Rafael (517 hectares) and handed it over to the Nasa. Immediately, afrodescendant communities, who for many years had inhabited the surroundings of La Hacienda and made a variety of uses of it, protested the decision claiming ancestral rights to the territory along with the requirement of the process of *prior consultation* with them before the decision was made⁶.

Table 2
Ethnic population in Buenos Aires and Santander de Quilichao



Source: Made by the author with data from DANE, Cense 2005

Even when the decision of the state to repair the communities with what was a crucial extension of land for afrodescendants was unexplainable, this did not mean that confrontations arose straightaway. It was only after some individual clashes for the use of wood, grazing from farm animals, the construction of fences and even houses from some indigenous families, and restrictions over the transit of people through the farm, that finally the conflict escalated into bigger proportions. By 2010 positions from each side toughened given the state unresponsiveness with alternative solutions. This led in 2011 to minor events of physical violence up to to the killing of a cow that was followed by a major violent confrontation between the communities with machetes and other artifacts resulting in injuries and accusations of a murdered indigenous. Ever since, distancing, distrust and disrupt of relations between the groups has been the rule while attempts to ease the tensions have been advanced by some of the leaders in the area through interethnic encounters.

*Ethno-education and the administration of public services:
Conflicts for the use of the Institución Microempresarial Agropecuaria San Andrés de Pisimbalá (IMAS)*

Inzá is located in the north-east region of the department and is inhabited by indigenous and mestizo communities, some of latter organized in groups self-identified as peasants. In the last decades, they

⁶ Colombian legislation contemplates the right to free, prior and informed participation of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations on decisions affecting their territories. Afro communities claimed that this decision violated this right, considering the land in question as theirs.

have increasingly questioned the state differentiated treatment of ethnic communities while leaving them excluded or marginalized from access to the benefits of these multicultural policies.

Map 8
Municipality of Inzá – location

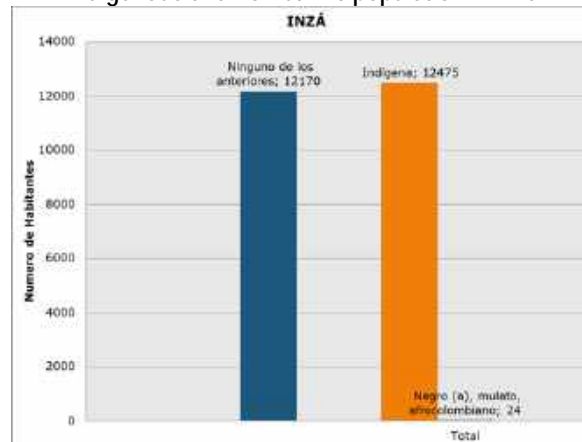


Source: Inzá Town Hall web page

These two communities have had a lot more connections, interchanges and forms of peaceful coexistence between them, even though racism and discrimination has been present from mestizo elites towards indigenous people historically. Nevertheless, only recently, tensions have acquired this “ethnicized” alignment in which peasants feel that indigenous communities are seeking to spread their presence and occupy territories through the extensions of their *resguardos*, effectively displacing them.

In this context, in 2009 the Departmental Secretary of Education issued an administrative act establishing the educative institutions that fell within indigenous jurisdiction. It included, among many others, the Institución Educativa Microempresarial Agropecuaria de San Andrés de Pisimbalá (IMAS). This would mean that administrative decisions over the institution would be made by indigenous authorities and not by the authorities from the municipality of Inzá. This decision was not well received by mestizo communities due to the fact that their children had been receiving classes together with indigenous ones over the last years without major inconvenients. By 2010 the same Secretary issued a different decree in which IMAS was excluded from the list of indigenous educative institutions, leading finally to the occupation of the institution by indigenous from the *cabildo* of San Andrés who claimed their right to ethno-education also established by Colombian legislation.

Table 3
Indigenous and non-ethnic population in Inzá



Source: Made by the author with data from DANE, Cense 2005

Following these events, violent incidents have continued, including unknown threats, injuries in personal confrontations, closing of roads, and even the alleged murder of one of the students⁷. The problem regarding education services has not been the only matter at stake, for the occupation of territories and other issues have also lead to more grave situations. In the 28th March 2013 papers registered the burning of the XVIII century doctrine chapel, part of the Archaeological World Heritage declared by UNESCO in San Andrés de Pisimbalá. The accusations have fallen directly to indigenous people as responsible of the incident; however the matter is still under investigation.

Capilla Doctrinera en San Andrés de Pisimbalá



Source: Press reports⁸

Identity politics and ethnic conflicts: Beyond territorial and material claims

It is certainly difficult to synthesize all the relevant elements that these cases involve, neither is it the aim of the accounts just presented. Each one may deserve a separate research and analysis, not to mention all the elements that the development of multiculturalism in Colombia may help to outline a

⁷ The relation between this murder and the problem with IMAS has not been confirmed so far.

⁸ Sources consulted on the 28th of March 2013: Image of the chapel before <http://elpueblo.com.co/popayan/queman-iglesia-en-san-andres-de-pisimbala/>, and after <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/articulo-413075-restos-de-un-lugar-historico>.

more profound understanding of them. Accepting the limits of this presentation, I turn to the reflections that are possible to draw from them under these conditions.

Due to the history of dispossession and inequality in the region, academic literature has contended that more than ethnic conflicts, these are the expression or continuation of longer historical trajectories of the unresolved problem of land distribution in the country. If conflicts emerge it is not as a consequence of the competition between interests of ethnic groups, nor should it be this considered the main cause of these conflicts, rather they respond to deeper and longer problems of injustice, marginalization, displacement and unequal possession of land, and absence of state presence (Caballero, 2011; Gamarra, 2007; Hoffmann, 2002; 2007; Houghton, 2008).

Undeniably, these historical and structural factors are fundamental to understand and provide solutions to the emergent tensions. Yet, seen through political lenses I would sustain that these conflicts are to be understood above all as ethnic conflicts. The point rests upon a comprehension of how political relations are conceived and of what is at stake in them.

When referring to political relations we must differentiate between politics and the political. The first is concerned with the institutional and more formal dimension of daily politics, related to elections, parties, and public administration and policies. They are however subsidiary to the wider constitution of power relations in the realm of the political. The political therefore precedes politics, insofar as it is in the definition of these power relations that spaces, actors and practices acquire specific dispositions that are the condition of possibility of daily political and social interactions (Rosanvallon, 2003; Mouffe, 2009).

How are these dispositions defined in the political? It is through the constitution and re-constitution of the political community, the definition of the "Us" that gives identity to those who belong to it, as well as meaning to their practices, and finally, form to the symbolic spaces they share. Simultaneously, this implies the necessary demarcation of a "them", the "other" that either is defined as the enemy, or simply becomes the excluded, marginalized, or invisible from the political realm. This is the core of political relations as relations of power, which are therefore inescapably defined both, by a pluralism of world views and forms of life, and therefore antagonistic and conflictive relations for the definition of a symbolic public space (Rancière, 1999; Mouffe, 2009; Nieto, 2012a).

Multicultural principles are an interesting instance of this dynamic of the political, for one of its intentions is to include and recognize the diversity of groups that constitute a given nation-state. Traditionally in the attempts to build nation-states the us/them frontier implied the exclusion or assimilation of cultural minorities, so it is certainly a challenge to this view of the political to conceive a form that defines itself as inclusive of diversity. If any form of inclusion that constitute the "us" implies a form of exclusion, the definition of a "them", how is the frontier established in the case of multiculturalism given its pretension to include the diversity of excluded? It seems that the case studies provide us with reasons to sustain that what multiculturalism performs is a re-definition of these frontiers via forms of ethnical differentiation.

In the multicultural context, *ethnical identification* becomes the means of inclusion for those hitherto excluded; it is a requisite for being part of the politics of multiculturalism. At the same time, it rejects other non-ethnic based communities as not being of political relevance, for instance the groups of

peasants whose demands were more visible at the time of the Welfare State and the Import Substitution Industrialization in Latin America.

This is clearly revealed when peasant organizations claim now to bear cultural practices and traditions, that is, forms of pseudo-ethnic identification. They are also seeking to reproduce a form of cultural territoriality in the form of *Peasant Reservoirs Zones*, all in order to become visible in the public space and therefore claim differential rights too. Likewise, many accounts of the growth in afrodescendant movements during the last decades have registered these reinforcement of forms of ancestral traditions and ethnic identification that were not as noticeable in the past, a time when they could consider themselves also peasants or workers plainly. The “replication” of the model developed by and for indigenous groups seems to be the note (Hoffmann, 2007).

In this case, it is worth pointing out to the administrative distinction that are made between the afrodescendant communities located in the Pacific and Caribbean coast of the country, and others located in the region of our concern, or in large groups in urban places. The claims of the latter to autonomy and recognition is still very much put into question not only by the state and other actors, but in many occasions by black communities themselves, for they do not seem to fit the ethnical “requirements” to be part of these benefits.

Thus, the paradox is that the inclusion made possible by multiculturalism depends on the reinforcement of essentialist and dogmatic ethnic forms of identification that make the relations between these actors inherently unstable. Evidently, material interests and unfulfilled needs such as territorial rights and state provisions are a substantial part to understand the emergence of these conflicts. Nevertheless, it is impossible to make sense of these demands and of the tensions they carry with them, unless we understand how ethnic identification more than a given factor in the equation, is the prime political resource framing the struggle for these demands. There is not politics without clashes of identities, and in this case they are reinforced in racial and ethnical forms due to the value they have in the context of the multicultural politics.

Neoliberal multiculturalism and “The governance of diversity”: The making of the ethnic-entrepreneurial subject

What I find interesting is that while many of the demands are shared between these groups (i.e. demands for territory, respect for human rights, public services, and resistance to the insertion of transnational capital in their territories) they have not been able to converge in organizations or social movements lasting enough to achieve common transformations in this respect⁹.

In the context of multicultural politics is easy to fall prey of a simple answer: the reason is that there is a conflict between diverse conceptions of territory, governance, rights and, in the end, between worldviews, which would explain that instead of cooperating in order to improve their conditions, these groups tend to find themselves in a diversity of confrontations.

⁹ Experiences of convergence are not uncommon, however, but many leaders in these communities recognize that they tend to be sporadic and regarding specific common threats. Also, they respond to articulation between well-organized sectors within them and differ from the daily coexistence between grassroots populations.

In the research that supports this paper, there was in initial intention to trace precisely these “different” conceptions regarding five categories that were considered representative of the discourses that support these actors’ practices: 1. Rights, 2. Territory, 3. Self-government and autonomy, 4. Inter-ethnic relations, and 5. Political Participation. Although these work has not been finished, the findings so far revealed something of great interest. Even though an intention to emphasize ethnical identification and differentiation is clear in all actors, it has been remarkable how similar the structure and articulation of these discourses is in each of them¹⁰:

- Rights – There is an emphasis on differential rights, and to the entitlements that are deserved considering the historical discrimination of the community.
- Territory – More than a productive entity – although this is not entirely absent– it is defined as the place that gives symbolic unification to the community. This is based on ancestral presence or as rectification for past or present injustices.
- Self-government – Autonomy over political decisions is emphasized due precisely to each group’s particularity. Here, the differentiation between forms of government and decision-making between groups is strongly underlined by the actors.
- Inter-ethnic relations – There is recognition of the importance to build horizontal relations between pairs with similar problems and difficulties, and who confront similar “enemies” (i.e. state institutions and transnational capital). Nonetheless, it is very common to find skeptical remarks about the feasibility of these cooperative relations in local and everyday practices.
- Political Participation – It is seen also with skepticism, especially in relation to representative democracy, and local politicians. This means that collective action and contentious forms of political struggle are privileged. This is one of the dimensions in which convergence between groups is identified as both desirable and necessary.

What I would like to put forward is that, albeit it is clear that differences exist between these groups, they are not essential to the ethnical identities currently held by them. They have been constructed in face of what I would call a “governance of diversity” proper to neoliberal multiculturalism. Beyond differences in conceptions of the world, what we find is the constitution of particular forms of “ethnic subjectivities”, that is to say, the demand and the incitation of desires in subjects to become ethnic subjects.

Multiculturalism, as a rationality designed to govern diversity, divides the population under its rule between those who represent ethnic subjects and those who simply cannot be rationalized in this manner. For them (i.e. peasant communities) the only possibilities are marginalization and exclusion, or their self-constitution as ethnic subjects. This is the classical racist division proper of modern rule that Foucault developed in its course *Society Must Be Defended*, and which, as I stated above, is a necessary part of the political character of these conflicts. It is through this division that political interventions, ranging from multicultural public policies, to administrative forms of regulations, along with security apparatuses, are deployed within this population (Foucault, 2004; Nieto, 2012b).

The emergence of these conflicts is not the direct consequence of an impossibility to live together, or of building political ties; it is the incitation of a racist discourse that sustains the political ties built in this multicultural governance of diversity –pervading identities, relations and practices within each

¹⁰ Discourses on each category are constructed from official communications of the most representative organizations of each group in the zone, as well as through interviews to some leaders and individuals that belong to them.

group– what in the end explains the emergence of conflicts. The intense racist character of neoliberal multiculturalism, explains why state's differentiated treatment of indigenous, afro-descendant and peasants groups who share a political space or territory strengthens essentialist forms of ethnic-based identification within them. I would argue further, that the strengthening of essentialists ethnic forms of identification has growth alongside a particular ethics that permeates all the rationality of governance in multiculturalism, which is supported on neoliberalism.

I would like to develop some lines on this articulation between neoliberal rule and the governance of diversity in which multiculturalism has been transformed¹¹. It is central to highlight in this respect that such governance is not dependent on state direct interventions. Under neoliberalism what matters is to limit state intervention, but this is by no means the end of governance but only its beginning. Keeping this important characteristic of neoliberal rule in mind, let us see some of its clearest expressions in its articulation with multiculturalism:

Firstly, we have the constitution of the entrepreneurial subjects, a fundamental characteristic of neoliberal rule. Are we to say that indigenous, afrodescendants, and peasant subjects fall within this category? It is clear for anyone who has worked closely in the consecution of resources and benefits for or within these groups that there is a demand to become much more efficient, able to formulate, implement and evaluate social projects they themselves are responsible to manage. It is surprising how much some ethnic organizations have implemented this rationality of projects, indicators, and efficiency within themselves in order to operate autonomously. The launching of indigenous health care services and afrodescendant-specialized financial institutions are evidence of this phenomenon.

Secondly and inherently related to the first element, is the so-called “government at a distance”. The constitution of the entrepreneurial subject means that the state is not going to take responsibility for anyone, but that everyone is responsible for its own fate. In this case, it implies that the state does not intervenes directly but only regulates the administration of services that are in general outsourced or dependent on the interests from private actors to provide them. That is why autonomy and self-government under multiculturalism is not necessarily contradictory with neoliberal rule. There appears to be a “responsibilization strategy”, or what others call a “chain of governance”, where many institutions and authorities compete to provide or outsource services and responsibilities in the communities. The amount of NGO's that intervene in this processes of social and ethnic projects, as well as academic institutions, not to mention many other private actors, are part of this chain that tend to be complemented –and in many cases compete– with local and regional public administrations.

Thirdly, competition becomes the principle governing the administration of multicultural public goods. In the context of neoliberal multiculturalism, differential rights, territorial claims, self-government, and above all ethnic identities are a form of competitive advantage in face of the competition for resources in which neoliberalism puts all these marginal actors of the market. They are included in market transactions only through this multicultural framing. It is as if there was a special market for the competition between them, a multicultural market to obtain financing of their initiatives, to become visible politically, or simply to be attractive for the wider market economy. Thus, difference becomes the added value in the competition; it is the possibility to claim an advantage over the others.

¹¹ Whether multiculturalism has always been neoliberal or not is a matter of another discussion. First, regarding the study of the political economy of its emergence in the world and Latin-America, and secondly in the discussion in political theory about its status vis-a-vis liberal principles of governance.

This is the most dangerous character of neoliberal multiculturalism. If you combine the ethics of the entrepreneur with strong forms of ethnic identification, the market competitor easily becomes the existential enemy. When we see disputes over territories, or over the administration of health and education services, there is something difficult to grasp in them, and that is the articulation of the economic man with the ethnic subject. This puts these actors in an extremely dangerous position, for this are not simple market transactions between individuals stripped off any form of identity, like the *homo economicus* of the free market. They are, as I showed before, political relations to the core, but they are not directed to construct a shared public space; they take place in the competitive realm of the market, where the step from competition to violent confrontation is a small one due to the dogmatic character of ethnical identities in neoliberal multiculturalism.

Ethnic identification and democratic citizenship: Towards inter-cultural political spaces and democratic pluralistic ethics

Rather than questioning the value of cultural diversity in a democratic regime, the aim is to highlight the need to redefine the understanding and treatment of ethnic diversity in public policy. The problem is not the existence of ethnic forms of identification in itself, but their framing in this form of neoliberal multiculturalism.

The questions remains as to how we may maintain the recognition of cultural diversity that multiculturalism was supposed to defend, while at the same time avoiding these paradoxical consequences. The fact that market rationality contaminates these principles should not drive us to contemplate state interventions as a solution to the problem, as sometimes has been the case when conflicts emerge and stability is put into question. The problems that administrative interventions "from above" bring about are well known in face of the experience of welfare policies. The divide and disarticulate as much as market competition does, not to mention their questionable material sustainability. A problem of recognition and participation cannot be resolved merely through material interventions, as seen in all the difficulties policies of restitution to victims have experienced so far.

Although it would be meaningless to develop a politics of recognition without a concern on material conditions, they require, first of all, a redefinition of citizenship beyond a juridical and administrative status (Fraser, 1997). If recognition is reduced to the administration of resources, being it from state institutions or any other form of governance, they will not resolve the problem of emergent conflicts between ethnic actors. To be a citizen must become the possibility of encounters with the "other" in order to construct shared political spaces. That is not to homogenize these actors up to the denial of their particularities, but to allow for agonistic encounters from their own worldviews (Nieto, 2012a). Interesting experiences have been developed in ideas that this communities themselves have proposed such as forms of inter-cultural territories, and working out differences in inter-cultural meetings.

They however involve an important demand on these actors: the abandonment of the entrepreneurial competitive subject and the embracing of a pluralistic ethos. This entails the transformation and articulation of ethnic identities with forms of democratic pluralistic subjectivities. In this way, forms of democratic participation and inter-cultural encounters would defend the value of diversity not based on ethnic essentialism but through a shared constitution of the public space in which the value of the

other resides in them being the condition of possibility of my own existence. This ought to become the rule of gold in the democratic governance of diversity.

Surely, agreements and consensus may become much more difficult to achieve, but the value of pluralism is the only *raison de être* of democracy and cultural diversity, which is why they must become the limit of any cultural demand. There cannot be a multiculturalism that denies its own existence by denying the existence of others, but at the same time, there cannot be a final realization of multiculturalism in which everyone is included. To defend cultural diversity as a democratic value demands the recognition its own impossibility, because closing the possibility of existence or emergence of new forms of life or identities would involve its denial. "What we are today is not what we may become tomorrow", a pluralistic ethos recognizes this fundamental feature in identity politics, where subjects that give life to inter-cultural interactions start from an awareness of their own incompleteness, that is to say, questioning any form of pre-established, dogmatic, timeless and essentialist form of identification. It is in the encounter with the other that they are shaped in contingent ways that constitute the commonality they come to share.

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