THE TRADITIONAL BASIS OF POLITICS IN COLOMBIA AND THE CHALLENGE TOWARDS A PLURALIST DEMOCRACY

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RESUMEN

Este escrito recoge las discusiones sostenidas por algunos autores en torno a las contradicciones del sistema político colombiano que oscila entre lo moderno y lo tradicional, produciendo una malformación en las instituciones y en las formas de asociación política, lo cual ha impedido, durante décadas, el desarrollo de un proyecto democrático, participativo e incluyente, y la consolidación de una condición real de la ciudadanía, al tiempo que ha hecho de la violencia el recurso principal para responder a la crisis desatada por este fenómeno, por los diversos agentes y fuerzas que componen el sistema.

Palabras claves: modernidad, tradición, ciudadanía, bipartidismo, democracia, violencia, clientelismo, crisis de la legitimidad y pluralismo político.

ABSTRACT

This text gathers the discussions maintained by some authors concerning the contradictions of the Colombian political system that oscillates between the modern and traditional, producing a malformation in the institutions and the forms of political association, which for decades has prevented the development of a participative democratic and inclusive project, and the consolidation of a real condition of citizenship, at the same time turning violence into the principal method of response to crisis unleashed by this phenomena, through the diverse agents and forces that make up the system.

Key words: modernity, tradition, citizenship, bipartisanism, democracy, violence, clientism, crisis of legitimacy, political pluralism.

Violence in Colombia has always been presented as a rural phenomenon. However, as noted by Daniel Pecaut, violence is not widespread in rural areas until after popular urban organizations were virtually annihilated. In this sense, violence appears without distinction in urban and rural arena, and refers to a process of social struggles. (Pecaut, 1985, 174)

In the context of these struggles have stood out two particular types of group formations in the socio-political history of the country, especially in the XX century. On one side is the urban grassroots mobilization (1944-1948) whose importance lies in the appearance of significant union actions, and secondly, peasant struggles for land in rural areas, expressed in the claims before the state of an agrarian reform , claimed by farmers and settlers.

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The state's repressive response to both forms of political organization deepened the growing separation between civil society and the state, which had been brewing for decades. It was sought to attenuate this divorce between the field of social conflicts and the political field by presidentialist politics ofAlfonso Pumarejo in 1936-1937, who tried to make the state a unifying instance of the social forces.However, for the decade of the forties, the crisis of the state revealed the breakdown of these forces, whose main effect was the widespread use of violence in defining the practices and political actors.This separation produced a process of deinstitutionalization, given the great difficulty that political organization presented in mediating conflicts between the various forces that went beyond regulatory institutions and social control. Thisdeinstitutionalization*"is one of the expressions of the crisis of legitimacy not only of the state but of the political regime, and the exercise of force one of its higher costs."* (CorredorMartínez, 1997.)

The intensity and dynamism of popular mobilization along with the systematic offensive of the ruling classes cannot be dissociated from the permanent exercise of violence. The offensive against the unions by the government in the late 40s of the last century[1], which will later extend against Gaitanist movement signified a joint offensive of the ruling class, contained within the associated political parties from August 1946.

Rural violence is part of the continuum of these social struggles predominantly urban (Pecaut, 175) and both, urban and rural violence, are the manifestation of the constant separation between the social and the political fields, which cause a dislocation between the apparatus and the power of the state. Beyond this phenomenon, the violence of the 50's is part of a whole dynamic of economic transformations related to the exports of coffee, which leads it to be more than the result of the struggle for power between the two parties. The separation between the social and the political, and dislocation that this factor produces in the state, appears here as a product of social and economic policy adopted by the ruling classes at this juncture, which marks a period of economic accumulation given the high revenue produced by coffee. Nevertheless, violence is not the result of the incursion of the agricultural capitalist structure, but rather the permanence of the traditional features that accompany this economic modernization, manifested, for example, in the removal of smallholders and the strengthening of large estates with a view to achieving a greater concentration of production.

> *"Violence is not then the result of the progress of capitalist agriculture, but rather of the forms of traditional political domination which accompanies this progress. The large estates play here the role of substitute for a political order in full crisis. But its role merely ratifies the fragmentation of power. "*(185)

Economic modernization, being accompanied by traditional forms that have led it, has been alien to a modern project. The political organization composed of the ruling class was unable to open to the changes demanded by the Colombian society and to accommodate the many transformations that demanded the entry of new actors and groups in the political and economic field, by not allowing the transformation of the old economic structures based on the monopoly of land ownership, strengthening the large estates and the concentration of power in the two-party coalition, whose highest expression was the National Front.

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1. It must not be forgeten that by 1943 the then president Alfonso Pumarejo had prompted a restriction on unions and the right to strike.

Thus, the union of the ruling classes in their repetitive attempt to block popular mobilization was never more evident than in the support given by the industrialists to the maintenance of agricultural structures in the years of the high productivity of coffee. Traditional ownership served as the basis for capitalist agriculture, by providing it with the political and economic conditions for expansion.The elimination of smallholders and the extension of large estates that, in regions such as Tolima and Cauca, seized neighboring possessions, meant, in turn, a process of agrarian counter reform (1944), and initiated the process of formation, strengthening and collapse of peasant struggles that took shape in the rural arena for the reclamation of land.

The agrarian conflict had its roots in the XIX century, a time when the government gave the landlords large partsof public land as a reward for their participation in the independence and as much were appropriated by them through speculation; but it is only until the mid-forties when this conflict is heightened and becomes visible given the character of peasant struggles in demand for land. The claims made before the state were answered authoritatively, with the use of the security forces to stop settler farmers who threatened to alter the dynamics landlords, so that during most of the XX century, settlers and farmers chose to use violence to get land or migrated to the cities.

Along with the struggles of peasants and settlers who claimed land, in urban areas, middle-class sectors and workers persisted with demands concerning, mostly, the right of union organization and strikes. For its part, on the side of big landlords and the industrial bourgeoisie that began to be constituted in the mid-50s, came other types of demands on the state, the first focused on preserving large estates through repressive state action against settlers, and the second in diminishing labor guarantees for workers in the cities. The

political system's inability to reconcile these conflicting interests and tip the balance to one side, caused the aforementioned rupture between the social and the political camps, which greatly affected its stability.As a result of this contradiction arose the *"ongoing revolution"* advanced by President LopezPumarejo, who *"tried to accommodate the interests of the peasantry and the urban middle class without violating the interests of the bourgeoisie and the big landowners."* (Richani, 2003, 47)

For 1936, the proposals for law for constitutional and agrarian reform presented by the government, had been the answer of the state to the demands of the peasantry and working class of the country. The "Ley 200" or land law finally appeared as an apparent solution to the conflicts of land through the modernization of agrarian structures, eliminating the unproductive landlords and proposing a more equal distribution of land. However, this answer on the part of the state manifested its own inability at the time of complying with legislation, that turned the "Ley 200" into a restricted and inefficientattempt to resolve the agrarian conflicts, that left the landlords intact and accelerated the process of conversion of the renters into laborers, unleashingnew and violent peasant uprisings due to demand for land. For its part, the ruling classthat controlled the state through bipartisanship, together with the industrial bourgeoisie, submitted president LópezPumarejo whose program was lessened under great pressures. As a form of giving into the pressures "Ley 100" arose, which widely benefitted these groups against the peasantry, denying the right to tenants and sharecroppers to become owners.

"Ley 100" reflected the great power of the elites who acted as a group in the formulation of state policy. These rulinggroups tried to perpetuate their dynamic of control over the political system through the bipartisan coalition that ended by giving form to the National

Front, whose apparent end was to lessen the wave of violence that shook the regions, although its real effect was the progressive exclusion of other groups and actors from the political system.Hence, before the National Front would have achieved pacifying the regions of the country, a new form of violence appeared, fruit of the uprising against the state of three guerrilla groups.

> In the decade of the 60s, in the name of the people and historic materialism, arose three guerrilla movements: the ELN (Army of National Liberation) oriented by the Cuban ideology, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, founded in a form of agrarian communism and the EPL (Popular Liberation Army), essentially made up of peasants. (García Villegas, 2000, 18)

As peasant organizations in their struggle for land, the genesis of the guerrillas respond to the conformation of the so-called *"farmers republics"* or *"independent republics"*, established in the localities of Marquetalia yRiochiquito, which toward the decade of the 50s and 60s had a significant impact, especially in the first years of the FrenteNacional (National Front). Its social base, predominantly farming community, has not changed considerably since Manuel Marulanda, Jacobo Arenas y RigobertoLozada,among others, initiated their command and set their dominion in areas of farming colonization.

From 1984 the guerrillas experienced a significant growth. Likewise, the decade of the eighties was characterized by widespread manifestations of popular protests and marked, in the rural sector, the re-emergence of the faring community struggle, that broke the perceived calm that followed after the defeat of the agrarian movement in the first years of the decade of the 70s, when after the Chicoral

accord of 1972, the then president MisaelPastranapromotedthe process of agrarian counter-reform that greatly benefited the landowners, who again received guarantees from the State in terms of the distribution of land to the peasant communities would be limited. In this context, as noted by Leon Zamosc, we are witnessing a process of consolidation of capitalism where the peasantry evolves as a social subject, and takes its struggle toward the defense of the free peasant economy, and towards the search for political freedoms that are associated with the role of citizenship. (Leal and Zamosc, 1999, 317)

However, for these same years we witness the consolidation of a new force that promoted an agrarian counter-reform movement. The new landlord class that emerged through drug trafficking and smuggling of emeralds got large tracts of fertile land, accelerating an annuitant type capitalist development in agriculture sector, through livestock farming and land speculation.The 80s configured thus, a new dynamic in the armed conflict within the country. The problem between land-rent based economy that collided head-on with subsistence farmer economy (represented by peasants, poor settlers, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities), historically managed by the oligarchy that since the 20s had led the conflict against the forces that threatened it, gave way to new social forces such as agribusiness, multinational corporations and, especially, to the narco-bourgeoisie, configuring new actors that stepped up the conflict. Accompanied by this dynamic of concentration of land, the landlord class built their militias and self-defense forces and the bourgeoisie their paramilitary organizations in rural areas, to which were added the forces of the state that had no great difficulty in allying with these groups, as the guerrillas represented their common enemy.[2]

The continued use of violence on the part of the diverse groups that they have encounteredhas caused the civilian population to be stuck in the middle of this conflict, bringing as a consequence, apart from the civil deaths the war has caused, the progressive de-articulation of the attempts at civil mobilization.

> ...in Colombia, the presence of various and confusing enemies -social and institutional-, as well as the devaluation of democracy as a political option, will discourage the attempts at social mobilization and will reduce social practices to the individual strategy of "save yourself", which was a cause and effect as well as the de-legitimizationof the system.(García Villegas, 24)

Also, while the violence has become more uncontrollable, the government has responded through the legaldimension, placing institutional emphasis in the legitimization and symbolic use of the legal apparatus, with it has tried to compensate the incapacity that it manifests at the moment of response, without achieving results, to the demands of the society in political terms.For the sociology of law, the symbolic use of the legal apparatus opposes the instrumental use of it, while the former is directed towards achieving specific purposes through certain means, unlike the second which is oriented to the production of representations in contexts interpretation is predominant[3]. In this way the instrumental inefficiency of the state -that operates in conjunction with the use of violence as another source of its delegitimization- has tried to be filled through the production of law, which has offered no real solution to the demands of security, political participation and social justice.

The social uprooting of the political system and its historical inability to gather different groups and actors that move in the field of civil society around the formulation of government policies, have hampered a political solution to these problems, which have passed to being addressed by institutional means, whose discursive solutions have meant the omission of the social problem as such.In this sense, legal ideology has operated as an element that has tried to cover the state's inability to offer real and viable solutions to both social and democratic security problems and delegitimization of the political regime.

The challenge of citizenship and democracy

The political modernity stands under the primacy of democracy, whose support is the citizen.The condition of citizen synthesizes the character with which modernity has clad the subject, a free and independent man, who is in a relationship of equality with respect to the rights and obligations that link him to a national community and that defines his practices and processes of political representation and participation.Political democratization Zamoscsays, "is the historical process by which citizenship becomes the guiding principle of political life." (Leal and Zamosc, 31).This process of democratization and citizenship in Europe cannot be separated from a process of consolidation of capitalism, which extended citizenship the width of the population, taking all to the political arena. The bourgeois

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2. However, at the beginning of drug trafficking when it was barely up a system through the illicit drug economy, drug traffickers, or the new emerging bourgeois class, accepted the rules of the guerrilla which intervened in market relations between sellers and buyers of drug crops; ie, between peasants and drug traffickers, through taxes and rates that allowed for the financing of guerrilla groups. It was only until the mid eighties when paramilitary groups, working for drug traffickers, sought to eliminate the interference of the guerrillas in the drug business, which resulted in the intensification of the war.

3. This clarification is made by Villegas in footnote n ° 52 of his essay, which also specifies the different ways in which this distinction has been used by the sociology of law. GARCIA VILLEGAS, Mauricio. "Estado, derecho y crisis en Colombia" (State, law and crisis in Colombia). In: Estudios Políticos N17 (Political Studies N17), from July to December 2000. Universidad de Antioquia, 2000.

revolutions give faithful account of this phenomenon, with the abdication of monarchical absolutism and the rise of a democratic political order.The value of citizenship is that its extension to the subordinate sectors of the population cannot shake the social struggle as it is a process of revindication and recognition of individuals as members and key players in shaping the social and political order.To this extent, no citizenship project is found outside the mobilizations and popular struggles, which constitute the driving force for a democratic opening.The tensions that are embedded in the space of popular mobilizations, shape the space of political struggle which from Foucault is known to have tried to be hidden by the great meta-narratives, where it appears as a marginal type of knowledge, even when it constitutes historical knowledge, able to modify and redefine the relationships and dynamics of power. (Foucault, 1992, 23)

Citizenship then, as an essential component of democracy, is about "a social struggle that must be won by those who have a priority interest in the universalization of political democracy." (Leal yZamosc, 315). In Colombia, the absence of a real project of nation and the historical continuity of the marked axis **church-estate-parties** that has prevailed in the social arena since the closure of the political, using patronage in all its forms, as well as the excessive use of force to remain in power has thwarted the implementation of a real character of citizenship.Likewise, the late economic modernization influenced this process, all of which produced that in the absence of citizenship and the low value assigned to it by the elites and the state, they have downplayed the collective struggles and social movements as relevant forces in shaping state policies and the course to where it should lead society.

Since the XIX century and closer to the present day, with the formation of the National Front, social movements and popular demands were divested of its character of struggles for citizens and democracy. This coupled with the persistence of nineteenth-century image of conceiving large groups of the Colombian population as uneducated and dispersed crowds, composed of minors, unable to make decisions and stand up for themselves, like the natives, African descendants of, women or peasants who were seen as idiots because their rural character.In this sense, as quoted by Leal and Zamosc "plebeian demonstrations continue to be viewed as mundane reactions whose motivations are always linked to the immediate conditions of existence" (315), unable to influence in the political sphere, and historically underestimated by political and economic forces.

widely influential driving force for the consolidation of this project in Europe.The new class with which it emerged had been born in opposition to the absolutist power of the nobility, and had managed to hold up against the proletariat.In Colombia, the capitalist bourgeoisie which was consolidated from middle of last century does not represent a break with the past, and advances without antagonisms, perpetuating the historical relations of the oligarchic groups who control the state and make use of violence to prevent the resistance of other classes that **threatens** to destabilize it. In this regard, notes William Ramirez:

> Classes that as the Colombian bourgeoisie have not gone through the school of social revolution, tend to neglect the development of their identity and their acceptance by consent of society at all.They give rise to the appearance of partial ends counter-current to the end that, as an established project legitimizes the global society. And therefore give rise to the hypertrophy of certain means, in this case violence, which not to be assimilated by the general purpose, in this case democracy, become legalities of their own ends. (Ramirez Tobón, 1990, 89)

This made it so that while capitalism has meant an expansion of citizenship in the political arena, and has dismantled old forms of political socialization based on patronage and kinship[4], -above all in the urban sector-, this citizenship has not stopped having a restricted character, taking into account also the persistence of the imaginary that it had of this, to be seen as a condition and privilege that belonged to the influential classes.

The closing of political space and the repression of collective struggles calling for their insertion into this field caused the political problems to be conducted through the use of force as an effective measure used by the elites to maintain the status quo, while in the subordinate layers of the population the idea that violence was the only way to access their multiple demands was strengthened. This continued use of the relationships of power was inserted as an inseparable factor in the practices and forms of political socialization, strengthening a political culture in which coercion has prevailed over consensus. All these factors demonstrate that Colombian violence is not foreign to democracy, given the historical inability of the state to accept and incorporate the novelty and differences from other social and political forces.The political crisis as a result of this phenomenon that has characterized the country for decades, is manifested in the exclusionary nature of the political regime and the use of force by the elites who are vying for power and of the counter-elites that arise in reaction to the instability of the system, causing a collapse of legitimacy experienced by the country at the level of the nation, and highlights the inability of the political system to respond to the demands and aspirations of the sectors it represents in appearance, as well as its ineptitude to recognize the implicit difference these.This type of restricted democracy has floated in recent years, the problem of redefining existing forms of governance. The

lack of representation of broad sectors of society by traditional mechanisms of democracy, -political parties-, has led to the need to develop a new paradigm of more democratic governance that is imposed over the restricted and authoritarian old paradigm that still seems to remain . As mentioned by Antonio Gamuc for the case of Mexico, and is valid for Colombia:

> In this difficult transition is being played not only the establishment of democratic rules to process conflicts of society (...) but also a new set of guidelines to generate and effectively exercise political power is being shown (...) in other words a new paradigm of governance democratic in nature is brewing, that has just been born, on the old paradigm of authoritarian governance, which has not yet dead. (Gamuc, quoted in Restrepo, 1999, 54)

Thus, for the nineties, the observation of the socio-political context reveals a new fact: the resurgence of identity claims of an ethnic, religious or cultural character among which, for example, indigenous communities have acquired a visibility hitherto unknown and have shown their purpose and ability to enter the national political game. Along with these, other groups and social movements are increasingly taking power in the public domain. Civil resistance movements take precedence not only to state policies but other forces at work within the political system as is the case with the guerrillas; there are also feminist movements; movements for sexual rights; environmental movements. These revindications,-primarily ethnic in nature, have been accompanied by the construction of political discourses, organizations and political parties, which are manifested in terms of requirement for insertion in the nation and state policies.

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4. These practices, as noted in previous pages, do not disappear entirely, but undergo a mutation, such is the case of clientelism that goes from being primarily ascriptive to purely instrumental.

All projects of democracy in Colombia have to pass through a process of recognition both of the diversity of its actors as for the political struggle expressed through new social movements. This recognition, to which Taylor appeals, is inseparable from the pursuit for diversity that Mouffe points out as an essential condition for the establishment of a pluralist democracy, that builds upthe character of politics in the multiplicity and contradiction that surrounds the subjects and in the recognition of the conflict as a constitutive element in configuring the public space where political practices and struggles take shape.

> The relationships of power and authority cannot disappear completely, and in this sense it is important to abandon the myth of a transparent society reconciled with itself, because this type of fantasy leads to totalitarianism. The project of radical and plural democracy, however, requires the existence of multiplicity, plurality and conflict in which is seen the raison d'être of politics. "(Mouffe, compiled by Santana, 1995 , 299)

The recognition of the different actors that make up the political system as actors, and the importance of the political struggle expressed through the social movements that escape the centrality of the state and underlie the real character of the civil society as a principal focus of democracy and has placed in checkmatethe centrality of the state and the system of parties, making a progressive politicizationof the civil society, strengtheningthe character of the citizens. The invocationof the social appeal to the demand of the new actors expressed through the new social movements. In this way, "The reorganization of society is interpreted in function of the rising of renewed forms of collective action that incorporate new points of views and interests."
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Gramsci has already pointed out with greaterauthorityby arguing that in our era it is imperative not the restructuring of ideologies, of parties or a particular conception of state, but rather the reconfiguration of politics itself, the rethinkingof the dynamic and relations of power. In this context, in the middle of this great crisis that everyone identifies in the modernity, of its no longer valid concepts, and subordinate promises, the great legacy that as a heritage for future times saved modernity for politics and that even today has not completely materialized: the general interest, basedin a real democratic project constitutes, without a doubt, the link from whence must be reconfigured these new forms of doing, building and continuing the politics in Colombia, in as much as this implies a process that involves all the subjects as shaping elements of a social order from which is directed and glimpsed the dynamic that the state should follow. In this sense, the Constitution of 1991 meant an important advance towards the acquisition of democracy, by opening doors to participation and the recognition of citizenship to actors and groups who have historically been excluded from the political arena, advancing thus a

process of re-composition of the political system.However, the Constitution of 1991 was promulgated as an answer to a crisis of legitimacy and security that had heightenedin the country, product of a new wave of violence that the drug cartels triggered, thus,the same as the constitutions that preceded it, this was more the result of governmental initiative, than the product of popular mobilization. (García Villegas, 31)

In this sense, the challenges for those who face a project of real democracy in our society do not escape the challenge of breaking with the dominant character of a political culture that has imbricated upon tradition, and advance in the process of consolidation of citizenship, which is made difficultbecause of the permanence of the restrictions of the political and economic systems, that continue to weaken the formationof a real project of the Colombian Nation and the collectivity that allows the real incursion of the citizen into the public arena and guides it towards the general interest, all of which leads to a thinking that we are before a state and a society in formation.

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