

**Clara Inés García De La Torre & Clara Inés Aramburo Siegert (eds.):
Geografías de la guerra, el poder y la resistencia. Oriente y Urabá
antioqueños 1990-2008**

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Jairo Baquero | jairo.baquero@fu-berlin.de

◆ Economic, social and political processes interact, are mutually conditioned, and lead to a region's configuration or re-configuration. Specifically, violence, development policies and struggles over political power change the position of social actors. Thus, a region's configuration, distribution of resources, and economic dynamics depend on struggles between diverse actors in their attempt to impose their territorial and spatial logics. That is the main argument of the book edited by Clara García De La Torre and Clara Aramburo. Both are researchers at INER (Institute of Regional Studies) of Antioquia University, where Aramburo also coordinates the Study Group on Territory. This book is result of research works of ODECOFI,¹ a network that aims to study the spatial dimension of violence and the configuration of political power in Colombia.

The book is written within the theoretical debates on "space" that consider the way that social processes use space to configure or sustain power relations. This approach claims that power relations materialize in specific spatial configurations, and power is exercised

¹ Observatorio Colombiano para el Desarrollo Integral, la Convivencia Ciudadana y el Fortalecimiento Institucional de Regiones Afectadas por el Conflicto Armado.

through space (41). Post-modern geography took space as a relevant dimension for social analysis of inequalities and power. Space is also political, due to tensions and conflicts among multiple actors about its use and organization. "Social representations" emerge as multiple voices aiming at orienting regional projects on issues such as development, territory, citizenship and reconciliation. The category of "geographies of power" (39) is also relevant to the study of binary spaces, dichotomies of regional structures, and the emergence of "other" spaces in the sense of Foucault.

The general aim of the book is to examine the ways in which the armed conflict has produced new social processes and socio-spatial reconfigurations, which have been created by the interaction between war dynamics and social responses of regional actors located in territories in the East and the Urabá regions of Antioquia in Colombia. Thus, the book analyses "the way in which economic, social and political processes, as well as their spatial modalities, interact, are mutually conditioned, and produce particular regional' configurations or reconfigurations, within a determined lapse of time" (37).

The book is divided into two sections, one focusing on the eastern region and the other

on Urabá. On one side, the authors show the process by which the Antioquia's eastern region, a former marginal area, became part of the economic "center" since the 90s, due to industrial expansion and introduction of infrastructure megaprojects (hydroelectric plants and the Bogotá-Medellín highway). However, industrial development was concentrated in a small number of municipalities in the Altiplano alongside a periphery with a precarious economy, a sub-regional peasant economy and an intermediate developed peasant area. The authors criticize the policies on the part of the state to produce the "region" by imposing infrastructure megaprojects. Even so, another sense of place was created from below, with the civic movement of the Eastern Antioquia, which contested the state's development policies. The authors analyze processes associated with the war, including the growing presence of guerrillas until 2000 and the arrival and rise of paramilitaries between 2000 and 2004. The authors claim that currently, war continues in the region. The ELN was replaced by Farc, paramilitaries assumed new structures after the de-mobilization process, military forces expanded, and coca crops arrived. Social organizations mobilized to demand respect for human rights, but also proposed a new spatial organization: the creation of a "province" (173), and the "*Asamblea Provincial*" as alternative political project or a "third space".

The second studied region is Urabá. Diverse populations from Chocó, Córdoba, Sucre and Antioquia settled there, attracted by new economic projects, occupying territories ancestrally inhabited by indigenous people. The authors claim that the expansion of banana industry since the 1960s dramatically

changed the social, economic and political relations in the area. Land disputes have been carried out by settlers, companies, lands investors, roads builders, members of public farms and political parties (286), and the emergence and arrival of guerrillas in the 60s gave new socio-spatial characteristics to the region. One point remarked by the authors is the existence of various types of territorialities in Urabá: sociocultural, war-oriented, entrepreneurial, urban and hoarding-oriented. The arrival of paramilitaries transformed those structures, as they sought control of rich lands with privileged geostrategic positions, displacing peasants and ethnic communities from their territories. After the demobilization process, new criminal groups took areas formerly controlled by paramilitaries, for trading drugs and arms. The authors show that land concentration rose during the 2000s, causing social mobilization, supported by international actors. Resistance modalities involve civil resistance at Lower Atrato, indigenous mobilization, the creation of Peace Communities, but also "pragmatic accommodation" of forcibly displaced population.

This book analyzes the spatial dimensions of war in Colombia. At the center of its inquiry is one of the main goals of the armed conflict's actors: territorial control. Also, it shows the way in which local communities are not passive subjects, but groups that produce mobilization strategies, which also deal with the re-configuration of spatial social relations. From my perception, the book takes important steps towards understanding these themes. However, it also has certain flaws. Broadly, the book presents rich statistical and geographical information useful for studying the spatial dimension of the armed conflict.

However, the analysis lacks various elements that would help to explain how social actors try to introduce new spatial structures. More analysis of political process is needed to complement the technical analysis of maps and statistics. For example, the challenges of elites to the “province” project of the third sector in the east merits further discussion. Discourse analysis and interviews would help to reveal the main conflictive points between this view, and those perspectives of other groups.

The book should give greater emphasis to the role of the state, the *parapolítica* (regional political powers) and the emergence of criminal gangs (or the continuation of paramilitary groups) that since the reintegration process control various territories. It would benefit from a deeper analysis of more political actors, their goals and levels of influence, in articulation with the geographical dimensions of the conflict. In terms of war impacts, one could argue that for the case of the eastern region, the authors’ analysis is limited by their choice of income levels as dependent variable for analyzing economic transformations. In contrast, in the case of Urabá, the authors included more categories to successfully explain how forced displacement, economic tertiarization and urbanization processes, were encompassed with land concentration. ♦