

Entanglements Between Violence and Peace: New Interdisciplinary Approaches

Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung (ZiF) - Bielefeld University

June 24 – 25, 2019

Organization: Prof. Dr. Joachim Michael

The international conference *Entanglements Between Violence and Peace: New Interdisciplinary Approaches* is the first joint activity of the research group "Visions of Peace: Transitions Between Violence and Peace in Latin America". The research group represents one of the research axes of the Center for Advanced Latin American Studies (CALAS) whose headquarters was established in 2017 at the University of Guadalajara, Mexico. The overall research proposal of the center is named "Coping with Crises: New Transdisciplinary Approaches from Latin America". The general coordinators of the research team are Prof. Dr. Christine Hatzky (Leibniz University of Hannover), Prof. Dr. Joachim Michael (Bielefeld University) and Prof. David Arias and Werner Mackenbach (both University of Costa Rica). Prof. Dr. Carmen Chinas (University of Guadalajara) is the local coordinator at the CALAS headquarters.

The event took place on the 24th and 25th of June 2019 at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) of the Bielefeld University. The aim of the event was to bring together scholars from the Humanities and the Social Sciences, from Latin America and from Europe, whose work focuses specifically on the relations between violence and peace. The aim of the conference was to provide a space for the reflection and debate on the multiple ways in which peace and violence come to coexist under diverse circumstances as well as the tensions and transitions that can be identified between them.

As this was the first conference of the above-mentioned research group, its main priority was neither to present case studies on topics related to violence and peace in Latin America nor to discuss investigations on specific transitional processes that lead from armed conflicts to peace and vice versa. Rather the purpose was to discuss the often quite ambivalent and contradictory ways in which what is called "peace" and "violence" interlace or mingle with one another. As the opening conference of "Visions of Peace...", it served the purpose of a conceptual debate on how to think about the relations between peace and violence. In this sense, the goal was to promote an interdisciplinary dialogue between researchers from Latin America and from Europe.

For this reason, the talks delivered did not necessarily have a regional focus – and if they had one, it was not exclusively Latin America.

As the convener of the event, Joachim Michael, pointed out in his opening remarks, the approach followed the lead of Peace-and-Conflict Studies to focus on both peace and violence. That is to say that both peace and violence can only be conceived when related to each other. However, in contrast to Peace Studies, developed in the aftermath of Second World War, the perspective of an achievable “positive” peace without any kind of violence seems to be questionable. For that reason, it appears as necessary to study constellations of peace where there still is violence, as well as to investigate forms of resistance against violence and its expansion. The aim, in other words, was to bring together the disciplines of Peace Studies and Violence Studies that boomed after the end of the Cold War.

Angelika Epple, Vice-Rector of Internationalization and Diversity of Bielefeld University; Petra Wagner, Dean of the Faculty of Linguistics and Literary Studies at the same institution; Olaf Kaltmeier and Gerardo Cham, both Directors of CALAS, all welcomed the interdisciplinary debate of the research group and the transcontinental exchange of perspectives as a great opportunity for the start of CALAS’ research group on peace and violence.

The event was inaugurated with the address of Héctor Raúl Solís Gadea, Executive Vice-Rector of the University of Guadalajara. Entitled "Violence and culture of peace in Mexico today", the talk gave an account of the situation in Mexico in recent years with respect to the high rates of social violence in that country. In this sense, the graphics and statistics presented by Vice-Rector Solís Gadea, were the sample of a panorama, not only Mexican, but also regional and even global, in which violence, the attempt to overcome it and the search for more peaceful forms of conviviality must be understood from the complexity of its circumstances.

The first panel was composed of Teresa Almeida Cravo (Coimbra), Jaime Ginzburg (São Paulo) and Jose Vicente Tavares (Porto Alegre). Almeida Cravo, from the perspective of Social Sciences and the Theory of Law, problematized the presumed relationship between positive law and peace as well as the understanding of violence as somehow located beyond the margins of that order. Ginzburg, taking as an example the Brazilian author José de Alencar and the Paraguayan War (1864-70), showed how writers and intellectuals engaged against peace urging the Brazilian government to deepen devastation in one of the bloodiest wars in Latin American History. Finally, from the point of view of sociological Security Studies, Tavares gave

an account for the relationship between security policies (e.g. police, social planning) and their inevitable link to the understanding of peace in the context of Latin American societies.

The second panel, composed by Leif Seibert (Bielefeld), Sebastián Martínez (Bielefeld) and Burkhard Liebsch (Bochum), focused on the possibility of thinking about violence and peace from a theoretical perspective. In terms of Sociology of Religion, Seibert reviewed various attempts to justify war and demonstrated the collapse of religious legitimizations in the case of the Bosnian War (1992-95). Martínez traced philosophical thinking according to which peace and violence appear as intrinsically interrelated (Benjamin, Derrida, Agamben). Liebsch, finally, reflected on the conditions of possibility of peace as “the art of the second best”, according to which one must strive for the impossible in order to reach the possible (a kind of peace that is more than armistice).

The first keynote lecture of the conference was given by Lothar Brock (Frankfurt). In his historical revision, Brock discussed the evolution of Peace Studies after the end of the Second World War. In this context he referred to the threat of nuclear annihilation and violent liberation. Brock also showed how, after the Fall of the Iron Curtain, the debate has shifted to global governance and peace keeping missions.

The first panel of the second day was composed by the historians David Arias (San José) and Olaf Kaltmeier (Bielefeld). In his presentation, Arias discussed the right-wing turn in Latin America in recent years and the links between neo-conservatism, neo-liberalism and Pentecostalism. He concluded by pointing out a growing tension between right- and left-wing movements which advocate conflictive concepts of social peace. For his part, Kaltmeier signaled the evident contradiction of the use of war in pacification politics, specifically in the case of state repression of Mapuche movements in Chile since the 19th century.

The subsequent panel included the participation of Anders Fjeld (Brussels) and Carmen Chinas (Guadalajara), who presented their critical perspectives on two central cases for the understanding of violence and peace initiatives in Latin America, namely, the case of the Colombian peace process (Fjeld). Given its long history, de-institutionalization of violence in this country means the uncertain endeavor of breaking up with multiple traditions of doing politics by the use of force. Murder and disappearances of civilians in Mexico reached unprecedented levels, but various initiatives of female family members and social organizations persist in the search of the bodies and serve as an example that civil society does not resign itself to crime and state violence (Chinas).

Sergio Rojas (Santiago), Werner Mackenbach (San José) and Gilbert Ndi Shang (Bayreuth) formed a panel marked by philosophical and literary reflections on violent contexts. In Rojas' critique of 'capitalist realism' economic development appears as a process that deletes memory and the democratic promise of peace at the end of the Pinochet regime turned out to be its perfect opposite with the imposition of a stark neoliberalism. Mackenbach, for his part, presented a study of literary discourses about the civil wars and its peace processes in Central America in the 1990s. Finally, Ndi Shang turned the attention to the (post-)colonial histories of violence in the Congo region in Africa and the literary strategies to understand them in "The Trilogy of the End" of Sony Labou Tansi.

The closing keynote lecture was delivered by the Argentine writer Martín Kohan (Buenos Aires) who is also a scholar of Literary Theory. Kohan read passages of his essay *El país de la guerra* (*The Country of War*, 2014), in which he fundamentally demonstrates how Argentine history and nationality was founded from war. He addressed the close relationship between violence and civilization in the 19th century (Sarmiento) and traced the ways how the bellicose understanding of the Argentine nation traversed also the 20th century and culminated in the military dictatorship and the Malvinas' War in the 1970s and 1980s.

The participants agreed that the approach proposed by the research team "Visions of Peace: Transitions between Violence and Peace in Latin America", regarding the entanglements between peace and violence, is fundamental for a better understanding of both concepts. In order to make advances in Peace Studies and Violence Studies it proves to be necessary to create a place of dialogue between diverse research traditions.

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