



Raising two fists: struggles for Black citizenship in multicultural Colombia

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BOOK REVIEW

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Cárdenas' book is a comprehensive discussion of the contradiction between the Colombian multicultural turn, marked by the 1991 constitution and Law 70 of 1993, and the reality of violence and governmental neglect that Afro-Colombians face on an everyday basis. The book also presents Afro-Colombians' struggles for dual recognition as citizens of a nation-state and as members of the African diaspora. This book comprises four chapters and an epilogue that discusses the use of the notion of *vivir sabroso* (to live well) in the political campaign of the elected vice president and Afro-Colombian activist Francia Márquez.

In Chapter 1, Cárdenas explains how the multicultural framework has been used to create a false dichotomy between tradition and development. Moreover, she asserts that this dichotomy reflects the state's preconceptions and racist ideas of what a Black community should look like, and not the actual needs of Black communities in Colombia. Chapter 2 presents testimonial and statistical evidence of the disproportionate victimization of Black communities in the Colombian conflict. In this chapter, Cárdenas discusses how Black communities have been uprooted and forced to move to urban centers. Chapter 3 poses the question of the kind of reparations that would be appropriate given the types of violence Black communities have systematically experienced. Cárdenas stresses that the struggles of Afro-Colombians need to be understood in the context of Afro-diasporic dialogues and the structural racism that characterizes Western societies. She stresses that the violence that haunts Black Colombians is the result of an imperialist global dynamic of exploitation, that not only subjects peoples in the Global South to unbearable living conditions but also manufactures justificatory discourses under the disguise of multiculturalism and diversity.

In Chapter 4, based on testimonies and her own experience working with two of the major Black associations in Colombia – the National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) and the Process of Black Communities (PCN)—, Cárdenas argues that the violence that Black communities in Colombia have lived through is genocidal. Thus, contrary to a governmental conception of peace as the end of the armed conflict with certain groups, the peace that Black communities fight for is the end of all violence motivated by a colonial impetus of erasure and ethnic cleansing. Cárdenas gives us a window into the complexity of what she calls 'the genocidal spectrum,' and how that complexity contrasts with the official government's views on peace. However, I think there is a further conceptual issue overlooked in Cárdenas' analysis, namely the conflation of security – a sense of safety that promotes well-being and human flourishing – and defense – as the active exercise of identifying and eliminating an enemy – in the security model of the Colombian government.

Central to the rhetoric of 'defense' is the concept of the 'enemy.' This concept has mutated throughout the recent history of Colombia as a function of its relationship with the United States. In the 1960s and 1970s, the enemy in Colombia was understood as the 'communist threat' or 'the insurgency' mirroring the language of the Cold War. During the Richard Nixon administration and its war against drugs, the enemy became 'the narcotraficante,' a label that is still used today. Later, after the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, the Colombian government started using the term

'terrorists' to designate the targets of the national security/defense model (Colombia, 2022, p. 389). Colombia has not adopted a framework of its own to understand its problems with security, peace, and public order. Furthermore, this borrowed model has proven to be a complete failure in a country with one of the largest internally displaced populations in the world (6.8 million by the end of 2022), and an armed conflict that left at least 450.664 dead, and 121.768 missing people, all of this despite having the biggest, most expensive and best trained military apparatus in the continent after the United States (Colombia, 2022, p. 380).

Considering the particularities of the Colombian security model is relevant to Cárdenas' analysis, precisely because the conflation between security and defense is at the center of the tension she points out between Afro-Colombian and state conceptions of peace. Additionally, this security model, based on the logic of identifying, seeking, and destroying, is a main cause of the stigmatization and persecution of political dissidents, human rights defenders, and ethnic communities in Colombia.

Reference

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