

From On-The-Ground Constructions to Global Disputes: Reflections from the 10th CLACSO Conference and the visit to the Cauca Department



Guache (Colombia), *La paz es nuestra (Peace is Ours)*, 2013.

Greetings from the Nuestra America Office of Tricontinental Institute for Social Research.

As the Tricontinental Institute, we were present at **the 10th CLACSO (Latin American Council of Social Sciences) Conference** held from June 9-12 in Bogotá, Colombia, attended by more than 28,000 on-site and thousands of on-line participants. Under the theme “Horizons and Transformations for Equality: Democracies, Resistances, Communities, Rights and Peace”, the agenda showed a plurality of cross-cutting issues that highlight the current priorities for the social sciences in the region.

Given our work, a delegation of researchers from Tricontinental’s Nuestra América Office had the opportunity to exchange with various think tanks and intellectuals from different latitudes on the main concerns for the social sciences at this critical global juncture, in the midst of the rise of the extreme right in some of the countries in the region, and the strengthening of alternatives to the neoliberal model in others. All this while, live and direct, in front of our eyes, we witness a genocide led daily by the United States and Israel against the Palestinian people.

From the perspective of the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, this conference represented a strategic space to better portray the struggles of the peoples of the Global South in the face of the advance of imperialism, extractivist plundering and the neoliberal offensive. In this context, we firmly denounced the imperialist character of the so-called “War on Drugs”: a policy imposed by US imperialism that has served as an excuse to militarize territories, criminalize rural communities and consolidate territorial dispossession, having a profound effect on food sovereignty and the processes of peasant autonomy. Thus, the conference not only established itself as an academic forum, but also as a political platform for articulating knowledge, resistance and emancipatory proposals stemming from the living experiences of the peoples in struggle.

It was also a key space to deepen the discussion on the advance of extreme right-wing movements in the region, understood as expressions of capital in crisis. In dialogue with researchers from different countries, we analyzed the process of radicalization of the right wing, which in our region expresses itself in the criminalization of popular movements, the offensive against acquired rights, the sequestering of the State by oligarchic interests and the resurgence of neo-colonial projects at the service of imperialism.



Urban intervention in Ibagué (Colombia), *Las cuchas tienen razón (The Elders Are Right)*, 2025. Part of a series of murals with the same slogan which act as a collective action, in Colombia and other countries, in response to the censoring of the original work. It alludes to the mothers –the *cuchas* as they are popularly called in Colombia– having been correct about claims that their children had been disappeared.

Our visit to Colombia revealed living and concrete forms of regional resistance to the neoliberal offensive seeking to *cannibalize* all productive, social and natural fabrics to employ them in the accumulation of capital. Colombia shows itself today as a zone of rupture and challenge to neoliberalism. The rise of vigorous social mobilization – with a leading role for the youth, the peasantry, ethnic and Afro-Colombian peoples, the feminist movement and popular economies – has opened cracks in the dominant order and allowed the emergence of a political project with the will to take power and a real capacity to challenge the right wing.

In this context, during the Conference, key elements for a life-centered development model were discussed: a just and sovereign energy transition that prioritizes the rights of communities over the extractivist logic; a labor reform that dignifies work and strengthens the social fabric; and a decisive commitment to infrastructure for popular economies that restores on-the-ground dignity and autonomy. Colombia, in the midst of its complexity, embodies today not only conflict, but also the hope of what can emerge when the peoples rise towards their own horizon.

In the face of a global geopolitical transition marked by the weakening of Western hegemony, the Conference also underscored the urgency of deepening Latin American and Caribbean integration as a strategy for collective sovereignty and a condition for building real alternatives to the advance of transnational capital and the war industry.

These debates were the ideal prelude to the visit that we carried out days later in the mystical Colombian southwest, which brought us the main reflections about our Institute's tasks in its *Nuestra América* space.

For Tricontinental, it's not possible to produce social knowledge without ties and real and concrete on-the-ground accountability to the communities and their organizational expressions. Our reference point, anchored in the Gramscian provocation of the organic intellectual, presses upon us, as a political task, not only to work with, but to be part of those collective processes that struggle daily to transform inequality. This is the reason why from the first moment we planned our visit to Colombia, we wanted to add a few days of work in the historical, hard-working and courageous region of Cauca, in the country's Southwest. There, we were hosted by comrades of the Popular Unity Process of the Southwest of Colombia – PUPSOC, with the generosity and open heart that only those who love life and defend it daily know how to bear as a standard.

In a melting pot of colors, ages, generations, traditions of struggle, means of work, history and courage, our fellow peasants, students, educators, human and housing rights defenders, played the main role in those intense days of work and learning. They have built organizational processes in contexts where the only thing that seemed possible was hopelessness or resignation. With enormous courage, creativity and a deep love for their territories, they have promoted the creation of entire neighborhoods where hundreds of people without a roof over their heads, now build collective experiences of housing and community life such as the Ecobarrio Sinai and the EcoAldea Estrella Roja. They have also built experiences of peasant organization that, in the midst of war and abandonment by the State, have defended the right to existence, defended the right to self-determination in the Peasant Reservation Zones in the department of Cauca, and have built collective tools for territorial defense and resistance such as the Peasant Guard, who accompanied us on all the tours, particularly in the north of the department, where we were welcomed by the youngest ones with a tribute to the comrades who have been killed in the midst of the struggle and the defense of territorial and peasant rights.



Débora Arango (Colombia), *La masacre del 9 de abril (The Massacre of April 9)*, 1948.

It is true that the regional context paints a discouraging picture due to the perhaps exaggerated prominence of some figures of the extreme right and their politics of hatred and cruelty. However, in Colombia and particularly in Cauca, we learned that it is also true that hope, organization, as well as the present and the future, are built and woven in the midst of the immense mountains of Cauca, as in the midst of each of the deep corners of this immense America of ours, Nuestra América. Silently, without too much fuss, without too much press. Therein also lies our task, to highlight the voices of the dream repairers, as the minstrel would say.

From the Nuestra América Office we have the challenge to continue thinking about our vast continent from a regional perspective. With its dimension, its diverse realities, and above all, with the unbroken hope that it is a continent in rebellion that continues to fight against the neoliberal model, that disputes meanings, that builds scenarios, that thinks about the development of the region from a paradigm overcoming capitalist exploitation and the voracity of imperialism, and that makes solidarity its main premise.

Tricontinental today plays an experienced role in articulating voices from the Global South, in calling the enemy by its name, in challenging resignation and in proposing, from critical thinking, paths by which to transform reality and achieve victory. In this regard, it is also our task to better portray the experiences of struggle and resistance present daily in our class, giving name to those who silently recreate their own lives in a collective and revolutionary manner. At the CLACSO meeting, the concern about the place of our continent in the reconfiguration of the dynamics and actors of global power was obvious, and on this, we have much to say. As Emiliano Lopez, our chief economist, elaborated in the previous **newsletter**, we face an open scenario of opportunities allowed by this world in transition and in Nuestra América we are challenged with building proposals for the future and development for the entire continent.

With potentialities such as those we identified in Bogota in the exchange with researchers and intellectuals; with hopes such as those we found in the Southwest, which continue burning in our chests like that sea of small fires; with the strength of the Cauca, Patía, Magdalena, Putumayo and Caquetá rivers that originate in the Colombian Massif, irrigating and instilling life in all of Colombia; we will continue doing social research together with those who instill with purpose the existence of our Institute. This has just begun.

Laura Capote, Maisa Bascuas and Delana Corazza



Guache (Colombia), *Paz con Pan (Peace with Bread)*, 2013.

ps /// For this month of July, full of important dates and anniversaries, we would like to recommend reading **Dossier 61** on the legacy of Comandante Chávez on the 71st anniversary of his birth.

We also want to share with you the launching of the **5th issue of the Journal Estudios del Sur Global**, which in this edition debates on the crisis of capitalism and the challenges facing the working class and includes an interview with the Argentine economist Claudio Katz. Finally, we cannot fail to recall the revolutionary deed of those Cuban men and women who inaugurated a new world with the assault on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953. On this subject, we recommend reading the plea “**History will absolve me**” by Fidel Castro, writing in his own defense.



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