

Necro-Power, Paramilitarism, and Sovereignty: An Interpretation of Colombian Paramilitarism as Symptom of the Formation Process of the (Neo)Liberal Democratic State

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Abstract : This paper seeks to argue that the phenomenon of 'paramilitarism' in Colombia exhibits the role of violence as constitutive of the political process of state formation in the country. In order to do this, it takes as its point of departure a landmark moment in the long history of private armies known as the 'paramilitary' in Colombia. In 2001, paramilitary commanders, politicians, and members of the military and other branches of state power signed what is known as the 'Pact of Ralito.' In this pact, the paramilitary appropriated constitutional and legal language. The paper argues that this appropriation shows that the paramilitary and the state express the same claim to sovereign power and therefore have the same foundation. More precisely, paramilitary power shows itself to base its power on the same foundation as the legal order, namely, extreme forms of violence where death is generative of power. In this sense, the paper shows how, by sharing its foundation, Colombian paramilitarism exhibits that state power in Colombia can be characterized as necro-power as Achille Mbembe understands it. The paper argues that paramilitarism shows state power as necro-power by constituting itself as a symptom understood, following Žižek, as that which both shows and overthrows its own foundation. In this way, paramilitarism shows the foundation of the state, thereby reconfiguring this very state. This reconfiguration, explicitly based on necro-power, the paper concludes, transforms the state into a form more appropriate to the political demands of neo-liberalism. By exhibiting its foundation in necro-power through paramilitarism, the Colombian State turns from a liberal into a (neo)liberal democracy.

Keywords : necro-power, necropolitics, paramilitarism in Colombia, state formation, state power, sovereign power

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