

Revolutionary Violence and Echoes of the «Thou Shalt Not Kill» Debate: A Tragic Reading of the Class Conflict in Colombia

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Abstract : Oscar del Barco, a former member of Los Montoneros, an Argentine guerrilla group of the 1970s, published a letter in 2004 that sparked a heated debate in his country about revolutionary violence. Del Barco, on the subject of «No matarás» (Thou shalt not kill) -as this debate was known- wrote to Sergio Schmucler, his addressee, the following: "There is no 'ideal' that justifies the death of a man. The founding principle of any community is 'Thou shalt not kill'. Thou shalt not kill the man because every man is sacred, and every man is all men". In this paper, the «No matarás» debate will be used to problematize two interconnected ideas that, in Colombia, underpinned the use of revolutionary violence by the guerrilla movements that emerged in the 1970s. On the one hand, an anthropological optimism; on the other, a theological scheme of converting violence into justice. Based on this, two arguments are put forward: 1) that revolutionary violence arose from an ethical-political certainty, namely: the confidence in being on the right side of history (because the violent ones were others), but 2) that its persistence over time made visible a tragic element, that is, that the bipolarity between victim and executioner, good and evil, or friend and foe that is inscribed in the class struggle is a false dilemma for in the context of revolutionary violence -as in the context of Greek tragedy-, no one ever has to make a decision, nor can he do so. For this reason, it is maintained that the fundamental aspect about guerrilla violence in Colombia is that it imposed itself as a violence of negativity which not only exceeded the capacity of the extreme left to control its revolutionary praxis but also exploited the link with the political subjectivation to which it aspired, the proletariat as the gravedigger of the bourgeoisie.

Keywords : marxism, social movements, armed struggle, debate thou shalt not kill

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