

Bridge-building in Transitional Geopolitical Conjunctures: Colombia's Hidden Peace Processes

Gwen Burnyeat
University College London (UCL)

Abstract

In order for transitions to be successful, civil society must be behind them. During peace talks between the Colombian government and FARC in Havana (2012-2016), heralded internationally as a sophisticated and serious process, Colombian civil society, understood in the broadest sense, reacted to this macro-political process in a number of ways. Polarised by war, the transitional period began to reveal rifts that were political – left/right – but also socio-cultural – rural/urban, upper/working class, victim/non-victim. This paper explores the work that began to happen to cross these rifts, using the idea of bridge-building as the central metaphor, going beyond the concept of reconciliation, the category most common in literature on post-conflict. Reconciliation is traditionally understood as occurring between political antagonists, or victims and victimisers. But in Colombia, peace-building at civil society level was increasingly called for in order to prevent future spirals of violence. A transitional geopolitical conjuncture, understood as the convergence of transnational political and social processes with historical trajectories, crystallised, in which state and non-state groups, recognising these rifts, began to build bridges with their hitherto unrecognised or demonised others. These are 'Colombia's hidden peace processes'. This paper will outline some of these different encounters, drawing on ethnographic material and affect theory, and explore the idea of bridge-building as the human 'stuff' of transitions to peace.