

Memorial struggles and power strategies of the rights in Latin America today

Luchas memoriales y estrategias de poder de las derechas en América Latina hoy

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Abstract

Recently, right-wing forces of different origins and types have sprung up in Latin America. In this article, four countries are studied: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Peru. The first two correspond to cases in which the right-wing groups stand in opposition to the so-called progressive governments. The other two correspond to cases in which they stand in a political system with a strong continuity of predominance of right-wing forces. Since there are few studies with an overall perspective, this article seeks to make a contribution in that direction. The objective is to analyze the non-electoral strategies of construction and/or exercise of power implemented by the right-wing groups around the memorial struggles. Based on the review of journalistic sources and speeches of the national right-wing referents, this article analyzes how current right-wing groups have proceeded to the institution of languages and the definition of a field of meanings that dispute the meaning of the recent past. From a comparative perspective, it is argued that in all four cases negationism offers an effective repertoire for these groups, which is used in their non-electoral (as well as electoral) strategies for building hegemony at the cultural level.

Keywords

Right, non-electoral strategies, Latin America, memory, negationism, cultural hegemony.

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Resumen

Recientemente han despuntado en América Latina fuerzas de derecha de distinto origen y tipo. En este artículo, se estudian cuatro países: Argentina, Brasil, Colombia y Perú. Los dos primeros corresponden a casos en los que las derechas se erigen en contraposición a los gobiernos denominados progresistas. Los otros dos corresponden a casos en los que las derechas se erigen en un sistema político con una fuerte continuidad de predominio de la derecha. Puesto que son escasos los análisis con perspectiva de conjunto, este artículo pretende hacer un aporte en esa dirección. El objetivo es analizar las estrategias no electorales de construcción y/o ejercicio del poder implementadas por las derechas actuales en torno a las luchas memoriales. Con base en la revisión de fuentes periodísticas y discursos de los referentes de las derechas nacionales, el presente artículo analiza de qué manera las derechas han procedido a la institución de lenguajes y a la definición de un campo de sentidos que disputan el significado del pasado reciente. A partir de una perspectiva comparada, se sostiene que en los cuatro casos el negacionismo ofrece un repertorio eficaz para esos grupos, que se valen de él en sus estrategias no electorales (además de las electorales) para la construcción de hegemonía en el nivel cultural.

Palabras clave

Derecha, estrategias no electorales, América Latina, memoria, negacionismo, hegemonía cultural.

Introduction

Recently, right-wing forces of different origin and type have emerged in Latin America (Giordano, 2019; Rodríguez, 2019). While in Argentina and Brazil the arrival of right-wing governments is directly related to the exhaustion of previous reformist processes, in countries such as Colombia and Peru, current Rights are inscribed in a political system of prolonged predominance of forces of that sign. However, these differences, the Rights of the four countries have in common the deployment of strategies aimed at disputing the meaning of the recent past around dictatorships (Argentina and Brazil) and the armed conflict (Peru and Colombia). The memorial struggles occupy a central place in the issues that inform those non-electoral strategies, whose objective is to operate at the level of civil society via media, organizations and foundations and direct actions (Eaton, 2014). At the level of public memory, this set of actions aims at the politicization of issues re-

lated to an authoritarian and conservative ideology through the construction of a simplifying and polarizing common sense that tends to deny a traumatic past (historical negationism/revisionism). Beyond the diverse intensities with which these strategies have been implemented in each of the national scenarios, in all cases the recent past has become the privileged object of “memorial struggles” in the political field (i.e. bids between different actors for constituting their interpretation in the hegemonic representation of what happened, Jelin, 2002).

The need to analyze the political uses of the past is pressing in times in which, from different areas, it is proposed to make historical memory a “overcame path” to “look to the future” and find paths of “national reconciliation” or “definitively close painful stages” (Ricoeur, 2010). In the rhetoric of the right-wing political forces in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Peru converge, without major contradictions, the exploitation and radicalization of the master divisions that marked the political violence and the latent or manifest negationism of state and civil responsibility in the commission of crimes against the national community. This refers, as Grimson points out (2007, p. 12):

A basic condition of any hegemonic project (...) is to institute the languages of the social dispute, to define the field of meaning where the social conflict develops, to effectively stipulate what are the potentially effective actions, claims and repertoires at a given stage.

Based on the review of journalistic sources and discourses of national Rights referents, this article analyzes how the groups of that ideological sign have proceeded to the institution of languages and the definition of a field of meanings that dispute the signification of the recent past. From a comparative perspective, we argue that negationism is an effective repertoire for current Rights, that they use it in their non-electoral strategies (in addition to electoral ones) for the construction of hegemony at the cultural level.

Argentina: “dialogue” and “reconciliation”

Argentina was the only country that after the fall of the “institutional dictatorships of the Armed Forces” (Ansaldi & Giordano, 2012) began prosecuting the military involved in crimes against humanity. This initiative was

interrupted by the laws of *Obediencia debida* and *Punto Final* (1987) under the Government of Raúl Alfonsín and then by the Indult (1989-1990) granted by President Carlos Menem. However, 2003 the Government of Néstor Kirchner resumed the legal path, even advancing, in subsequent years, in the prosecution of civilians who had acted in complicity with the regime of the dictatorship in the commission of economic crimes and against humanity.

The publication in 1986 of the report prepared by the National Commission of Missing Persons (CONADEP), published under the title *Nunca Más*¹, inaugurated a “memory regime” (Crenzel, 2008). There, the number of 9,000 disappearances under, the last dictatorship, was established. Based on additional evidence, the human rights organizations assumed the figure of 30,000. And on this basis a consensus was built on the number of victims of state terrorism and a “canonical account” about the recent past (Crenzel, 2008). Although there were attempts to destabilize that consensus at earlier times, it began to seriously break down with the arrival of the PRO, in the Alliance of Change, to the National Executive Power in 2015.

Government officials and even President Mauricio Macri himself argued about the figure of 30,000 vs. 9000 (“Mauricio Macri”, 2016). And so negationism became part of the state (before the controversy around the number had arisen, of course, but not from the power of the State). A more recent episode of open negationism took place at the 2019 Book Fair, when the book by Jorge Di Pascuale, a former repressor condemned for the murder of the daughter of the president of the grandmother of Plaza de Mayo, Estela de Carlotto, was presented. Under the title *Chronicle of a denied war*, Di Pascuale (2019) gathers three volumes of clear negationism spirit, in which it aspires to “shed light on tragic years, during which our country suffered a revolutionary war” and explains the process between 1976 and 1982 as “the victory of the Legal Forces over irregular militias.” The presentation panel was made up of retired military personnel and journalist Ceferino Reato, in a room full of relatives of investigated repressors, charged and convicted of crimes against humanity committed during the last dictatorship (“Carlotto”, 2019).

This negationism fits in with another element that Rights are bearers of: “the utopianism of dialogue democracy” (Hinkelammert, 1988). A key figure to understand the appropriation of this element and the promotion of

1 Never again.

historical revisionism in the ranks of the PRO is Pablo Avelluto (Safers-stein, 2017). Between 2005 and 2012, Avelluto was Editorial Director for the South Region of Random House Mondadori Argentina, which administers the South American label. In 2012, he entered the world of politics in the hands of the PRO: he was general coordinator of the Public Media System in the Government of the City of Buenos Aires and then Minister of Culture of the Nation (currently downgraded to the rank of Secretariat). At the request of its management, in 2015 the book *El diálogo*² was published, edited by the South American label and of which Avelluto was editor and collaborated in the writing (Fernández Mejjide & Leis, 2015). It is a conversation between Héctor Leis (who joined the ranks of Montoneros) and Graciela Fernández Mejjide (mother of a missing person, member of CONADEP and member of the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights, APDH, and became a political leader in the 1990s). In the book (and in the documentary that was filmed from the same material), the notion of “dialogue” refers to a conversation between parties that far from being antagonistic show coincidences. It is a notion of dialogue that is constitutive of the *Change* identity, and that is observed in so many other instances, as indicated by Goldentul and Saferstein (2019).

The community of ideas that structured the “PRO world” (Vommaro, Morresi, & Belloti, 2015) in its escalation to the national State was built on the basis of a close relationship between publishing enterprises (fundamentally, but not exclusively, of the *Sudamericana* Editorial) and the *Pensar* Foundation, the think tank of the PRO (Giordano & Soler, 2016 and Giordano, 2017). In 2015 Iván Petrella, at that time legislator of the City of Buenos Aires and Director of that Foundation, published *Que se metan todos*, also under the *Sudamericana* label (Petrella, 2015). It shows another vein of the “utopianism of democracy dialogue”: the eradication of conflicts. In this case, through the promotion of the notion of “reconciliation,” recovering the model of the Truth Commission of South Africa. In one chapter, Petrella specifically refers to a possible application in Argentina of the South African model of reconciliation as an alternative to the Justice model implemented by previous governments, promoting the way of amnesty to reach the Truth.

From its access to the power of the State, the PRO has tried to implement measures in line with the negationism that was already part of its re-

2 The dialogue.

pertoire of ideas. Thus, it has sought to reconfigure the field of memory in a meaning operation whereby historical differences are suspended in pursuit of a vocation of coincidence. At the level of rhetoric, for example, on the occasion of the commemoration of the coup on March 24, 2017, the Secretary of Human Rights Claudio Avruj said: “human rights are for everyone” (“The PRO speech”, 2017). On the legal level, the PRO has also made some attempts. The most popular was a ruling by the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation of May 3, 2017 that admitted the computation of the “2x1” in crimes against humanity (double the time in condition of detainees before having a final sentence, a benefit that had been stipulated in 1994 for common crimes and that was repealed in 2001). The measure was rejected and a few days later, Congress passed Law 27,362, which stipulated that this benefit could not be applied in cases of crimes against humanity and that, on the other hand, reaffirmed the validity of the measure for the period 1994-2001. Although there was a reversal, the scope of the government’s negotiation intentions cannot be avoided, which seeks to strengthen itself not only in rhetoric but also in laws.

Brazil: “against communism”

Unlike Argentina, in Brazil there was an Amnesty Law enacted in 1979, during the dictatorship. Although initially this law included the demands of the movements of resistance to the dictatorship that requested amnesty for political prisoners, it was immediately used by the Armed Forces to extend it to the perpetrators of crimes committed under the regime established in 1964, interpreting the terms “political crimes or related “in their favor. Another significant difference is that in Brazil there was no Truth Commission until 2012, when the National Truth Commission of Brazil (CNV) was instituted under the government of Dilma Rousseff.

The CNV established that between 1964 and 1985 there were more than 434 political murders or disappearances, more than 10,000 tortured, and some 8,000 indigenous people killed to carry out infrastructure and agriculture plans in the Amazon region. The serious human rights violations that occurred during the period under investigation, the CNV concludes, “resulted from a generalized and systematic action by the State, configuring crimes against humanity” that were “carried out by the Armed Forces whose

exercise involved chains of command originating in the Cabinets of presidents and military ministers “(CNV, 2014).

The CNV report was published a year before the dismissal of Dilma and the right turn that began with the mandate of Michel Temer that weakened the initiative. In effect, however, despite the CNV’s call for the Armed Forces to recognize their institutional responsibility, the recent trend in both civil and military sectors is closer to the apology of the dictatorship. The arrival of former captain Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency in 2019 has run in parallel with the public dissemination of a discourse that vindicates the actions of the military regime.

In his time as a deputy, Bolsonaro had defended the method of torture, so it is not surprising that in his vote in favor of the “impeachment” against Dilma he made this declaration of principles:

For the family, the innocence of the children in the classrooms, which the PT never had, against communism, for our freedom against the São Paulo Forum, for the memory of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, for the fear of Rouseff, the army of Caxias, the Armed Forces, for Brazil above all and for God above all, my vote is yes. (“A deputy”, 2016)

Ustra was the leader of the torture system that many suffered, and avoided repercussions thanks to the Amnesty Act of 1979 that also acquitted the military. After the return to democracy, he published the book *A verdade sufocada: a história que a esquerda não quer que o Brasil conheça* (Ustra, 2006). The book presents a version of the dictatorship from the perspective of the military, and run out of stock in its 14th edition after Bolsonaro claimed that this was his reference book (“I am in favor”, 2018).

More recently, in an interview for the TV channel Bandeirantes, Bolsonaro said that the military regime had “some problems”, but that it cannot be described as a dictatorship: “We have to know the truth. No regimen is wonderful. And where have you seen a dictatorship give up the government peacefully? Then it was not a dictatorship,” said the president (“Bolsonaro denies”, 2019). Next, he urged the main military units to hold celebratory events on March 31, commemorating the coup of 1964. Thus, in March, the Military Command Planalto held a ceremony in which the coup was remembered as a “civic-military moment”, a euphemism that validates the refusal to qualify as a dictatorship the government regime imposed in 1964 (“Military Command”, 2019).

Also known are the statements of former Minister of Education Ricardo Vélez Rodríguez, who proposed that school books teach that in 1964 there was no coup d'état perpetrated by the military but a "sovereign decision of Brazilian society" that deposed a constitutional president to establish "a democratic regime of force" ("The minister fell", 2019). Vélez is a staunch follower of the ultra-right writer Olavo de Carvalho, famous for his conspiracy theories about the infiltration of cultural Marxism in the institutions of Brazil ("Olavo de Carvalho", 2019). Updating the master scission of the dictatorship, Vélez declared that "Brazil, during the governments of the PT, was on the verge of being under the control of totalitarian socialist groups", and today we must "fight for the country where one lives" so that it doesn't happen as in Venezuela that "is a colony of the dictators who control Cuba" ("Cayó el ministro", 2019). The fear of "Castro-Chavism" has the power of simplicity by putting under one umbrella everything that the Right considers bad and dark without too many distinctions or explanations, and at the same time fulfilling the objective of neutralizing symbolic and political capital from the Left and the progressive forces, erecting them as the enemy.

Like the Government of Cambiemos in Argentina, that of Bolsonaro has also entered the legal plane to guarantee impunity for the military. But if in Argentina the attempts to establish laws favorable to the armed forces did not prosper, similar initiatives are being advanced in Brazil. By decree 9,759, of April 11, 2019, the Commission of the Political Dead and Disappeared of the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights was extinguished, which had the mission of concluding the identification of victims of political repression during the dictatorship.

Colombia: hate policies

In Colombia, peace processes with the insurgency have been the defining axis of the last three presidential elections. In a system of parties traditionally inclined to the right, there are few agenda items that offer nuances in programmatic proposals in social or economic matters. The handling of the armed conflict, on the other hand, has become the main point of polarization between the parties and in civil society.

Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010 and 2010-2014) was able to capitalize on the generalized rejection of violent actions by the FARC by reducing

the network of political and social contradictions to a game of friends and enemies that assumed the form of an “anti-Farian nationalism” (López de la Roche, 2014). Through a media-ideological operation, he raised his personal hatred for the insurgency to a public-political level and delimited a field of adversity in which, before the great enemy of the FARC, the masses held captive by the “firm hand” discourse, ended up demanding more ideological uniformity, more security and more order, without noticing that they were evicting democratic criticism and opposition.

In addition to the scenarios of armed confrontation, the war declared by Uribeism was settled on the symbolic level. Together with the FARC, other actors were demonized and declared a military target: Human Rights defenders, social leaders, teachers, students and indigenous communities throughout the country, under the accusation of being “guerrilla auxiliaries” (IACHR, 2005). The same qualification was attributed to the Historical Memory Group that published in 2013 *¡Basta Ya! Colombia memorias de guerra y libertad*³, a report on the political violence that has occurred in the country since 1958, described by Uribeism as an unacceptable exercise of historical manipulation “based on the hypotheses of radical sectors” (“Min-defensa”, 2013).

In parallel, there was a commitment to the rewriting of national history on a counter-insurgent note, which transcended the criticism of the victims’ memories to actively jump into the production of television fictions “based on real events” where well-known drug traffickers and paramilitary leaders become little less than national heroes (i.e. “*El Patron del Mal*” of the *Caracol* channel and “*Tres Caínes*”, of the RCN Channel, declared ally of the Uribe government). In this version of the past, narco-paramilitarism is presented as the necessary evil to thwart guerrillas, hiding the most sinister side of the Democratic Security Policy: the extrajudicial execution of more than ten thousand Colombians under the figure of “False positives” and the legal, political and economic validation of the paramilitary project through the Justice and Peace Law (Rodríguez, 2016).

When the scandals of the “parapolitics” (López, 2010) and the “false positives” (CorteIDH, 2018) took public knowledge, the national consensus around the effectiveness of the armed solution to the conflict was undermined, paving the way for President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014 and

3 Enough is Enough! Colombian memoirs of war and freedom.

2014-2018) to resume the path of dialogue with the FARC. Santos' negotiating attitude marked an important shift in the Uribe era, which transcended internationally (Rodríguez, 2014). Although the legislative reforms promoted during his tenure were timid and difficult to specify, the main contribution was the signing of the Peace Accords in Havana in 2016.

Three years after the agreements were reached, Colombia is far from turning the page of political violence. To the reconversion of the conflicts in the territories are added the difficulties of the State to guarantee the security of the demobilized and of the Colombians in general, evident in the numerous murders of social leaders, human rights defenders and political activists. On the other hand, the crimes committed against members of the demobilized FARC-EP that have been pardoned or that are in the process of reinstatement do not comply with the guarantees agreed in Havana and open the door to the return of arms.

In a pendular movement that goes from war to peace, public opinion bet on warmongering in the last presidential elections. The call to the hard hand against the guerrillas was one of the campaign emblems of the opponents to the peace process that had more receptivity. As in the ineffable triumph of No in the Plebiscite for Peace of 2016, criticisms of the dialogue led by Santos and the insistence on prosecuting ex-guerrillas according to the canons of ordinary justice inoculated in common sense the idea that FARC would suddenly become a sector benefited by all kinds of state gifts. In a country where poverty is around 28%, according to recent ECLAC estimates, the dissemination of false news about the huge resources that demobilized guerrillas would enjoy to the detriment of sectors such as retirees inflamed citizens' sense of injustice and inclined the balance in favor of the uribist candidate Iván Duque.

A new controversy arose under the Duque government (2018-), regarding the appointment of historian Rubén Acevedo as director of the Historical Memory Center, given his resistance to recognizing the existence of the armed conflict and its origin in the land dispute, contrary to the testimonies of the victims and to what is sustained by much of Colombian and international historiography. Acevedo also affirmed that the Truth Commission "is the result of the political interest of the guerrillas to impose a justifying explanation of their adventures and crimes in academic clothing" and expressed their refusal to implement the Special Jurisdiction of Peace (JEP), central axis of the Peace Agreements with the FARC ("Controversy", 2019).

Acevedo's "historical revisionism" coincides with the systematic objections that Duque and his party, the Democratic Center, have made to the JEP, to obstruct the concretion of the transitional justice scheme required in the post-conflict era.

Peru: "national reconciliation"

In a context of state collapse, economic crisis and political violence, the regime headed by Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000) operated an authoritarian reconfiguration of order (Burt, 2009). Not without difficulties, he obtained the necessary support to launch a project that sought to restore the social and political order challenged by the armed insurgency, while restructuring State-society relations according to the neoliberal matrix (Tapia, 1997). In 2009, Fujimori was sentenced to 25 years in prison for crimes committed in the exercise of power, including two killings at the hands of the Colina Group in the framework of the fight against the Sendero Luminoso guerrillas.

In 2010 the Popular Force (FP) party was created, and from that moment the Fujimorist story built on the recent past appears unfolded: on the one hand, the strict defense of the actions of the dictator (considered a pacifying hero) and on the other, the conviction of the operation by his intelligence advisor Vladimiro Montesinos (responsible for the multiple cases of corruption and human rights violations) ("Keiko", 2016).

In the 2016 elections there were two right-wing candidates: Pedro Pablo Kuczynski of the *Partido Peruanos por el Cambio*⁴ (PPK) and Keiko Fujimori of FP. Then, Keiko began the pressures to achieve freedom for her father, erected historical leader of the FP. Finally, in December 2017 PPK granted the pardon, but his figure was very worn out and in March 2018 he had to resign, involved in accusations of corruption and amid popular discontent over the measure taken in favor of the dictator. However, before his resignation PPK was able to name the year 2018 (it is part of the institutional culture of Peru to give a name to each year), declaring it "Year of Dialogue and National Reconciliation". The concept of "reconciliation" had special

4 Peruvians for change Party.

resonance because of the recent pardon, a clear concession of PPK to the negationist rhetoric of Fujimori.

Unlike in Argentina where there was a “canonical story”, in Peru fifteen years after the publication of the CVR Report, the meanings of what happened during the armed conflict (1980-2000) have not been established. During the PPK government (2016-2018), the memorial struggles were deployed in three illustrative controversial scenarios.

One of them was the denunciations that swarmed in 2012 for the apology of terrorism from politicians of both Fujimorism and APRA, regarding the decision to include the issue of armed conflict in the teaching of history in the national curriculum design, decision taken in 2004 by the Ministry of Education. As a result of this, the texts in question were officially withdrawn from the schools. In 2012, the Congress of the Republic and the President of the Council of Ministers launched the “Terrorism Never Again” initiative, with the aim of “informing and raising awareness about the implications of terrorism in Peru, as well as promoting the benefits of a culture of peace and democratic coexistence”. In the video - suggested as educational material - the attacks committed by Sendero Luminoso and the MRTA between 1980 and 2000 are presented, without exposing the actions of the Armed Forces, the Self-Defense Committees or other actors (Jave, 2018).

Another scenario was the public disclosure of the involuntary surgical sterilizations of hundreds of Quechua women after the launch of the Registry of Forced Sterilization Victims (Revesfo) created under the government of Ollanta Humala in 2016. In this context, negationism did not wait. In a supposedly academic speech, *La verdad de una mentira: El caso de las 300 mil esterilizaciones forzadas*⁵, a book where the political scientist María Cecilia Villegas, asserts that it is a myth created by feminist organizations in alliance with the Catholic Church and the conservative sectors, to accuse Fujimori (Villegas, 2017).

A third scenario was the conflict over the creation of the script and the functions attributed to the Place of Memory (LUM), a space for pedagogical and cultural commemoration that houses the history of violence in Peru between 1980 and 2000. In August 2017, the LUM was accused by the Fujimorist bench of apologizing terrorism, demanding the resignation of its director Guillermo Nugent, for “allowing” the exhibition of the 1992 *Visual*

5 The truth of a lie was published: The case of the 300 thousand forced sterilizations.

Resistance retrospective, a reflection on this year from the perspective of 36 graphic artists, collectives and activists. It should be remembered that the LUM was inaugurated in 2015 under the Humala government as part of a state policy that sought to respond to the demand of victims and their families to recognize the violent events that occurred during two decades of armed conflict and its consequences for Peruvian society. The facts are told as they were presented in official documents such as the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and ratified by sentences issued by the justice system.

Unlike in Argentina and Brazil, in Peru the most prominent right-wing force that incurs in negationism is not in power. PPK resigned amid scandals. And while Fujimori was the predominant force in Congress until very recently, it was weakened by the decision of the Constitutional Court to review the pardon of their “hero.” Currently, both Alberto Fujimori and his daughter Keiko are being held. For its part, the current president Martín Vizcarra has shown signs of advancing in the institutionalization of human rights policies by creating the Genetic Data Bank in September 2018. However, in the words that he pronounced when he assumed, he read a certain desire to erase conflicts: “What has happened must mark the end point of a policy of hatred and confrontation.” The creation of a specialized agency for the search of missing persons is based on this meaning framework. Moreover, at the time of signing the creation of the aforementioned institution, Vizcarra said: “the years of violence that us Peruvians suffered affected us all” (“President Martín Vizcarra”, 2018). It is that, in Peru, unlike the other two cases analyzed so far, the right stands on a memory of the recent past that, as the CVR Report states in its conclusions, assumes that both the State and the insurgency undermined collective identities, destroyed the material and moral bases required for social organization and inoculated a culture of fear that is still felt in the country (CVR, 2003).

Conclusions

It is possible to group current Rights according to their origin: whether they arise in contrast to previous progressive experiences or in continuity with a right-oriented political culture. Here the analysis has focused on four cases that are registered in one (Argentina, Brazil) and another type (Colombia,

Peru). The memorial struggles are at the center of the non-electoral strategies of building a hegemonic “common sense” in the four cases. In this framework, the Rights have turned to different modalities of action that can be characterized as state negationism and academic negationism (Thus, 2017).

As for state negationism, in all four cases explicit practices are observed through all those statements with which presidents, officials and congressmen intend to relativize, banalize and minimize the cruelty of what happened and the suffering of the victims. The questioning of the number of disappeared from the dictatorship in Argentina has its analogue in the official negationism of cases of forced sterilization in Peru and false positives in Colombia and the presentation of the Brazilian dictatorship as a necessary evil to contain the communist expansion.

State negationism is complemented and nurtured by an academic negationism that, under the guise of a false historical revisionism aimed at “telling the whole story,” seeks to spread a legitimizing counter-discourse of illegal and illegitimate state violence. In all four cases, this has been promoted through various cultural artifacts that operate in the resemantization of the past: books of the best-seller type and books of non-commercial publishers that print on demand, as well as documentary formats and TV fictions. Along the same lines, are the disputes for the guidelines of the places of memory in Peru and the debates for the contents of history to be taught in the schools of Peru and Brazil.

Finally, memorial struggles are based on the law, which, as is known, does not only fulfill a punitive role, but also has an enormous performative capacity as a truth management device. Each law or sentence has the power to affect the narrative structures of national memory, making visible or obscuring the meanings of Justice for victims and victimizers. The attempt to rehabilitate the 2X1 law for the benefit of repressors in Argentina and the pardon of Fujimori (both revoked); the obstruction of the JEP in Colombia and the elimination by decree of the Commission of search for missing persons in Brazil, are examples of a legal modality of rewriting of history by the perpetrators, in which Reconciliation is imposed on the Truth and Justice. At this point, a key difference can be made: in cases where there were significant prosecutions (Argentina and Peru), negationism more prominently adopts the reconciliation formula, while in those cases where memory was less woven around criminal trials against humanity, negationism settled on the idea of war.

However, in the four countries, negationism has articulated new fields of adversity that renew and perpetuate the forms of oppression that were at the origin of the violence (armed conflicts and dictatorships). In general, all these practices have a profound impact on the present, reviving ancestral hatreds and fears for electoral purposes and serve to feed meaning constructions with the aspiration of cultural hegemony.

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