



RESEARCHING VIOLENT SOCIETIES COLOMBIAN SEMINARS

REPORT

University of the Andes, Bogotá, Colombia
4th and 7th February 2003

These seminars were organised by INCORE (International Conflict Research), the United Nations University Peace and Governance Programme and the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of the Andes. The events were convened with financial support from the Ford Foundation, the United Nations University and the British Council and we are grateful for their support of and interest in this very important area of study – how to conduct research in societies where there is political or ethnic conflict and violence.

Despite the high level of research activity in conflict areas around the world, there has been little attention paid to the actual processes and methods of conducting research in violently divided societies. Within a substantial literature on research methods, there is little that directly addresses the ethical and methodological challenges of researching in societies experiencing ethnic conflict and other violent upheavals. Often, researchers working in such circumstances have struggled to connect with the mainstream research community, yet are left to grapple in isolation with the special demands made on them in terms of research design, ethics and analysis.

These seminars built on earlier work in Northern Ireland and Nigeria and the **aim** of this workshop was to open the debate on the methodological and ethical challenges involved in conducting research in Colombia and to share with Colombian scholars the experiences from Northern Ireland and elsewhere: in particular to

- Build networks of interested scholars*
- Document Colombian experiences*
- Consider possible future events*
- Build local research capacity*

4th February 2003 – ACADEMIC SEMINAR

The first seminar on 4th February was primarily an academic event (see programme) and brought together an experienced interdisciplinary group of researchers from Colombia with practical experience of solving the problems associated with conducting research in the violent context of Colombia and a few international researchers with particular interests in methodologies. (Unfortunately, Dr. Schnabel was unable to attend the seminar due to a car crash the week earlier and Professor Osaghae was also unable to attend the seminar as he was unable to secure a visa). The 36 participants (see list of participants) included anthropologists, sociologists, historians, political scientists, lawyers and researchers from CINEP-Colombia (a highly respected NGO that conducts serious academic research as well as community outreach work and one of the few that is

still actively involved in field work). By using some of the expertise developed in earlier meetings (Northern Ireland 1997, 1999 and Nigeria 2002) as a starting point, the objective was to consolidate and compare experiences of research in Colombia, with a view to beginning to document the approaches, insights and dilemmas shared by researchers who operate in violent contexts. The aim was also to consider a future event that would involve other researchers throughout Colombia and perhaps the Latin American region and to expand the international network of scholars interested in this topic to Colombian scholars. Such an event and subsequent documentation, we think, will be invaluable in supporting existing researchers in their work, and in providing relevant and useful training materials for a new generation of researchers who may wish to work for aid agencies conducting relief work or who have an interest in societies where there is violent political conflict.

The programme gives full details of the sessions. The workshop was structured to ensure adequate time for discussion and debate, there was simultaneous translation, and most participants contributed enthusiastically.

The seminar concluded with an evaluation session where the majority of participants were enthusiastic about the seminar and were keen to develop a network to continue work in this area. It was agreed that

1. A working paper detailing key findings from the seminar would be produced. Dr. Mason, Dr. Smyth and Dr. Robinson will liaise to produce this in Spanish and English. The basis will be the transcribed workshop proceedings. It will be circulated to all participants and made available on the INCORE and University of the Andes websites. (It will also be circulated to funders.)
2. Participants are to contact Dr. Mason directly to discuss any future event, be that a local series of seminars, a major Colombia event or a major international event including participants from other countries in Latin America. Dr. Smyth and Dr. Robinson indicated their willingness to work in partnership with local Colombian scholars to arrange and seek funding for future events should that be considered helpful.

Seminar: Friday February 7, 2003 Measures for the Prevention of Violence in Colombia: Perspectives from the Stakeholder Community

This half-day seminar was targeted at the policy/stakeholder community and the programme (attached) shows the contributors. The seminar was advertised widely and attracted significant interest with up to 250 people attending and wide media coverage. The opening speakers focussed on Early Warning and Research and a stimulating question and answer session followed. The second session had 5 excellent contributions from the UN, the media, NGO sector, the Church and the Private sector. The level of interest was most encouraging and encourages us to consider future events outside the traditional academic sector.

The organisers would like to record their appreciation of the work put in to this event by Dr. Ann Mason, University of the Andes and her colleagues, especially Claudia Gonzalez. The superb organisation led to two very professional events with appropriate participants. We look forward to working with the University of the Andes in the future.

Dr. Gillian Robinson
Dr. Marie Smyth
Dr. Albrecht Schnabel
Professor Eghosa Osaghae

13 February 2003