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NEH "Meanings of War"

State Formation, State and Nation, and Warfare in States are very important sections in the discussion of Political Anthropology. The reading material, discussions, and overall presentations by the members of the Seminar, "Meanings of War" provided insights as well as diverse perspectives to think –and rethink the subject of war. Particularly, I am very interested and impressed by both the depth of the theoretical discussion and amazing ethnographic work by the anthropologist Alexander Fattal. The preface and chapter four of his book, *Guerrilla Marketing: Counterinsurgency and Capitalism in Colombia* (2018), are very good choices for a lesson (or two) on how the State exercises power. This country is an infamous illustration of an extremely unequal society living through a long-protracted armed conflict and state's organizations such as the army, has managed to influence people's perceptions through ideologies to reinforce the right of powerholders to rule, to exercise coercive power, and inflict structural violence on sections of the population.

The students should have read the sections mentioned above: Law and Order in States, State and Nation, Stability and Duration of States, and Warfare in States from the course's requested reading (*Perspectives. An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology*) before reading and discussing in pairs the excerpt from *Meanings of War*.

For former FARC fighters, the good life is continuously deferred in an often incremental process of disappointment that leaves them adrift in context of extreme poverty and rampant criminality. Thwarted aspiration connects former rebels with their working-class neighbors who themselves must figure out how to live an ethical live..." (Fattal, 166).

The prompt/Questions

- What is in your view "the good life"?
- What is Colombia in relation to the criteria within political anthropology?
- What do you think is "the good life" for a Colombian ex-combatant trying to enter a "normal" life?
- What, in your view, are the predicaments and challenges the ex-combatants encounter after "leaving the weapons and war behind"?
- Would you see a special difference in terms of gender of an ex-combatant trying to entering a "civilian life" here in the US and in Colombia?

Abstract

- Course: Cultural Anthropology (Introductory)
- For Non-major students

- The assignment's two-fold purpose is to reflect on the roots and consequences of armed conflict, especially for those members of society that have decided to demobilize from guerrilla or insurgent organizations. It should help to understand that if the root of the conflict is not addressed (extreme poverty in a society where people hold high aspirations of social mobility), it would be very difficult for ex-combatants to effectively make a living in social situations of structural violence.
- This should be an activity to be carried out during class and should not take more than one (1) hour for the students to discuss before sharing their findings and thoughts. The students must have read the chosen selections before.
- This is not necessarily a high stake assignment but it could be turned a high stake one if the instructor incorporates other aspects of the material on social inequality in States.
- 10% of the final grade if the previous step is taken.
- The assignment is directly connected to the "Meanings of War" seminar.